

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

THOMAS J. AIKEN



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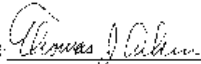
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**STATEMENT OF DONATION
OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS OF
THOMAS J. AIKEN**

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, Thomas J. Aiken, (hereinafter referred to as "the Donor"), of Sacramento, California, 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 interviews conducted on October 3, 1995; May ~~1998~~ 20, 1998, at the area office at Folsom Dam, and on March 31, 2004, at his home in Auburn, California, 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.
 - a. It is the intention of the Archivist to make Donated Materials available for display and research as soon as possible, and the Donor places no restrictions upon their use.
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3. Copies of the Donated Materials may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the National Archives, including the Bureau of Reclamation. Copies of Donated Materials may also be provided to researchers. The Bureau of Reclamation may retain copies of tapes, transcripts, and other materials.
4. The Archivist may dispose of Donated Materials at any time after title passes to the National Archives.

Date: 3/31/04
 Signed: 
 Thomas J. Aiken

 INTERVIEWER: 
 Brit Alan Storey

Having determined that the materials donated above by Thomas J. Aiken are appropriate for preservation as evidence of the United States Government's organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and transactions, and considering it to be in the public interest to accept these materials for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration, I accept this gift on behalf of the United States of America, subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth in the above instrument.

Date: _____

Signed: _____
Archivist of the United States

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS
THOMAS J. AIKEN

[Editor's note. Tape one of this interview is missing from the oral history collections of the Reclamation history program. The part of his career covered on tape 1 was spent in the Denver and Durango offices of Reclamation. This information is covered at the beginning of his interview on May 20, 1999. In addition, he wrote about his entire career and the period of his life covered on tape 1 in his centennial essay: "Memoirs of a Bureau Curmudgeon: Unabridged Version—Politically Incorrect" which may be found in: Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, *The Bureau of Reclamation: History Essays from the Centennial Symposium* (Denver: Government Printing Office, 2008.)¹

Storey: This is tape two of an interview by Brit Storey with Thomas J. Aiken on October the 30th, 1995.

**Hoped to Return to Denver as Reclamation's
Business Manager**

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

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

You were saying that you had thought you would go back to Denver eventually as the Business Manager.

Aiken: Yeah. That was kind of the game plan that I thought would play out for me, that I'd go back into that position, and it didn't occur. The organization changed and that position really no longer exists, at least in the format that it did when I was looking at it.

Roger Patterson Requested He Take over the Central California Area Office

And then things changed for me, too, out here, when Roger [Patterson] asked me to come out here to take over this area office. That's been an interesting challenge.

Storey: When did you put your career plan into place, or begin to put one into place, do you remember?

Aiken: Well, I basically kind of had it going, I guess from the day I stepped into the Bureau. I kind of looked at—you know, saw Hank Halliday there and thought, "Well, shoot, I can do this job," and just kind of worked toward it.

Became an Administrative Officer for the Experience

I moved on to the administrative officers' ranks, which I felt was excellent background for that position. When the job at Auburn started to go south, and the position of Chief of the Program Coordination Division down in regional office

opened up, I thought, "Well, that isn't bad either. That's an Administrative Division Chief job, that's still on my game plan." And, then, of course, when the Assistant [Regional Director] for Administration opened up, that was *squarely* on my game plan. And then it was after that that somebody changed the rules. (laughter)

Storey: (laughter) I had a friend named [Steve] Sigstad who was an archeologist [U. S. Forest Service, Denver] in the region, and, you know, they have one of these calendars that has a law, and he got Sigstad's Law added to this calendar, and Sigstad's Law was "When it's your turn, the rules change." (laughter)

Aiken: (laughter) Yeah, I can see that.

Storey: I think I'm hearing that you had a family.

Aiken: Yes.

Storey: Did your family have any trouble adapting to your move to Durango and then your move to Auburn?

Lost Money on His House in Durango

Aiken: No. When I moved to Durango, my daughter was just a year old, little over a year old, and my son was born in Durango. When we moved to Auburn, I actually came out here in December of '74, I had to leave the family back in Durango, because we just couldn't sell the house. It was mid-winter, and it was buried under snow, and there was just no market. I came out here and just rented a room in Auburn and lived through March

and left the family back in Durango, and finally just decided, "Well, I'm going to take my lumps and go back and get the family, move us out here."

We got taken advantage of by small-town folks. They knew I was over a barrel, and the real estate people weren't really trying to sell the house. This all kind of came out after the fact, but when I went back there in March, this guy that drove a school bus came out of the woodwork, and led by the realtors that we had trusted, the one that we had bought the house from initially, and the one that was selling our house, who was supposedly a friend of my wife's, and a guy makes us an offer, I don't know, a couple of thousand below the appraised value, and I said, "Yeah, fine. Take it." And they turned right around and made five grand off the house. They just sold it like that. [Snaps fingers] So I think we got whipped-sawed by the local yokels on the house.

But, got the family and moved them out here and bought this house in Auburn, and I still live in it. I've got a different wife now, and my kids have moved on, but I'm still in the same house.

Storey: And you commute down from Auburn every day?

Aiken: A lot better commute than going down to Sacramento. (laughter)

Storey: Yeah, I guess so.

Aiken: I just drive down that little old country road and

count the pigs and chickens, and it's very nice.

Move to Auburn Dam

Storey: Well, now, let's see. In '74, when you moved to Auburn, that would have been with Bill Martin as Regional Director.

Bill Martin Was Regional Director. Paul Olbert Was Assistant Regional Director for Administration

Aiken: Bill Martin was Regional Director, and Paul Olbert was Assistant for Administration.

Storey: Auburn was just building up then.

Aiken: We were just in the middle of the contract to do the foundation work for the dam. It was going through a real boom time in terms of bringing people in and getting things done.

Storey: Tell me how the project office and the regional responsibilities worked out in terms of contracting. Your boss really would have been the Project Construction Engineer; am I thinking correctly?

Most Interactions at Auburn Were with the Denver Office

Aiken: Don Alexander was the Project Construction Engineer, and it was, in a lot of ways, a situation where the construction offices were part of the region but really answered to Denver. Most of our interactions were with the Denver office, even

in terms of the contracting work. We had really a limited involvement with the regional office.

Storey: Did that cause tensions?

Aiken: I didn't know. It just seemed, you know, that was the way it was with construction offices. The same thing with the San Felipe office.

“Really, the only interplay that we had with the regional office was through the budget process, because the region still handled all the budgeting. . . .”

Really, the only interplay that we had with the regional office was through the budget process, because the region still handled all the budgeting. That was when Mike Catino was down there. Mike was just kind of making the transition at that time from budget to assistant [regional director], but we worked with Mike and Jim Neal on budget. The rest of it, certainly the contract work, we had very little interplay with the regional office.

Contracting Function Moved Away from Denver and the Construction Engineers

Toward the end of that, Mike (unclear) at Auburn. That was when we went through this heartburn thing in the Bureau where they kind of pulled the contracting function away from the construction engineers, that sort of thing, and put it into the administrative side of the house. I know there was a *lot* of heartburn at the construction offices when that occurred.

Storey: Did it go to the regional offices or did it go to the Denver office administrative folks, or what?

Aiken: You know, I don't really recall initially where it went. It ultimately ended up in the regional offices, administrative side of the house.

Concerns about How Contracting Was Handled by Reclamation's Construction Staff

This, again, had occurred when I was transitioning out of there and down to the budget shop, but I didn't view it as a bad thing, to be honest with you, because I saw in action some of the stuff that we did on contracts that left me to question how it was being done, because the contractor and the project construction engineer, the field engineer, all these guys, you know, they're working real close together on a daily basis, and I saw where we, as a Bureau, gave away a lot more than we should have, whenever we got to negotiating out mods, and once that was transferred down to these people that are kind of remote from the day-to-day contact with these people, the Bureau got a little tougher, and it was better for the Government.

The construction guys never saw it that way, but from my perspective, I really had no chips on the table on the deal. It was just my observation. I was out there when it was happening the *old* way, and I had no feeling one way or the other when the Bureau went and switched it over to the administrative side of the house, but, in retrospect, I think it was a good thing, at least from my observation there at Auburn.

There were several occasions that we just gave away more than we should. There was one where the contractor just flat made a bust on his calculations on material, and my way of thinking is that that's tough. That's life in the business world. But our PCE said, "Ah, we'll split the cost with you on it." Wait a minute. Government didn't cause this. This is something that this guy did. I didn't see why we needed to share anything with him on it.

Storey: So contracting would have been a function of the project office and the Denver office?

Aiken: It was pretty much that way, yeah.

Storey: Working together?

Aiken: Yeah.

Storey: So you were actually involved in the contracting process as the administrative officer?

Aiken: To a degree, yeah. And that degree at that point in time was relatively limited on those big construction contracts, because we had a whole staff right there on the project that was what we refer to as the office engineer staff, and that's all they did was keep track of the contracts and the modifications and change orders and all that stuff. My involvement with contracting was pretty much limited to the *non*-construction stuff that was going on.

Paul Olbert

Storey: Tell me about Mr. Olbert.

Aiken: Olbert? I guess I first met Paul when he was in the personnel office back in Denver. He came there after Gould retired, and became the Personnel Officer there in Denver. And then when Bill Martin became the RD out here. They had worked together, I think in Pueblo. And when Bill came out here, he brought Paul out here. Initially, he came out as the Personnel Officer because a guy by the name of Nissler [phonetic] had the Assistant [Regional Director] for Administration, but Nissler bowed out shortly after Paul arrived on the scene, and Paul became the assistant to Bill for administration.

Paul and I, when I was the administrative officer at Auburn, we would lock horns on occasion on issues, but Paul was always fair about it, and I guess we developed a deep mutual respect, because we became friends, and Paul was instrumental in me being selected down there as the Programs Officer, and I think he was also instrumental in getting me the Assistant [Regional Director], after he left. But he had indicated to me that one of the reasons that he picked me for that job down there was because if I didn't think he was right, I'd tell him I didn't think he was right, and he appreciated that. We haven't for a while, but we do occasionally get together for lunch.

Storey: So he's still around in the Sacramento area?

Aiken: Yeah, he's retired here in the Sacramento area.

Storey: How do you spell his name?

Aiken: O-L-B-E-R-T. Paul.

Storey: Who was the Field Engineer?

Aiken: At Auburn?

Storey: Yeah.

Rod Summerday, Field Engineer at Auburn Dam

Aiken: A guy by the name of Rod Summerday.

Storey: Tell me about him, please.

Aiken: Rod is retired from the Bureau, and he worked for a number of years, after retiring, with Harza Engineering. I think he's still with them. I saw him a year or so ago there in Auburn, and I think he's on this big dam project that they're building down in the Los Angeles area. I think he went back to work down there.

Rod was, I guess, the stereotypical Field Engineer, you know, the guy that likes to have the hard hat on and go out and kick the clods of dirt and talk rough and tough, and all of that stuff. He was the Field Engineer. He filled the position kind of by default. I think they were really—well, actually everybody in the job out there was just—initially, Don Alexander wasn't who the Bureau *ultimately* had in mind for the Project Construction Engineer once the dam started to be built, and Summerday was actually coming out there to be the chief inspection, chief of the

inspection crew. And, you know, happenstance and circumstance, they ended up where they ended up.

Lou Fry Was Chief Geologist at Auburn Dam

Rod Summerday and Lou Fry, who was the Chief Geologist out there, just absolutely locked horns on just about every issue. With the foundation work and the seismic work, Lou Fry thought that he was the daddy rabbit, and Rod Summerday, with the contracts and the construction going on, felt that he was the daddy rabbit. And so there was quite a bit of a battle going on continually between those two. I don't know that either one of them ended up on top. I guess Rod did, because he outlasted Lou. Lou went back to Denver, took a position back in Denver, and Rod, after Don Alexander retired, Rod took over as the P-C-E, but it was during the babysitting, the initial years of the babysitting stage, I'd refer to it. Where there wasn't really anything going on. Finishing up Sugar Pine Dam was about it.

Storey: And who was the Office Engineer?

Aiken: A guy by the name of Gaylord Hay [phonetic]. Gaylord came out to Auburn from Denver. Very personable guy, soft-spoken, mild-mannered, very personable guy. He was a heavy smoker, and it killed him a few years ago. He developed respiratory problems and yet smoked to the end, which was unfortunate. I had a good working relationship with Gaylord. He and I'd go out to lunch frequently, and this, that, and the other

thing. After Rod left, then Gaylord took over briefly as the babysitting, so to speak, Project Construction Engineer, until it really kind of faded out out there, all the activities faded out. Then Gaylord retired and died shortly thereafter.

Storey: How did you as the Administrative Officer relate to these key folks in the office, Project Construction Engineer, the Field Engineer, and the Office Engineer?

Don Alexander Was Project Construction Engineer at Auburn Dam

Aiken: Well, like I said, it was, it's the situation where you kind of handle all the headaches that they don't want to handle or that they don't have time to handle. I worked very well with Gaylord and Don Alexander, the P-C-E. I had more difficulty with Rod Summerday and, to a degree, Lou Fry. Summerday just seemed to have a built-in disdain for administrative-type people, non-engineering-type people. In fact, I've got excerpts from a letter in that regard that he sent when this issue came up of moving the contracting function out of the construction area and into the administrative area. He wasn't the brightest guy in the world, and he wrote a really stupid letter. I've got a copy of it in there.

At any rate, of all of them, I think I had probably the worse relationship with Summerday. He just, like I said, had no respect for administrative-type people and didn't mind telling you that.

Administrative Officer's Job at Auburn Dam

Storey: What did you do for them? What kinds of functions were filled by the administrative officer and his staff?

Aiken: Making sure that, first of all, there's dollars flowing into the project, you know, and making sure that they have the equipment, supplies, to get the job done. I don't know. The administrative side of the house is kind of the grease that keeps things going in any office. They're the ones that get the supplies there, get the dollars, assure the dollars are there, deal with the personnel issues.

Storey: So how many folks worked for the administrative officer at Auburn Dam?

Aiken: I'm going to guess again, probably around thirty, something like that.

Storey: And what kind of assigned responsibilities did they have?

Aiken: Well, same sort of stuff, all of the administrative stuff, property, supply, the garage, the mechanics, you know, that kept the equipment running, were under the administrative side of the house. All of the guides/guards on the project worked under the Administrative Officer.

Storey: Some personnel security?

Aiken: Personnel people worked under the Administrative Officer. Office services.

Storey: I was going to ask if you were gearing up at that time for the construction project?

Aiken: Yeah. Actually, we were underway with the foundation portion of the project, and we were gearing up for getting into actually the placing of the concrete phase, which was the next phase to come along.

“We were also going to finish the Folsom South Canal. . . .”

We were also going to finish the Folsom South Canal. This was all going on at the same time. In fact, one of the last things I was going to do up there before everything kind of grinded to a halt was to go down and locate a field office site down in the Lodi area for the work to finish off the Folsom South Canal. Of course, that never happened, but that’s some of the stuff that we were doing.

Earthquake While in the Auburn Office

Storey: There was an earthquake, I believe.

Aiken: Yeah.

Storey: Where were you? Do you remember?

Construction Office for Auburn Dam in the Livingston Building in Auburn

Aiken: Yeah, I distinctly remember that. When I first went to the Auburn office, the construction office that was being built down at the construction site was not completed, so we were still located in the old Livingston Building off of High Street right in

Auburn, and I can't describe to you what this building is like other than this guy by the name of Livingston built this building. It's a two-story building that's a block long, and he built it during World War II with high school kids and timbers that he scavenged down in the mines in the area. It was, and is, a piece of architectural wonder.

At any rate, I remember I was sitting at my desk. My desk, incidentally—I don't know if you've ever been into these—oh, you don't even see them in amusement parks anymore, but they used to have these buildings that you walk into and everything is kind of not quite square and kind of weird. That's the way my office was. Nothing in it was square. There was a big pillar right in front of my desk that I had to peek around it to see people.

But, at any rate, I was setting up my desk, and there was just this loud *pop*, just a big loud *crack*, and a very sharp jolt, but no rolling, no nothing else, just "Boom!" like that. Like somebody had run into the side of the building or something. And that was all I felt. But the building, I swear, I thought it was going to collapse, because everything in the building, the lampshades, everything, just was a back-and-forth movement, and the building was creaking and moaning, but only felt that one shock. I think that building kind of rocked for, I don't know, several seconds after the shock went through. But that's where I was at.

Earthquake and Failure of Teton Dam Derailed Auburn Dam

Oral history of Thomas J. Aiken

And that coupled with the Teton Dam failure I think is what really derailed Auburn Dam, because the Teton Dam failure caused us, as an agency, to start second-guessing ourselves and to be tentative, and anytime anybody would bring anything up about seismic safety this or anything related to the construction, we just seemed to qualify and back pedal. I firmly believe that those two events stopped Auburn.

Storey: Do you remember when the earthquake was?

Aiken: Yes. It was in August of '75.

Storey: How did you feel the effects of the earthquake in terms of the project and its development?

Aiken: Well, when it occurred, there were some people who opposed the project that were bringing the issue up, but they weren't really getting much play—much ink. And then in June of '76, when Teton failed and we started to back pedal, then they brought the earthquake issue back out. We, as an agency, weren't comfortable, I guess, in stating that we can design to accommodate the earthquake, and people started to question the double curvature thin arch concept. We, as an agency, wouldn't give an answer—you know—wouldn't give a clear answer. Every answer we gave was qualified. I think we lost the confidence of the public on this and never regained it. Lost our credibility.

Storey: Wasn't there a geological study done?

**Felt, after the Earthquake, That a Consulting Firm
Took Advantage of Reclamation Doing a
Geological Study for Auburn Dam**

Aiken: Oh, one of the most extensive geological studies ever done on any dam site anywhere, if not the most studied dam site. I'm sure it is, yeah. And we got involved with—when the seismic issue came up and people started to trump up the fear of faults in the foundation and this, that, and the other thing, we got ourselves on to a roller coaster with a consulting engineering outfit that really, in my estimation, were pirates, because every time we would get to a point, we'd entered into a contract with these guys to provide us with a geological report relating to the foundation, and initially it was, I don't know, two or three-hundred thousand-dollar area that we contracted for, and every time we'd get right up to getting a report out, these guys would say, "Yeah, you know, it doesn't look good, but a few more dollars, and I think we can get you the answers you need." And that happened two or three different times, 'til ultimately the—

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 30, 1995

BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 30, 1995

Storey: So ultimately we spent over a million dollars on the contract.

Aiken: Right. And then Lou Fry, who was our head geologist, got concerned about what *that* report was going to say, so he went out and convinced everybody that we need to get these *individual* consultants on to refute whatever our own

consultant was going to say. It got to be really squirrely.

“ . . . ultimately . . . the Secretary of [the] Interior stated that, yes, we could build a safe dam at Auburn, and by that time we had gone into . . . concrete gravity [design] rather than the double curvature thin arch. . . . ”

I don't know how much money we ultimately spent on that geological stuff, but ultimately it came out that the Secretary of [the] Interior stated that, yes, we could build a safe dam at Auburn, and by that time we had gone into the CG3 design, I think, which is concrete gravity rather than the double curvature thin arch. In other words, kind of another Shasta Dam.

That kind of was where the [Jimmy] Carter Administration left off, the [Ronald] Reagan Administration came in, and the issue at Auburn then became a financial one, not a dam safety one, and the rest was kind of history. It's just kind of bounced around.

Filled a Public Affairs Function at Auburn Dam

Storey: Tell me how you became involved as sort of the public affairs point for the Auburn office.

Aiken: Because nobody else wanted to do it. (laughter) When we had all these reporters going around, it just seemed to fall into my lap.

Storey: At what point?

Aiken: Really, initially. When the controversy came up on seismic safety and the reporters started to come up there, Don Alexander just asked me if I'd take over and handle it.

Storey: So that would have been right from the beginning?

Aiken: Yeah.

Storey: Beginning about '74?

Originally Asked to Socialize in the Community of Auburn

Aiken: Well, we didn't have that much public involvement at that point. What Don had asked me when I came on to the project, he asked me to get involved in community affairs and kind of be a liaison between the Bureau and the community. So I went out and got myself invited to join the Lions Club, and I started to make those kinds of contacts with people. I got acquainted with the city council people and just did the schmoozing thing at that point in time. Then when the controversy started coming up and we started getting reporters up there, TV and newspaper reporters, Don just asked me to handle it for him.

Storey: What did you find out about handling the press?

“television . . . I found out that you've got to formulate whatever point you want to get across and say it in fifteen seconds or less, you know, just short points, . . .”

Aiken: I found out that you have to choose your words carefully when you talk to those people, and I found out that the television, the electronic media, I'm referring to, and I found out that you've got to formulate whatever point you want to get across and say it in fifteen seconds or less, you know, just short points, because if you get into any kind of technical diatribe, it doesn't make it. It goes over their heads. And that's what I tried to do here since the gate failure, and apparently I've been successful. People have told me I've done a good job, including people in the media.

Storey: Did it ever get hot? Did you go to public meetings, and that kind of thing, and it got hot?

Aiken: Oh, yeah. At Auburn?

Storey: Yeah.

Opposition to Auburn Dam

Aiken: Yeah. There were people—by and large, at least in those days, the public supported construction up there, but there were a handful of people that were opposed to the project and they were very adamant, very vocal in their opposition. Then, of course, when the seismic issue came up, then they picked up a following. The public meetings were, after a while, pretty much dominated by the environmentalists, the anti-dammers, as opposed to the people who supported it.

Storey: What were the arguments for and against that were being thrown at Reclamation?

Aiken: Well, before the seismic safety issue, the arguments against Auburn Dam were focused on the damage, the environmental damage that would occur in the canyon with losing umpteen and so many miles of river canyon. They brought out things like the dogface butterfly and the harvestman spider, are two of them I remember. It turns out that these butterflies and these spiders are in virtually every canyon in the Sierra. They just went from, you know, one thing to the other, people looking for something, anything, to stop the project. And then when the seismic issue came along, then that was where the focus was, is on the seismic safety.

Auburn Dam in the End Was an Economic Issue

After the Carter Administration declared, virtually on its last days, declared that a safe dam could be built there, then it became a question of economics and who would pay for it.

Storey: With the Reagan Administration.

Aiken: Yes. And that's kind of the way it has coasted for the last decade. And now that the flood control issue and the water resource issue are to kind of come together in Congress for a decision, then the environmentalists have come back out in force and we're starting to see all kinds of seismic safety issues pop up in the press, and the same routine is starting to be played out again. So obviously the people who oppose the project are feeling nervous about it.

Storey: When you were out at Auburn, who did you work

with the most at the regional office?

Aiken: I guess Paul Olbert. I guess it would be a toss-up between Paul Olbert and the Personnel Officer, who was a guy by the name of Hal Matson. But most of my issues I just took up with Paul.

Storey: I thought he was the Project Construction Engineer.

Aiken: No. Paul Olbert was the Assistant [Regional Director] for Administration.

Storey: Assistant Regional Director?

Aiken: Assistant Regional Director for Administration.

Storey: I see. Okay. And Mr. Alexander was the Project Construction Engineer.

Aiken: Right.

Storey: Instead of replacing Mr. Olbert.

Aiken: No. Olbert replaced a guy by the name of Mistler [phonetic], and I replaced Olbert.

Storey: Okay. And who did you work with the most at the Denver office, at the E&R Center?

Aiken: When I was at Auburn, I really didn't have a lot of contact with the E&R Center.

Storey: What I'm interested in is the relationship between the three offices, how Denver played into the picture, how the region played into the picture,

and how the construction office played into the picture.

Interactions among Region, Denver, and Auburn Offices

Aiken: The construction office and the Denver office were very close in regards to the contract work, the design work, that sort of thing. I didn't have much of a part in that particular scenario. As the administrative side of the house, my dealings was mostly with the regional office in terms of the personnel problems. The supply and procurement problems we took care of pretty much out there. Our involvement was fairly well focused on the budget and the personnel side of it with the regional office.

Storey: So, the split, I think I'm hearing, is that construction supervision and construction loyalty, if you will, went to the Denver office.

Aiken: Oh, no question. Yeah, no question.

Storey: Administrative responsibility came to the project office from the regional office?

Aiken: Right.

Storey: Including personnel, budget, and that kind of thing. And that's where *you* did most of your work?

Aiken: Right. Right.

Storey: Okay. Good. Well, I hate to say it, but we've

finished two hours. I'd like to ask you whether or not you're willing for researchers inside and outside Reclamation to use the data contained on the tapes and the resulting transcripts.

Aiken: Sure. I don't have any problem with it.

Storey: Good. Thank you.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 30, 1995.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MAY 20, 1998.

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Thomas Aiken, Area Manager of the Folsom Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation, in his offices at Folsom Dam, on May the 20th, 1998, at about two o'clock in the afternoon. This is tape one.

As I told you yesterday, my tape was stolen, my first tape of our interview, so I'd like to again ask you where you were born and raised and educated and how you ended up at the Bureau of Reclamation, and then we'll go from there.

Born in Colorado Springs in 1942

Aiken: Okay. My name's Tom Aiken. I was born in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1942. I grew up there.

**Graduated from Colorado State University in
Business Administration**

I went to Colorado State University and got a degree in business administration in 1964.

Commissioned a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army During Vietnam Era

I also got a commission as a lieutenant in the Army at that same point in time. I spent two years in the Army, one of them in Vietnam. Came back from that and initially took a job as an Accountant for the City Utilities in Colorado Springs.

Took the Federal Service Entrance Exam

I also then took the Federal Service Entrance Exam to try to get into Federal service, and I scored high enough on the exam that it qualified me for a GS-5 or GS-7 entry, and I immediately had three offers: I had one from the Army Materiel Command in Texarkana, Texas at the GS-5 level; and I had one from the National Park Service at Grand Canyon at the GS-5 level; and I had one from the Bureau of Reclamation in Denver at the GS-7 level.

Went to Work for Reclamation as a Budget Analyst

It was the combination of the proximity to Denver and the offer of a GS-7 over a GS-5 that I accepted the position with Reclamation. That was as a Budget Analyst in the Program Coordination Division at what was then the Chief Engineer's Office. That was in October of '67.

Storey: So tell me what a Budget Analyst did in Reclamation at that time.

“ . . . everything was done manually. . . . ”

Aiken: Well, in those days, everything was done manually. We had not yet entered the computer age, so to speak, at least in the budget shop, to any degree. So all of the budgeting was done manually. It was done on a variety of forms, preprinted forms and *huge* forms we used to call bedsheets, where you'd just add up columns upon columns upon columns of numbers. We each had at our desk a ten-key adding machine and some type of a calculating machine.

Worked on a Hundred Key Marchant Calculator

I say some type, because as the new kid on the block, I had one of those old, we called them hundred-key Marchant calculators, whereas some of the more senior guys had the new Freidans, the big Freidans. I spent five years there pounding away on those keys and decided that I did *not* want to stay in budgeting my whole career.

Applied for Job as Administrative Officer in the Durango Office

After about five years, a position as an Administrative Officer at our Durango, Colorado, office opened up, and I applied for that because that was more in line with where I wanted to go with my career, a broader career than just budgeting, and I was fortunate enough to get picked for the job.

Durango Office Consolidated with Grand Junction Office

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

I was there for about two years and a decision was reached to consolidate the Durango office with the Grand Junction office. This was the first attempt at that, and inasmuch as the Grand Junction office already had an Administrative Officer, Enos Stone by name, who was *probably* the most senior Administrative Officer in the Bureau at the time, an old and very experienced Administrative Officer, I became surplus as an Administrative Officer. So they offered a position to transfer me up to Grand Junction to go back into the budget arena in the Grand Junction office.

Applied for Job as Administrative Officer at Auburn Dam

About that same time, the position of Administrative Officer for the Auburn Dam Construction Office opened up, and I applied for it. My wife and I were actually on a house-hunting trip to Grand Junction when I got notice of an interview for the Auburn job. I came out here and interviewed for that job and was fortunate enough to get selected for that, and spent about four years there. Things occurred at Auburn which, of course, put it on the back burner, and the work was starting to wind down.

Became Program Coordination Division Chief in Sacramento

The Program Coordination Division Chief position opened up down in Sacramento, and I applied for that and was lucky enough to be

selected for that. I went down there and spent about eight years as the region's Program Coordination Officer, and the position of Assistant Regional Director for Administration opened up. I applied for that, was fortunate enough to get selected for that and was in that position from 1984 to 1993, when Roger Patterson, the Regional Director, asked me to come out here to Folsom to resolve some issues that we had out here and to set up the area office. That's when we went to the area office concept. I did *that*, and here I am.

Now, there's something that is unique and probably ought to be recorded for history here, and I'm going to tell you that. Every position—every position—that I have had in the Bureau of Reclamation has been eliminated after I had left it. Every one of those jobs were eliminated, simply eliminated, after I left it, so I don't think there's anybody else in the history of this organization that can make that statement.

Storey: Let's go back to budgeting in Denver. Did you get promoted while you were in that job?

Promotions at Reclamation

Aiken: Yes. Over the five years I was there, I was promoted, started as a GS-7 and was promoted up to the 11 level right there in-place in the job. I got the 12 when I went to Durango, a 13 when I went to Auburn, and the 14 when I went down to the regional office.

Decided He Didn't Want to Continue in Budgeting

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

Storey: Why did you decide you didn't want to do budgeting?

Aiken: It became, to me, very routine and boring, because there was never an end to it, you just go through the cycle, go through the cycle, go through the cycle. The numbers changed, but the forms didn't change, the work didn't change. It was, to me, kind of confining. That's what I felt. I felt confined just adding numbers and adding numbers and balancing things out. It was interesting for the first few years, but then the sameness of it and the fact that you never really got to the end, I mean, you would crank out a budget, the budget would become part of the Bureau's budget justification, and then you'd just start the cycle all over again. Same stuff, in many cases, same numbers, other cases the number changed, but it was all the same stuff.

Storey: How did it [the budget office] operate within the Chief Engineer's Office? In other words, where did it get its information from? How did it interact with other offices? What decisions did it make? What decisions were made by others and explained to it? And so on.

Budgeting in the Chief Engineer's Office

Aiken: Okay. When I first started for the Bureau, the Budget Office was actually reporting ~~[[to] in part of the Chief Engineer's office.~~ Over time, though, it then became part of the business resources part of the Bureau. ~~initially.~~ In fact, our mail code back in those days was in the 200s, as opposed to

nowadays the mail code for budgeting is 320. This was two, two-something, 206, something like that at any rate, which indicated that they reported directly to the Chief Engineer.

Budgeting in Denver Was Different

Budgeting in Denver was different than, say, in a regional office, because in Denver you were trying to determine what the charges that the Denver office would levy on all of the different projects [would be].

Doing Budget Work in Denver Gave You a Look at the Whole Spectrum of Work Reclamation Was Doing

So we had the whole spectrum of work that the Bureau was doing that we were dealing with in there. From that perspective, it was good for a young kid just starting out in the Bureau, because you got exposed to everything the Bureau was doing, and I'm sure that that helped me immensely in being able to land the jobs that I did, because when the job opened up down at Durango, I knew what their projects were, I knew what their budget was.

By the same token, when the job opened at Auburn, I hadn't been that far removed from it, just a couple years, that I knew, you know, basically what was going on at Auburn. So I have maintained for a long time that all new professionals starting to work for the Bureau should have been rotated through the budget shop

to get them that broad exposure. It was entertained in a couple of areas, but it never really locked on; not everybody got to go through the budget shop, which is probably unfortunate.

Budgeting in the Regions

But at any rate, we did that type of budgeting, whereas in the regional offices, the budgets that are put together there are the ones that actually go up before Congress and X number of dollars are authorized for the Auburn Project. Of that, then Denver would have a certain amount of those dollars earmarked for the work that they were going to do on the Auburn Project.

We did have a few direct appropriations coming into Denver. There were some in the planning area and there were some in the research area, particularly the Atmospheric Water Program that was going on out there. Those were [ones] ~~when~~ we directly budgeted that directly got into the budgeting process. The rest of them were budgeting *with* the regional offices for the Denver costs.

Storey: Who was determining how much Denver—you said "levied" earlier.

Aiken: Yeah.

Storey: To me, that's an interesting use of a word. Does it imply some sort of control from the Chief Engineer's office?

Barney Bellport, Chief Engineer's Office, and

Denver Office

Aiken: In those days, yeah. When I first started at the Bureau, Barney Bellport was Chief Engineer and Floyd Dominy was the Commissioner, and by God, you knew where the power was, and it was in those two seats, so to speak, the one in Denver and the one in Washington.

Spring Work Review at Denver

The process that was used in those days was to have what was referred to as a spring review at Denver, and that's where the regional offices would come to the Office of the Chief Engineer with their programs, with the work that they wanted out of the Chief Engineer's office, and we would sit down and determine what that level of work would cost and then get back to the regions and say, "Okay, for the work that you want on the Central Utah Project for this year, it's going to cost thus and such."

Then we would track these costs as the year played out and run trend charts, and if it looked like we had overestimated what the Denver charges were going to be, we'd call up the region and say, "We don't think we're going to need all of the money we told you," or, conversely, we would have areas where a project got under way and things would come up that was not anticipated, so we'd call up the regions and say, "We're going to have to have more money than what we originally agreed on." That's kind of the way it was done in those days. Like I said, it was all done manually.

Storey: I had the image, I guess, of the Chief Engineer was in charge of construction, and until construction was completed and turned over to the regions, the regions weren't much involved. I gather that's an incorrect impression.

Aiken: No, it's correct and incorrect. Initially, the regions, if I understand it correctly, all evolved out of and reported to the Chief Engineer's office in Denver. Then it evolved to the point where they were—you know, that was during the early days when the Bureau was building.

Storey: That would have been '43, '44, '45.

Region and Denver Relating to Auburn Dam Office

Aiken: Then as we got projects on line and you had the operation and maintenance, then the regions kind of became regions, instead of field offices for the Chief Engineer. They became regions and reported up to a Commissioner as opposed to the Chief Engineer. But in terms of construction, the Chief Engineer's shop did call the shots on it. It was that kind of a strange relationship. Construction was occurring, as an example, at Auburn, but we worked more closely with the Chief Engineer's office, or at that time the Engineering Research Center, than the regional office, but we still reported to the Regional Director. You had that kind of an administrative boss over here and a technical boss over there.

Storey: Was the budget shop—there was a budget office?

Division of Program Coordination Contained the

Budget Shop and the Program Shop

Aiken: Denver, yes. It was called the Division of Program Coordination, and then it was separated into two shops: you had the program shop and you had the budget shop. The program shop were the guys that actually worked directly with the regions. In other words, one of the programmers in the program shop would be assigned to Region Two; that would be his total responsibility. He would be kind of the go-between between what was going on in the region and what was going on in Denver.

Object-class-type Budgeting as Opposed to Program-type Budgeting

Over in the budget shop, that's where we kind of converted the programs into the presentations that are needed for government-wide budgeting, the object-class-type budgeting, as opposed to the program-type budgeting. Then we had our own set of charts over there that we kept— again, manually.

Was Responsible for a Monthly Report

I was responsible for a report that went back to Washington on a monthly basis and then a larger report about the size of a small pamphlet that was distributed around the Denver office. Early in my career back there, I was sent to the Washington office on detail for training purposes, and I just wanted to see who it was that used this important report that I made every month back in Washington. I found out that this "important

report" was just received back there and dutifully filed away, and nobody, that I could tell, really used it.

So when I got back to Denver, I asked my boss, Bill Schilichting, "How about if I just prepare this report but not send it in for a few months and see if anybody misses it," and he agreed. So we did that. Nobody ever missed it, nobody ever called me up and asked me for the report. And this was a big part of my work day there in Denver. So we just eliminated part of my job doing that. The other report, the one that was sent around to the folks there in Denver, which was like a small booklet, on a monthly basis, it was not really utilized that much either, because periodically, just as I would assemble the book, I would put something in the book that was totally unrelated to it, totally unrelated to it, and just see if anybody tumbled to it and gave me a call, and I did that for a couple of years and I only got about two calls. So I'm sure that that report wasn't well read either, but, by golly, it was an important part of my job, and that might give you a clue as to why when I left the Denver office that my job there was eliminated. (laughter)

Storey: Who decided what the figures were going to be?

How Budget Figures Were Determined

Aiken: Well, in all the budgeting, you have your budget targets. For the budget year, each entity has a budget target, like each region has a target, and they try to work within that target for all of the work that they're doing. Then when they would

come back to Denver, they would have their target, the regional office target, and they'd sit down with the folks in Denver there. It was kind of a negotiation process as to what kind of money could be spent and where it should be spent. There were things of lower priority that just dropped through the slot, didn't happen.

Storey: So who was doing the negotiating?

Aiken: Well, the regional office, they would come in with the Regional Director and their Program Coordination Officer and then they would sit down with a virtual army of Denver people. It would depend on the type of work. If it was related to dams, then they'd have the dams guys in there, concrete dams, or, if it was earth-fill dam, then they'd have the earth-fill dam guys in there, or if it was a canal, they'd have the canal guys in there. So the spring conferences, they lasted pretty near a week, I think, to get all the regions through all of the different entities that they needed to talk with back there.

Like any budget process, you try to work it out within the targets that you had. If things were over the target, then the process would be, is to go to the Washington budget shop and see if it couldn't be worked out through reprogramming or supplemental appropriations, something like that.

Storey: You mentioned Barney Bellport. Did you ever meet him?

Barney Bellport on the Elevator

Aiken: Oh, yeah, yeah. I've got a story to tell there, because, like I said, when I started there, the Program Coordination Office reported to him. So we were on the fourteenth floor and, of course, that was Mahogany Row. You had Barney Bellport, you had Jack Hilf. Harold Arthur was up there, and Hank Halliday and all of their immediate staff. That comprised the fourteenth floor. I'll never forget one day I probably had less than a year in there and had finished lunch down in the cafeteria and got on the elevator, and Barney Bellport and his whole entourage of folks, his top, top people, came on the elevator, and Barney was just chewing them out something fierce. I have never heard such a chewing-out. I'm telling you, I wanted to just shrink up and disappear into the carpet. I felt, you know, here I am, a little nobody nothing in this elevator with all the powers-to-be in the Bureau, and the Chief Engineer just really, really reaming them out about something. It was embarrassing for me, but it didn't seem to bother Barney at all.

Storey: Do you think that kind of behavior was characteristic of him, that he would do that out in public?

Aiken: Well I certainly witnessed it. I don't know how characteristic it was of him. He was, I guess you would say, from the old school of management, from my interpretation. He was boss and he let you know who was boss. I mean, he was personable enough to me anyway when I did meet him, but you definitely knew he was in charge.

Storey: Tell me about Jack Hilf.

Aiken: I don't remember a whole lot. I do know that he preferred to be called Dr. Hilf. I'm trying to remember. I think he oversaw the design part of it, and I think Harold Arthur oversaw the construction part of it, but I can't swear to that. That's been, good God, thirty years ago.

Storey: What about Harold Arthur? Did you ever meet him?

Aiken: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I met all those guys. In the course of budgeting, you know, you run into them, and then, like I said, they were all up there on the fourteenth floor, right across.

Storey: What was he like?

Aiken: He was at least, to me, he seemed to be more pragmatic and less confrontational than maybe Hilf or Bellport was. He seemed to have a little more dignity than the other two to me. I don't know whether that's the right way to characterize it or not, but dignity or class or something.

Building 67 Completed in 1967

Storey: Let's see. You went there in '67. That would have been two or three years after the building [67] was completed.

Aiken: Actually, it was a matter of about six months. The building was completed in May of '67. I started there in October of '67. It was interesting from the standpoint that that was also the time frame that they were pumping these nuclear wastes into deep well injection there at the Rocky

Mountain Arsenal, and there were frequent earthquakes in Denver in those days. I'll never forget one day, like I said, our offices were on the fourteenth floor, and I was coming up the elevator, coming to work, and apparently an earthquake occurred while I was in the elevator. Well, of course, being in the elevator, it nullified any of the feeling any of that motion. I walked into the office there, and some of my cohorts were sitting there literally grabbing their desks, and their eyes were as big as saucers. I asked, "What the heck's going on?" They said, "Well, didn't you feel that?" "No, no." They said, "We just had an earthquake."

Storey: What were people saying about the new building?

Aiken: The only thing that I remember about the building in terms of people talking about it was the fact that the Bureau got it authorized and it was appropriated through the Bureau budget. I think it was around six million bucks to build the building, and we got it built and moved in, and then the decision was reached that that should be turned over to GSA to administer, and GSA immediately started charging two-million-dollars-a-year rent on a building that the Bureau just spent six million dollars to build. That struck me as awfully strange that we would get caught in a deal like that.

Storey: You were in the budgeting process, so you saw this happening.

Aiken: Yeah.

Storey: Yes, it is interesting.

Aiken: Yeah, you'd think that there would have been some consideration for the fact that it was budgeted and built with Bureau funds, and then when we had to turn it over to GSA for them to run, then they started charging the Bureau two million a year to run the building.

“Mahogany Row”

Storey: You mentioned the term "Mahogany Row." That's been a common term that's come up over and over again. Was there actually any mahogany?

Aiken: I know what it goes back to, and that is when the—

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Storey: I was just asking you about the term "Mahogany Row" and whether there was really any mahogany.

Aiken: There was, but it was not in Building 67. The Bureau offices, before 67 opened up, were over in Building 53, and there actually *was* one of those hallways that was paneled in dark wood paneling. Now, I don't know whether it was mahogany or not, but that's where the front office, so to speak, got referenced the term "Mahogany Row." Of course, I didn't start in Building 53, I started in Building 67, but I was out on a walk one day with one of my cohorts there, and I don't remember

which one, but he took me into Building 53 and was showing me where they used to be. It was at that time vacant. The building had been vacated by the Bureau and had *not* been remodeled or refilled with other agencies as it is today. He was commenting on how one of the hazards in that building was bird droppings, because the birds would actually fly in there and get up in the rafters, and you'd be working at your desk and periodically get bombed, so to speak, by a bird. But as we were walking through the building, he did point out Mahogany Row, and that was the explanation that he gave to me. That's how the term "Mahogany Row" originated.

Storey: Did it still have the wood paneling at that point?

Aiken: Yeah, the paneling was still there.

Storey: Interesting. How many folks in your part of the budget office?

Staff in the Budget Office

Aiken: Just in the budget office, there was Bob Cope, Tom Bumgartner, Rudy Mezner, myself, and then Bill Schilichting was the boss. Tom Bumgartner and Bob Cope were both veterans of World War II, and Rudy Mezner was older than them. He was too old to go into the war. So I'm saying that all of those guys, when I started there, had to be close to fifty years old when I started.

Storey: What about on the programming side, do you remember?

Staff in the Programming Office

Aiken: There were more on the programming side. Dale Raitt was the boss, and there was a guy named Jim Moomaw, a guy named Bill Wiley, a guy named J. R. Smith, a guy named Denby Peeples, a guy named John Childress, a lady named Charlotte O'Malley, Harry Menzel. Then there was another guy that worked with Harry on C-P-M and PERT, and I can see his face, but I can't come up with a name.

Storey: So we're talking about--

Aiken: There was Bill Hilmes also in there.

Storey: So we're talking around fifteen folks in this division, was it?

Aiken: Yeah, at least that. Then we had the secretary. The chief, when I first started there, was George Powell. George retired after a year or two, and Dale Raitt became the chief.

Storey: Now, am I hearing correctly this office was doing the Chief Engineer's budgeting?

Aiken: Initially, but when I got there it was just going through the transition of reporting up through Hank Halliday, who was the business administration guy there. I'm trying to think what Halliday's title was. Business Manager, I think, was his title.

Storey: But not doing, for instance, the Washington office's budgeting?

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

Aiken: No. We got involved with the overall Bureau budget once a year, and that was when we were pulling together the budget justification. They would be consolidated there at Denver, and the budget people from each of the regions would come in and we'd sit down with them and crank out the Bureau-wide budget.

Storey: Did anybody ever go to the program review sessions with the Commissioner and the Regional Directors?

Skull Sessions

Aiken: Yeah. I think you're talking about the one in January-February that was referred to as the skull session and then the Commissioner's summer conference. Yes. From the Denver office, it was always the Division Chief would go, and I believe that the Budget Officer would go, and I believe that the Programs Officer would also go on that. They'd take two of those assistants.

Bill Schilichting

Storey: So this would be Mr. Schilichting?

Aiken: Mr. Schilichting and Dale Raitt.

Storey: So how do you spell Schilichting?

Aiken: S-C-H-I-L-I-C-H-T-I-N-G.

Storey: What was he like?

Aiken: Bill was super. I could not have had a better first boss in the Bureau than Bill Schilichting. He was very supportive. He and I would often lock horns, we would have differing opinions, but he would hear me out. Just to give you a notion of how he was on a personal level, I had just bought a house in Denver and mentioned, this one particular weekend, that I was going to be drywalling my basement, finishing my basement off, and thought no more about it. And Saturday morning [the] doorbell rang, and there was Bill Schilichting, and he had all these drywall tools. He says, "Well, I used to do drywalling. I'm going to help you." I didn't ask for it, I didn't expect it. Boom! There he was. That was just the type of guy he was. I still correspond with his widow, Jean. We exchange letters at Christmastime, and she just recently sold their house there in Lakewood and moved back to their home grounds which was up in the Douglas, Wyoming, area. Both of them super people, just super people, couldn't have had a better boss.

Storey: What kind of background, do you happen to know?

Aiken: Bill?

Storey: Yeah, did he have.

Aiken: He had quite a few years in private industry, and it was involved with, I think, grinding glass lenses somehow. I've just got vague recollections of that. This was back in Wyoming. But he also, like I said, was involved in a number of different things. As I said, he had drywalling experience,

too. But I think that times just got real tough for him and he accepted a job with the Bureau back in the Washington budget office and worked back there for a number of years and then transferred out as the Budget Officer there at the Chief's office, and, of course, that's where I ran into him.

Storey: What about the Division Chief, who was that?

Aiken: When I first started, [it] was George Powell, and George was a man, I would say, well in his sixties and his interest lie more in talking about fishing than anything else that I could remember. I enjoyed fishing, too, and he would frequently stop by my desk and we'd swap fishing stories. He was in that office, like I said, only maybe a couple of years. He developed prostate cancer and had the surgery and then retired shortly after that. I don't know whatever happened to him, and then Dale Raitt became the Program Chief.

Storey: This is R-A-I-T?

Aiken: R-A-I-T-T.

Storey: What was he like?

Dale Raitt

Aiken: Dale was personable but more politically driven, I think, would maybe be the word. He left about the same time I left to go to Durango. He went to Amarillo as the Assistant Regional Director in Amarillo, as I recall. He was more job oriented, more politically oriented than George Powell was.

Storey: You started as a 7, then I presume became a 9, then an 11.

Aiken: Right.

Storey: Did the nature of your job change as you were promoted, or was it just that you were more skilled at it?

Aiken: It might have changed a little bit, but I think it was because I was more skilled. I would go around and ask other people if I could help them with stuff that they were doing. I had an ulterior motive because I wanted to expand my knowledge base and horizons, but basically the job was the same for the five years that I was there. They would give me different things to do as I became more skilled, take some of the workload off the other guys' shoulders, so to speak. Right over there in that cabinet there is a book that has the very first job I ever did in the Bureau, and if you want, I'd be pleased to show it to you.

Storey: Sure. What was it?

Aiken: Some kind of a cost allocation. Let me just and get it. I tend to hang onto stuff. I still have a car that I bought in 1964. (laughter)

Storey: When you got this job, or it was before that?

Aiken: No, it was before this job, but it's a Corvette, '64 Corvette that I've owned since new, so it's more valuable now than, of course—

Storey: Than it was then.

Aiken: –it was then.

Storey: I sure wish I'd kept my '56 Chevy, I'll tell you.
(laughter)

Aiken: Oh, boy, yeah. At any rate, here's the very first thing that Bill Schiliching had me do for the Bureau. It's a comparison of total expenditure and total obligation for the water resource, engineering research, fiscal year 1967. There's some of the line items: aquatic weed control, concrete, earthquake engineering, electrical power, evaporation reduction, hydraulics, open and close conduit system, rock mechanics, scientific communication documentation, soil engineering, so on and so forth.

Storey: So you were getting an overall picture of the lab.

Aiken: Right. That was my very first assignment.

Storey: You mentioned that every job you left disappeared, as it were, after you left.

Aiken: That's correct.

Storey: Did you ever explore any jobs that you decided not to apply for, or did you apply for jobs that you weren't selected for?

Job Offer at the Atomic Energy Commission Withdrawn

Aiken: The only job, through the course of events there until I reached where I'm at now, the only job that I applied for was as the Chief of Administration

for the Atomic Energy Commission at their Yucca Flats Proving Grounds in Nevada. I got a call that I was selected, and I was all excited. Then I got a call shortly thereafter from the selecting official who said, much to his chagrin, that they had a lady that had filed an EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] complaint, and that the powers-to-be in his organization said that he needs to give that job to that lady.

Storey: When would this have been?

Aiken: This was while I was still at Auburn, so it would have been—

Storey: '74-'78.

Aiken: Probably about '75, '76, sometime in that time frame.

Storey: Do you remember how the Administrative Officer position came to your attention in Durango?

Aiken: I just saw it on a vacancy announcement.

Storey: So were you checking the vacancy announcements regularly?

Aiken: Oh, yeah. Like I said, after five years of budget work, I was becoming bored and looking around.

Storey: Who was the Project Manager? It would have been "project" in those days.

Ed Wiscomb Managed the Durango Office

Aiken: Project Manager, yes. It was a gentleman by the name of Ed Wiscomb.

Storey: Did he have you down to interview you?

Aiken: Yes, he did. Went down for an interview. This would have been in the spring, I guess, of 1972, and he selected me and I reported to work out there in about August or September of '72. Well, I've got it right here. Why guess. September 18th of '72, I reported to—this chart is my thirty years of Bureau of Reclamation and salary. Except now I've worked more than thirty years, and I don't know where I could ever find this old graph paper to keep building this thing out, so I just gave up on it after thirty years.

But I reported to work in Durango, September 18th of '72. Reported at Auburn on December 28th, 1974. December 31st, '78, I went down to the regional office as a Programs Officer. November of '84, I went to the front office, and January of '93, I came out here. Looks like I did all my action in the winter.

Storey: While you've got that out, would you mind telling me what a GS-7 starting in 1967 made, roughly?

Aiken: It was about \$6,400 a year. If I were home, I could tell you precisely, because I've saved every pay slip I've ever had in the Bureau, but it was about \$6,400.

Storey: So you went down to Durango. What does an Administrative Officer do in a project office? What was the project office doing? Maybe we

better start there.

Work of an Administrative Officer in Durango

Dolores Project, Animas-La Plata Project, San Miguel Project, Paradox Valley Salinity Control Project

Aiken: Yes, the Durango Project's office, at that time it was a field planning office, and they were doing the preliminary planning work for the Dolores Project, the Animas-La Plata Project, the San Miguel Project, and the Paradox Valley Salinity Control Project. They were involved in the data-gathering and preliminary design-type investigation work down there.

Storey: So this is a planning office. It was not a construction office.

Durango Was a Planning Office Rather than a Construction Office

Hammond Project

Aiken: Right. It was a planning office, and then we had just a tad of operation and maintenance, because the old Hammond Project, which is around Farmington, New Mexico, was still under the Bureau's purview, and so we had a little bit of O&M work down there, but the rest of it was all planning.

Storey: Moving to Durango in '72 must have been interesting.

Fishing on the Ute Indian Reservation

Aiken: I loved it for about ninety days of summer, because like I said, I'm a fly fisherman. For reasons I never understood or investigated, I was the only person that I knew down there that would go down to the Ute Indian Reservation and pay the five dollars for an annual reservation pass to fish or hunt. In so doing, the reservation starts immediately south of town and the Animas River goes right through there, for five dollars a year I had a private fishing stream. I fished on that river virtually every day in the summer the two years I was there and never, ever saw a soul on that river except me. It was a fisherman's dream and I lived it for two years. The fish, beautiful fish, you'd catch absolutely beautiful fish there. So that was great. What wasn't so great was the rest of the year when it started to snow and snow and snow. I did not do well with snow.

Storey: Well, now tell me what an Administrative Officer does in a planning project office.

There Are No Longer Planning Project Offices

Aiken: Well, there's no planning project offices that I'm aware of anymore. That was kind of all called into the regional offices.

Area Offices Are Spinoffs of O&M Offices

Virtually all of our area offices now are spinoffs of O&M offices, as is this one. The duties are much the same. I mean, you're dealing with budget issues; you're dealing with personnel

issues; you're dealing with purchasing, procurement; property management issues; you're dealing with computer issues. That part of it hasn't changed. Some of the reporting and formats for reporting, of course, have changed, but the essence of what you do is still the same.

Storey: You're getting the typewriters.

Aiken: Yes.

Storey: In those days, the typewriters and the ribbons and so on. And doing the budget for the planning operations that were going on?

Administrative Officer Responsible for Budget Staff Work

Aiken: Yes. In Durango we had a staff of two guys that that was their job, their whole job was budgeting down there, budgeting and accounting for the expenditure of the funds. Same when I got to Auburn, there was a person there that did the programs and budgeting, *but* the Administrative Officer was responsible for it. It's like here, our budget person here reports to the Administrative Officer.

Storey: What kind of training were you taking at that time?

Took a Lot of Training

Aiken: Of course, my background, formal education was business administration, and the emphasis that I had was on economics, and you had a lot of

accounting courses and such as that. When I got into the Bureau, particularly during those early years, I was going to every training course that I could talk Bill into letting me go to that had anything to do with budgeting. In addition to that, the Bureau, or at least the Chief Engineer's Office back in those days, had quite a library of self-improvement courses, training courses, and I immersed myself in a lot of that stuff, statistics, math-type courses. Then I started taking supervision-type courses through this self-improvement, you know, where you go check out a book and you go through the book and turn in your results and it's graded, that sort of thing. It's all done on your free time.

I don't know, over my thirty-year career, I've had a ton of different kind of training. I would probably shudder to see a printout of it now. It was all, in the early days, more technically oriented. Then as I got into supervision, when I became an Administrative Officer, then it was more oriented toward supervision and management. Today they call it diversity; then it was EEO-type training, first aid, typical stuff that you would have.

Storey: I presume there was a study going on. We're thinking about what to do with this office. That always causes a lot of uproar in the office, doesn't it?

Aiken: Oh, yes.

Storey: What was going on down there in Durango? Durango is an office, I think, that's sort of come

and gone and come back.

Consolidation of Durango and Grand Junction Offices

Aiken: Yep, it's had a history of it, and, like I said, while I was there, the decision was reached, I guess, in the Salt Lake City office to consolidate the Durango office and the Grand Junction office into a Western Colorado Office. When that occurred, like I said, I became a surplus package, and fortunately was able to land the job in Auburn, but I think what ultimately happened there is they transferred Ed Wiscomb from his position down near Durango up to Grand Junction, and he oversaw the two offices for a period of time, but my recollection of this is that it kind of migrated back into two separate offices up until this latest Bureau-wide effort to consolidate into area offices. Then it was resolidified into the Western Colorado Area Office, but it waxed and waned.

Applied for Administrative Officer Job at Auburn Dam

Storey: So then you were looking around. Did you apply for other jobs in Reclamation or just the one at Auburn?

Aiken: I think it's just the one in Auburn. It was the only one available at that time frame that, the only Administrative Officer-type job that was available.

Had a Standing Offer to Work in the Budget Shop in D.C.

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

I fairly well had a standing offer to go back to Washington, D.C., and work in the budget shop there, but I—

Storey: Not tempting, huh?

Aiken: I didn't bite on that. I figured I'd have to be awfully desperate before I'd go back there, so I never took up that offer, that standing offer that was there.

Storey: So you moved to Auburn as Administrative Officer. Same kinds of responsibilities?

“Same types [of responsibilities], different twist . . . major construction office and a *lot* more procurement, you know . . . budget work was the same, but it was just bigger numbers . . . lot more personnel issues there . . .”

Aiken: Right. Same types, different twist, because in Auburn it was a major construction office and a *lot* more procurement, you know, a lot more property responsibilities than you'd have in a planning office. The budget work was the same, but it was just bigger numbers, you know. Personnel, a lot more personnel issues there, because it was a lot larger staff.

Administrative Officer Staff in Durango about Thirty While it Was Around 150 at Auburn Dam

I don't know what our staff was in Durango, I don't remember now, but I'm going to say it was probably around maybe thirty people, and I think

what we had at Auburn when I got there was around 150 people.

Transferring Staff in to Work at Auburn Dam Took a Lot of Time

At that point in time we were in an expanding mode, so we were transferring in a lot of people, moving a lot of people in, and that took a lot of time.

Became Involved in Public Relations Activities at Auburn Dam

The other thing that I really got involved in at Auburn that I had little or no responsibility for at Durango was the public relations stuff. That kind of fell on my shoulders in Auburn. So I was the media's front man, so to speak; I was the guy that they'd come and ask questions of, and I was the guy that went out and joined the Lions Club and got involved in the community and gave speeches and that sort of thing.

Opponents Used the Oroville Earthquake and Seismic Safety to Oppose Auburn Dam

So that PR aspect was a fairly good part of the job in Auburn, as you might imagine, especially when we got into the seismic safety controversy there, you know, there. There was a lot of public interest.

Storey: When did that happen? You were there four years.

Oroville Earthquake

Aiken: Yes, that was triggered by the earthquake that occurred out here up by Oroville in the summer of 1975.

Auburn Dam Initially Designed as a Concrete, Double Curvature, Thin-arch Dam

Then the environmental—well, I should say the people who opposed the dam, construction of the dam, latched onto that, and they were painting this picture of this huge monolithic concrete, double curvature, thin arch dam holding back this full load of water and then suddenly collapsing in an earthquake sending this hundred-foot wall of water rushing across Sacramento, which physically couldn't have happened, but that was the image that they were trying to portray.

Reclamation Had Difficulty Publicizing its Position Regarding Auburn Dam

So it was a real challenge trying to get the Bureau's word out, because the people who opposed the dam had connections that they could make, totally unfounded, unscientific statements that would get front-page headlines, and whatever we would put out in terms of our press releases, *if* they got printed at all, would be back buried in the—

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BEGINNING SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MAY 20, 1998.

Storey: This is tape two of an interview by Brit Storey

with Thomas Aiken on May the 20th, 1998.

[You were] saying that Reclamation's press releases often got very little media attention.

Editor of *Sacramento Bee* Opposed Auburn Dam

Aiken: Yeah. Back in those days, the *Sacramento Bee*, which was and is the predominant paper out here, had an editor that was opposed to the dam, so it was very difficult for us to get our word out as to what we were doing with the geological investigations, where we thought we could go with it.

Failure of Teton Dam

Then a year after the Oroville earthquake occurred, we had the Teton Dam failure in Idaho. That was kind of a one-two punch for the Auburn Project, and we were never really able to recover from that one-two punch, plus which because of the failure at Teton—well, in my opinion, a couple of things happened that all played a part in this.

Commissioner Ellis Armstrong Reorganized the Office of the Chief Engineer

One was going back to when Ellis Armstrong became Commissioner, he had so much heartburn with Barney Bellport that he just kind of dismantled the Office of the Chief Engineer, and Barney, of course, *left* the [federal] service, retired.

Teton Dam Failure and the Changed Role of the

Chief Engineer, along with the Oroville Earthquake, Marked the End for Auburn Dam

Our organization in Denver, that's where we, I think, transitioned from Chief Engineer to Engineering Research Center. *That* kind of shook the foundation of the organization. Then when we had the Teton Dam failure, I think that was the watermark for the Bureau of Reclamation, those two things: lessening the role of the Chief Engineer in terms of the whole Bureau, and then the failure at Teton. And that impacted Auburn, because then we started second-guessing ourselves on everything we were trying to do at Auburn. I think we hit the high watermark at that point in time, and then we just kind of flattened out and we are what we are today, which is a water resource organization.

“ . . . in terms of being a preeminent engineering go-build-'em type of an organization, that kind of turned around in the . . . middle to late seventies. . . ”

But in terms of being a preeminent engineering go-build-'em type of an organization, that kind of turned around in the middle seventies, middle to late seventies.

Construction Contracting Moved from Chief Engineer to the Regions

Storey: Yes, about '77. For instance, they took the contracting responsibility away from the Chief Engineer and gave it to the regional director. Did that have any effect on Auburn that you recall?

Aiken: The effect that I was aware of is that the construction community within the Bureau just really was opposed to that, and I don't think they made any efforts to make that a success. [If] anything, they went the other way to try to prove that that was not the way to go.

Some Construction Staff Got Too Close to the Contractors

But, you know, it was a decision that was reached, and the decision had some validity to it, I think, from the standpoint that some of the construction guys got too close to the contractors on many jobs, and maybe the Bureau wasn't getting the best bang for the buck.

Contract Administrators Were Removed from Day-to-day Working with Contractors

And by treating it this other way, where you have these contract administrators who are kind of removed from the day-to-day working with the contractors, I think it was a good move myself, but it certainly caused the construction community at the Bureau to really have some problems.

Storey: When you went there in '74, what stage was Auburn in at that time?

Arrived at Auburn after Completion of the Diversion Tunnel and Implementation of the Foundation Contract

Aiken: They had already completed the diversion tunnel

for the dam site, and in '74 they were actually under way with the foundation contract.

Environmental Statement for Auburn Dam Challenged

They had a situation where the environmentalists challenged the environmental impact statement (EIS). This was back in about '71 or '72. They challenged the adequacy of the environmental impact statement. So the Bureau spent a couple of years up there addressing the concerns that were expressed, and ultimately satisfied the Court with an amendment to the environmental impact statement. The foundation contract was let in late '73, as I recall, and they were pretty much just getting under way with that contract when I got out there.

Working on the foundation, “the huge pan scrapers . . . would get up on the side of the canyon wall and just aim those pan scrapers right down the canyon wall, and . . . drop the scraper part and use that as their brake”

I remember seeing the huge pan scrapers, if you can believe this, would get up on the side of the canyon wall and just aim those pan scrapers right down the canyon wall, and they would actually then drop the scraper part and use that as their brake. They'd scrape a load of dirt out and then swing off to the side. It was the most incredible thing I've ever seen.

Storey: That's a pretty steep canyon wall, as I recall.

Aiken: Yep. I don't think they ever paid those guys enough money to do what they were doing, but that was how it was done, the initial cutting of the keyway.

Storey: Who hired you out there at Auburn?

Don Alexander Was Project Construction Engineer

Aiken: Don Alexander. He was the project Construction Engineer at the time.

Storey: What was he like?

Aiken: He was a *very* fine gentleman, very pleasant-natured. I don't think anybody disliked Don Alexander.

Storey: Where were you officed when you came out here in '74?

Initial Office for Auburn Dam Was the Livingston Building in Auburn

Aiken: When I came here, we were in the old, I think they called it the—now I can't come up with the name of it, but it was an old building on Lincoln Avenue [Livingston Building off of High Street] that the guy that owned it actually built it with high school help during World War II. He got some high school kids, and he went up to all the old mine shafts and got these huge timbers, and he built that building with these timbers. If you ever saw the structure in there, I'm amazed the building is still standing, and if you got up into the ceiling

part, it was the most Rube Goldberg thing to control the leaks. He had buckets and drainways and everything else coming in between the roof and the ceiling to redirect the leaks from the roof back outside so it wouldn't drip down in the interior of the building.

After Two Months at Auburn Dam Moved to the New Construction Office on the Rim of the Canyon

It was an incredible building, but we were only there, or at least I was only there for a few months and we moved into the newly constructed Bureau offices there right above the canyon. I had a beautiful office. I was just two doors down from the project Construction Engineer. I had this beautiful view out my window of the canyon. It was great. I wouldn't mind moving my office up there right now except I can't figure out how to do that practically.

Would like to Move the Area Office to the Auburn Dam Construction Office

Storey: That *is* within your area office.

Aiken: That's within my area office and that building still exists. It's currently vacant. It would cost probably fifty, sixty thousand dollars to fix up to make it habitable, but it just sets now.

Storey: Really? I thought I was out there maybe two years ago and that the local Board of Education or something—

Aiken: Yes, two years ago we did, we had the Auburn Union School District Administration located in there, but they've since got their own buildings and have moved out, and the building would require a lot of work. I see no percentage in investing any of my budget into it and leasing the building out, because the revenue that we would get from leasing it would just go directly to the Treasury, so it's a net drain on my budget to do that. We've tried to talk to people who have come to us and said they'd be interested in leasing the building. We've tried to talk them into doing the fix-up work and we would just adjust it out of their lease arrangement, but nobody's bid on that yet.

Congressman John T. Doolittle Wants to Build Auburn Dam

Storey: Of course, Congressman Doolittle wants to build Auburn.

Aiken: Yes, he does.

Reclamation's Official Position on Building Auburn Dam Is Neutral

Storey: Tell me what Reclamation's official position is on this.

Aiken: Our official position is neutral.

Auburn Dam Is Still an Authorized Project

The project is an authorized project, still is.

Reclamation Is Obligated at the Auburn Damsite to Provide Pumps to Placer County Water Agency to Pump Water out of the Canyon During the Summer

It's considered to be in a state of construction, even though nothing has gone on there to speak of, outside of our obligation to provide Placer County Water Agency with pumps to pump their water out of the canyon each summer. The Bureau's position is neutral on an Auburn dam. It would have to be reauthorized. Congressman Doolittle is trying to get it authorized as a flood-control structure.

Congressman Doolittle Proposes Reclamation Holdings Be Turned over to the State of California Which Could Then Build the Auburn Dam

Where he is at right now, he recognizes that getting something built at Auburn through a Federal agency is fairly remote, so he's kind of taking the position now that the property up there ought to be turned over to the state of California and let the state of California address the flood-control needs. He's going to have hearings out here next week, and we've been kind of preparing Roger [Patterson] to present the testimony at the hearings. In fact, I just pulled some of what I'm anticipating his line of questioning will be to Roger off the computer here.

Storey: What are people saying to you? Is anybody trying to put on pressure?

Central California Area Office Works Closely with

Congressman Doolittle and His Staff

Aiken: I deal with Doolittle, Doolittle's staff and occasionally Doolittle. I deal with his staff daily. We must have had four phone conversations yesterday alone, and it involves the flood-protection things, it involves putting back in a permanent set of pumps for the Placer County Water Agency up at Auburn, it involves getting a bridge built down here at Folsom, just a multitude of issues that we're involved with very closely with his shop. They send over pieces of legislation that they want us to review and see if we're all right with it, that sort of thing. So in this office we work very closely with Congressman Doolittle.

Storey: While you were up there, did you have any visitors from, like, the Chief Engineer or the Commissioner?

Aiken: Yes to all of those. We even had Secretary of Interior [Cecil] Andrus come out and visit the spot, so, yeah, it drew a lot of attention.

Storey: Did you meet all these folks?

Aiken: Yes.

Storey: What were they talking about? How were they reacting?

Visitors to Auburn Dam and Secretary Cecil Andrus's Announcement That a Safe Dam Could Be Built

Aiken: Well, of course, all the folks on the Bureau side were trying to strategize on how we could get back on track and going. Secretary Andrus, this was just before he left office, and he came up there to make the announcement that, yes, a safe dam could be built at Auburn. That was kind of their parting shot when Andrus left, but certainly all of the Bureau folks that came there, it was all trying to get Auburn going, trying to keep it on track.

Storey: I've noticed a very high level of frustration among Reclamation retirees who were involved with Auburn, that they couldn't get the message across. You've mentioned that also, that they'd had this blue ribbon panel that had studied, you know. What were you seeing happen around all of this?

Opposition to Auburn Dam

Aiken: What's, I think, curious is on a number of occasions they've had referendums, public votes on Auburn, and it's always the general public has supported an Auburn dam. I mean, it's usually a 60-40-type split on an Auburn dam, but the environmentalists, they've got all the cards in their hands. Anything you can try, they can trump you on. And the environmentalists, I think, will really come out in opposition to this proposal to turn it over to the state because they've got a chokehold on the Feds and they know it. They have a hold of the state, but they don't the same chokehold that they have on the Feds.

One of the reasons Doolittle has such a hard time getting anything done is because they've got

a number of congressmen that are pretty much in their pockets back East, and it's not going to happen. Hell, they've got them out here, too. That kind of outlines Doolittle's strategy. I think he feels that the "enviros" don't have quite the chokehold over the state that they do the Feds.

Storey: Interesting. Who was the Chief Engineer who visited?

Harold Arthur and Don Duck at Auburn Dam

Aiken: I remember seeing Harold Arthur out there. I remember seeing Donald Duck out there.

Storey: Yeah, he would have been the Deputy Chief Engineer.

Aiken: I don't remember Bellport being out there, but I'm sure he went out there before I got there, because it was *the* big project that the Bureau had coming down the pike. While I was out there, I remember visits from Harold Arthur and Donald Duck. In fact, Donald Duck was out there frequently.

Storey: What would they be doing when they would come out?

Aiken: Of course, during the foundation contract they were out there with those type of issues, you know: Where are we going? How's the progress? That sort of thing. Then when it started to get derailed, then they were out there trying to strategize, "Well, how do we get this geologic report done? How do we get the seismic study done?" There was controversy with that.

Woodward Clyde Kept Milking Reclamation on the Geological Studies at Auburn Dam

We had contracted with Woodward Clyde to help us with this thing, and they got going down the trail, and every time we'd get to a decision point, my personal opinion, I think they were milking us quite a bit, because every time we'd get to a decision point, then they would say, "Well, you know, what we see, it doesn't really go your favor, but we *think* for another \$200,000 we can get there." So we'd do that. We went through that iteration several times.

Lou Fry Wanted Another Board of Geologists to Look at Auburn Dam

Then Lou Fry, who was the Project Geologist, got concerned and he thought that some of our so-called experts were going to give us a detrimental opinion, so then he went out and got another board of geological experts to come in and look at it. No, it got so convoluted, it was silly. It was really silly.

Storey: Tell me more about interacting with the community. Were you actually living up in Auburn?

Aiken: Still do.

Storey: Oh, you do?

Aiken: Yes.

Storey: No wonder you want your office moved.

(laughter) That Project Manager's office has a *wonderful* view down into the valley there.

Public Affairs Activities at Auburn

Aiken: When a government agency like the Bureau goes into a small community with such a *big* project, you know there's going to be overwhelming impacts for that small community, and I think it's very critical that you get right out into the essence of the community and communicate with the people. I kind of took on that role up there. I was the guy that went to all the functions that the city would have. I'd go to the Chamber of Commerce meetings. I joined the Lions Club. I gave speeches at the other service clubs, that sort of thing. To that degree, we were successful at getting the word across, at least to the local community, as to what we were doing and why and the importance of it all.

We did not have a real strong public relations office in the region—period—at that time. In fact, it's only been within recent years that we've really developed a strong public relations office down there. But back in those days, we were pretty much on our own up there to try to get the word across, and it was difficult. It was difficult.

Did have enough contacts to make it work. I became acquainted with a fellow by the name of Bernie Hartung, who was Senator Bible's chief of staff, I guess. Bernie had retired and come back to there, and we became friends through the Lions Club. Bernie had a lot of good contacts and he

was very supportive of the project.

Arranged an Editorial Board with the *Sacramento Bee*, but the Regional Director Insisted on Handling That Contact and it Didn't Go Well

One of the contacts he had was with the editor of the *Sacramento Bee*, and he got us set up to do an editorial board with the *Sacramento Bee* and get our side of the story out, but the Regional Director felt that that should be his job to do, you know, go down and make contact with the editor of the *Bee*.

So, he and Jerry King, that was Billy Martin and Jerry King, went down and talked to the editor, and they probably weren't as forceful as I would have been in terms of trying to get our message across. The feedback that I got from Bernie after that was that we probably lost more ground than we gained in that interview.

Storey: Did you ever do sort of a career plan?

Planned to Return to Denver as Business Manager in the Denver Office

Aiken: I had in my mind when I started out that I would somehow eventually end up back in Denver *in* the job that Hank Halliday had back in those days, and that was the Business Manager. Through different organizations it took on a different title, but it was still the Business Manager back there. But then over the years they kind of reorganized out where that job kind of faded off into the wild blue yonder, and I was the Assistant [Regional Director] for Administration down here in the

regional office by that time. It was a similar job, lower grade, but similar job. I went, "Okay, this is okay."

Asked to Take over the Central California Area Office by Regional Director Roger Patterson

Then when Roger [Patterson] asked me to come out here, I had reservations about coming out here, because, you know, my whole experience had been on the administrative side of the house. But I came out here and I've really enjoyed this job. I've had a good time out here.

Storey: In '78 you decided to apply for the Chief of the Budget Office down in the region. Why did you want to make the change? Had you decided Auburn wasn't going to make it, or what?

Decided to Take Job as Chief of the Budget Office in the Region in Sacramento

Aiken: Yeah. I saw the handwriting on the wall.

Paul Olbert, Assistant Regional Director for Administration

That job was open, plus which Paul Olbert, who was then the Assistant [Regional Director] for Administration, he had known me from back in our Denver days, and he suggested that I apply for that program's job down there, so I did. You know, when the guy that's the selecting official makes that kind of a suggestion, you probably ought to do it. So that's what I did, and then I was selected for the job.

Storey: This was program budgeting.

Aiken: Program and Coordination Office, yes.

Storey: So that was different from the kind of budgeting you had done before in the Denver office?

How Budgeting in the Region Differed from Budgeting in the Denver Office

Aiken: Yeah, because this was where the rubber meets the road-type budgeting. In other words, the numbers that we put down were the ones that actually go right into the budget documents that go right before Congress.

Storey: How long did you do that?

Aiken: I was there from '78 to '84.

Storey: Who was the Regional Director at that time?

Mike Catino Becomes Regional Director

Aiken: Initially it was Bill Martin, and Bill transferred out in, I think, about '81 or '82, and Mike Catino took over. Mike was acting for, I want to say, close to a year, I think, as Regional Director. *Finally* they gave it to him, but then he was only in the job, I think, maybe a year after that where he actually held the title of Regional Director.

David Houston Becomes Regional Director

Mike retired, and Dave Houston was brought in as Regional Director. That would have been in

about '83, I guess. He left when the [Ronald] Reagan Administration cleared out, whenever that was.

Larry Hancock Becomes Regional Director

Then we had Larry Hancock, and Larry was there till Roger Patterson came in. I think Patterson came in about '91.

Storey: Tell me about these guys. Bill Martin.

Bill Martin as Regional Director

Aiken: Bill Martin, super gentleman. Really, really enjoyed working with him. He was very pragmatic, kind of quiet in his approach to everything, but really great to work for.

Mike Catino as Regional Director

Mike Catino, he was great, too. I had known Mike. Mike was one of the more personable personalities in the whole Bureau, and when I first started to work for the Bureau back in Denver in '67, I can remember to this day Mike Catino walking in the door and just walking over to me and introducing himself. He'd sit there and he says, "Who are you? How are you? Are you married? You have kids?" Yada dada dada. And from that day forward, anytime I'd see him, he'd remember my kids' names. He'd ask how they were doing. It was just remarkable. Of course, when I came out here, he was the Assistant Regional Director for O&M in those days. He had just moved out of the Program Coordination

Office for that position. Again, same story with Mike. He knows your whole family history and would ask you about it, so he was that type of a personality. Had a heck of a memory.

David Houston as Regional Director

Dave Houston. Houston was new to the Bureau. He had some short period of time back in Washington at the Department level. Secretary [James] Watt brought him out here and put him in as the Regional Director. Dave is one of the most remarkable people I've ever seen, in terms of intelligence. You could go in and start briefing him on something that was totally unknown to him before your briefing, and by the time you were through, he knew what you were saying, plus he had his own thoughts into the thing. He's *remarkable* that way, a very intelligent man. Big ego, but intelligent, nonetheless.

Larry Hancock as Regional Director

Larry was kind of middle of the road in terms of a Regional Director and effectiveness as a Regional Director.

Roger Patterson as Regional Director

Roger is very much along the side of Houston in terms of his intellect. He's also very politically astute. I guess that's about the way I'd have to describe him.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MAY 20, 1998.

BEGINNING SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MAY 20, 1998.

Applies for Job of Assistant Regional Director for Administration

Storey: ... [Tell me about how you became Assistant Regional] Director.

Aiken: That was a situation where Paul Olbert retired and the position became vacant. I just threw my hat in the ring and was interviewed by Dave Houston and was selected. It was pretty much as simple as that.

Storey: That was back in the days—were there three Assistants at that time?

Aiken: Right. There was one for Design and Construction, one for Operation and Maintenance, and one for Administration.

Storey: And you were—

Aiken: Administration.

Storey: The Administration. So this is what you'd been doing all along. You became a Budget Officer, an AO, back to budgeting, and then up to administration. What kinds of issues would you see at that level that you hadn't seen before?

What New Issues Did You See as Assistant Regional Director?

The Most Notable New Issues Were Personnel Ones

Aiken: Well, the most notable ones were the personnel

issues. In any organization you have a lot of really tough personnel issues to deal with from time to time, and in that position I was aware of all of them. That was different than anything I had experienced before. The rest of it was pretty much the same, only you're dealing with bigger numbers. The *functionality* of it, the *function* of the work is pretty much the same. The personnel issues, tough personnel issues.

Storey: What kinds of issues, without us naming any names?

Refused to Settle a Bogus EEO Issue

Aiken: There were a number of EEO-type issues, some valid, some bogus, and trying to work your way through that. Had one particular situation that I *vividly* remember, and that was a person that worked in one of our field offices that had a really bogus EEO complaint. It was fairly well recognized that it was a bogus complaint, but I had pressure from our *own* Solicitor's office and I had pressure from the Department of Justice just to pay this person off and get him out of our hair; just settle.

I was not willing to do that, because it was such a frivolous and bogus claim, and it got down to the point where the Justice Department called me up and said, "We do *not* want to do this. It will be less expensive for you to just pay this person off and get it off the books, because this is going to be a long, protracted trial." I said, "No, we got to stand on our principles sometime."

They went in to trial, it didn't even last a day. The judge saw it and threw it *right out*. So I felt very vindicated in standing my ground, and I didn't get any calls back from either our Solicitor's [office] or the Department of Justice, at least on that issue. So that was one of them.

Storey: Who was your Regional Director at that time?

Aiken: Oh, gosh.

Storey: Doesn't matter if you don't happen to remember.

Aiken: It probably was in the Houston era, I would guess.

Storey: What about issues like sexual discrimination? Excuse me, I misstated that. I can't think of the term now, but complaints of a sexual nature.

Aiken: Sexual harassment?

Storey: Right, right.

Aiken: There seemed to be a few of those. One of the more problematic ones was a guy who was actually a contractor. This wasn't actually sexual harassment, but it's along those lines; it's what comes to my mind. I can't remember exactly. No, he wasn't a contractor, he was actually an employee, a temporary employee. That was when we were doing the remodeling down there to get set up for office furniture. This guy was working nights. Our photo lab down there, the guy that headed it up kept seeing things in the morning that were not right, you know, in his setup. So he set up his own camera down there, and they

caught this guy coming in, and instead of working, he was going back there running porno tapes at night with the Bureau equipment. So we immediately showed that guy the door.

Another interesting one that came up was when we first had the daycare center established out there. We had this draftsman that worked in the cartographic shop that was super, a super worker. We got the daycare center set up and it was actually just outside the room that the draftsmen were in, and found out that this guy was a registered sex offender for molesting kids. So, he disappeared. Those were two of the more interesting ones.

We did have the traditional sexual harassment charges where one sex was complaining about members of the other sex harassing them on the job. *Those* and the EEO based on race were fairly common charges that were levied, but the other two were the ones that stood out in my mind along those lines. Those are the type of issues that I was somewhat aware that stuff like that occurred, but when I came into that job, I had no idea.

We had people sleeping with people in the office, you know, carrying on affairs and that sort of thing, which always is a mess. I think you have that in any office setting, but we had it there.

Storey: What kinds of things does Reclamation do to try and make sure its people are graded at appropriate levels and so on?

Aiken: Well, you have the classification process, and anybody who feels that their grade level is not commensurate with the type of work or the workload that they're doing, they can always request a desk audit. People from Human Resources will come out and perform a desk audit and do a classification on the job. So you have those sort of remedies or protections, I guess.

Storey: Did that happen a lot while you were Assistant Regional Director?

Aiken: It happened, but it wasn't a real common occurrence. We did have people who felt that they deserved a higher grade than what they were being paid, and so a desk audit would occur. Most of the time the audits would come back indicating that they were at the proper grade. I remember occasionally it would come back and it would actually say that they were too high a grade, and then on even rarer occasions it would come back and say, yeah, these people deserve a higher grade. But that was all done through that desk audit classification.

Storey: Any particular incidents that stand out, anything that came up?

Aiken: No, I guess not.

Storey: How about the way the region would relate to project offices? What kinds of things would come up there?

Aiken: In terms of personnel issues?

Storey: In terms of anything that you would be responsible for as the A-R-D for Administration.

Regional Office Handled Personnel Matters for the Project Offices

Aiken: The relationship we basically had with the project offices was that I would work through their Administrative Officer. If they had issues that needed to be or were going to surface at the Regional Director's level, then they would work with me on that. Inasmuch as the project offices really have had and have no personnel-type function, all that type of work was handled through our regional office, all the employee relations stuff, labor relations, classification and that sort of thing. Any of those type issues in the area offices was dealt with through the personnel office.

Storey: I presume you would have been responsible for purchasing and supplies and all that sort of thing.

Purchasing in Regional and Project Offices

Aiken: The purchasing and supplies, up to a threshold, are all done in the area offices or in the project offices. Then if it's beyond that threshold, and the threshold has changed over the years, but if it's beyond that threshold *or* if it is a construction-related contract, then it would go through the regional office.

Storey: Everything worked well?

Aiken: But purchasing, you know, small purchases and

that sort of stuff. Yeah, yeah, I think so. Even to this day, I think some of the arrangements that we have right now are fine. I don't know what our threshold is now, but whatever it is, it's working. We don't see the need to go down and get the threshold changed.

Received Meritorious Service Award

Storey: The Meritorious Service Award, I think you got first year you were there.

Aiken: Yes, I got that in 1984.

Storey: What did that mean to you?

Aiken: Oh, it meant a lot. It meant that somebody appreciated the hard work and efforts that I've made for the Bureau.

Storey: Why did you get it?

Aiken: It was basically related to the work that I had done with the Bureau up until I got the assistant job. In other words, the budget work, the work that I did at Auburn, so on and so forth. I've actually got the write-up that was used to get me that award. It went clear back to the beginning of my career when I was in Denver. I guess my long suit has always been kind of a strategic big-picture thinker, and I did some things back in Denver when we were charged with the responsibility of consolidating the Bureau-wide budget that got noticed. When I was up in Auburn when we were going through the seismic review, the guys that were trying to get the age-

date in some of these faults were having real trouble age-dating the gouge material because it would crumble apart. They'd have to take thin slices of it to analyze, but it kept crumbling apart. I remembered back when I was in Denver all of the work that the lab was doing on concrete polymer, and I just suggested, "Hey, why don't we try that." In other words, penetrate this gouge material with this polymer and then see if you can take the thin slices. And they were able to do that. So that was one of the things, I think, that was cited.

Another one was when I was the Budget Officer down there, I consolidated all of the work on the budget into my shop, and at the same token reduced the staff down from—it was something like seventeen, eighteen people involved in budgeting, and I got it reduced down to six people. We were handling *all* of the region's budget with six people. It has since ballooned back up. I think they gave me credit for improving the efficiency down there for that.

Storey: A Meritorious Service Award, what do they give you besides maybe a piece of paper or a plaque?

Aiken: They gave me that piece of paper, a letter from the Secretary of the Interior, and a silver-dollar-sized medallion. And I still have all three.

Storey: That's great. Tell me how the change came about from the region out to the area office.

Establishment of the Area Office at Folsom

Aiken: It was not without its problems. I think probably the biggest problem was the threat that the people who worked in the regional office felt that they were somehow losing authority and power to these area offices. Initially there was a lot of confusion as to who was responsible for what. It's taken a couple of years to kind of work out the kinks, but I think they're worked out now. I think we're doing fine under this concept. Certainly the notion was to get the Bureau out close to the customers, get people who could make important decisions out next to the customers and negotiate with those customers. Certainly in this region it was highly centralized up until that point, and virtually everybody, no matter what the magnitude of their problem was—by that I mean the outside customers—no matter what the magnitude of their problem was, they felt they had to put it on the Regional Director's plate to resolve it.

So there was a lot missing out of that process. But now with the area offices, these people have got someplace that they can go locally and have their problems heard, and if it *does* need to be elevated to the Regional Director, then they've got a conduit. They can get it up there, you know, on the Regional Director's plate. So from that standpoint, I think it's great. It's a help, I think, to these water users particularly, but other people, too.

Doesn't Know Why Roger Patterson Suggested He Move to the Area Office as Area Manager

Storey: I guess I meant to ask you, I didn't ask it well

enough, how it came about that you and Roger [Patterson] talked and you were asked whether you were interested and so on. What happened there?

Aiken: I really don't know, other than Roger apparently had other ideas as to how he wanted the administrative office or function down there organized and handled, because, of course, like I said, when I came out here, shortly after I came out here, the Assistant for Administration position was abolished and they set up this different arrangement and eliminated all the administrative divisions down there. What gave Roger the notion to specifically ask me or why he felt that I could do the job, I don't know. You'll have to ask him.

Storey: This office existed before?

How the Area Office Expanded the Project Office Previously Housed at Folsom Dam

Aiken: Well, the Folsom office existed before. What was here before was a project job that, of course, was just involved with strictly Folsom Dam, Nimbus Dam, just this close locale. Then with the area office concept, and, of course, we expanded over to Lake Berryessa and down to New Melones and folded all of that into this office. This position in those days was called Project Superintendent instead of [Area] Project Manager, because it was just one leg of the CVP [Central Valley Project].

Storey: Why not just an office for the CVP?

A Single Area Office for the Central Valley Project Was Rejected Because it Would Have to Act like a Regional Office

Aiken: That was considered, but it would have just been taken on—because the CVP is so large—it would have just been another region. I mean, it would have functioned as a region. So it made more sense to set up these area offices, again, for the same reason, because then you have the decision-maker right out there with the public, with the water users that are most directly affected. If you organize CVP under a single leadership role, you'd be functioning as two regions out of here. I mean, that's how big CVP and how dominant CVP is over this region.

Storey: Tell me about this area office. You handle New Melones to Berryessa and out to Folsom and Nimbus, but what does that mean in terms of water contractors and issues with water users and flood control issues, and so on?

Central California Area Office Deals Principally with M&I Water Users

Aiken: The principal water users that we deal with are M&I users as opposed to ag users. In terms of the CVP, we have the largest contingent of M&I users of any of them, so our contracts and our dealings are a little bit different than what the rest of the folks out here in the CVP, because we're dealing with the domestic water supply issues.

Flood Control Is Very Important in the Central California Area Office

We also have very high on our screen right now the flood control situation on the American River, flood control protection for the Sacramento area, which, as we speak, is a very controversial debate for this area as to what is the proper fix or proper resolution for flood control.

Congressman John Doolittle Is Pushing the Auburn Dam Issues

Congressman Doolittle is pushing the Auburn Dam. The Auburn Dam does provide the most flood protection.

Congressman Robert T. Matsui Is Suggesting an Alternative Approach to Flood Control for Sacramento

On the other hand, Congressman Matsui has introduced a bill that provides a lesser degree of flood protection, but enough that the people from the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency feel is adequate, and that scheme implies enlarging the levees, the downstream levees, and doing some physical modifications to Folsom Dam to increase our ability to get more water out sooner. So we are sitting here right in the middle of that debate and also recognizing that we have a public-trust responsibility to provide the best flood protection we can, and we have a responsibility to protect the structure from damage during a high flood event.

Storey: The structure being Folsom?

Matsui's Approach to Flood Control Is to Modify

Folsom Dam and Downstream Levees

Aiken: Folsom Dam, um-hmm. The controversy between the two congressmen is such that the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, SAFCA, has indicated that they support the proposal that is being championed by Matsui, in other words, the modifications to Folsom and the downstream levees.

Reclamation Is Concerned About Coordination of Operations with Construction at Folsom Dam If the Corps of Engineers Is in Charge of Design and Construction

However, that particular bill is going through the Corps of Engineers WRDA '98 Bill [Water Resources Development Act] which would keep it out of Doolittle's jurisdiction. We here in Reclamation have some heartburn with that in that if it pans out that the Corps of Engineers has design and construction responsibilities for the work on Folsom, we can foresee some real problems trying to coordinate operations, because our concern is our contracts and our obligations. The Corps' concern would be just to get something done for flood control. So, it has a high potential for real problems.

Even If the Decision Is to Do Modifications at Folsom Dam, Reclamation Hopes to Have the Work Turned over to It

So, we are hopeful that before the dust settles on this, that if the decision is made to do modifications to Folsom that that work be turned

over to the Bureau to do, and we've been forwarding that point at every opportunity. At any rate, that's one of the big issues that we deal with in this area office.

Lake Berryessa Is a Big Issue for this Office, as Is New Melones Dam

Another big issue that consumes a lot of our time is the recreation issues, principally at Lake Berryessa, and to a lesser degree down at New Melones, but we do have that responsibility on both those reservoirs. The problem that we have over at Lake Berryessa is, over the years, when the Bureau built the dam back in the middle fifties, they turned over the management of the lands to Napa County to manage the recreation on the lands.

For Years Reclamation Has Been Wrestling with Exclusive Use at Lake Berryessa and How to Open the Lake More to Public Use

What happened is, Napa County pretty much let it get out of control, and they allowed concessionaires to come in on government land and really set up exclusive-use facilities. What we're faced with over there now are seven concessionaires, seven resorts, and six of those resorts have long-term leases, leased out little plots of land that people have moved in and put all manner of trailers and such on. We have wrestled with that issue for—well, it's been an issue on the region's plate since I came to the region twenty-some years ago, and we are trying to deal with that now, trying to open it up more to

public use and less to exclusive use, but it's got this long history and a lot of problems getting from point A to point B.

Streamflows in Lower Putah Creek below Lake Berryessa Are a Problem

The other issues that we have to deal with, one of the particular ones right now is streamflows in lower Putah Creek. We hold the water rights on Putah Creek and serve the Solano County Water Agency. We have a contract with Solano County Water Agency. Well, during the recent droughts, the lower Putah Creek dried up, and so a number of environmental organizations and local people sued. Actually they sued the Solano County Water Agency to get more water into the stream to protect the fisheries, and they won that battle in court. Unfortunately, they did not address the issue that the Bureau of Reclamation has the water rights, and we were not party to the lawsuit. Whereas the court order has directed that these certain flows be allowed down Putah Creek, it is not binding on the Bureau of Reclamation, that actually holds the water rights. So, the Solano County Water Agency and their family of subcontractors are trying to get the ruling appealed and eventually get the Federal Government brought into this situation to resolve it since we have the water-right issues.

We tried to reach a resolution between the two parties over the past two years. We got them to the table and through interest-based bargaining tried to resolve the issue, but after about fourteen months it became apparent that the Solano people

weren't really interested in resolving the issue; they were more interested in getting it back into court. So that's kind of where we stand today. It's compounded in that our contract with the Solano County Water Agency expires here in about a year, and we need to renew the contract, but in so doing, we've got to address a number of environmental issues, none the least of which is flows in the stream. So we're caught into a time crunch on resolving that.

New Melones Recreation Management Issues

New Melones, in terms of the recreation down there, the Bureau handles all of the recreation down there, which has worked. What the difficulty that we have down there is that we—

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MAY 20, 1998.

BEGINNING SIDE 1, TAPE 3. MAY 20, 1998.

Storey: This is tape three of an interview by Brit Storey with Tom Aiken on May the 20th, 1998.

. . . issue citations down at New Melones because of no law enforcement.

Aiken: No law enforcement authority, and that complicates our job down there of adequately managing the resources. If you can imagine a GS-4 temporary Park Ranger going up to a party of fishermen who have been drinking beer all day and are partying on hearty into the night having this ranger walking up to them with nothing more than a two-way radio strapped to his hip, and asking them to please knock it off and go to bed.

Very difficult situation. So those are the types of issues that we deal with here that I think are unique to this area office, the recreation issues, the fact that most of our contractors are M&I water contractors, and the particular problems that they have, as opposed to ag contractors.

The Powerplants at Folsom and Nimbus Need Major Work

Storey: What about power issues, do you have anything there?

Aiken: We produce power here at Folsom and downstream at Nimbus and then at New Melones. We don't really have power issues per se, except for the fact that the powerplant here at Folsom and the powerplant at Nimbus are forty years old, forty-plus years old, and they're just, quite frankly, wearing out. They're wearing out faster than the budget is allowing us to keep up with them. This is true, I think, throughout the CVP. We have, through Lowell Ploss down at the Central Valley Operations Office, worked out some funding, up-front funding deals with the power customers which look very promising for the future, but right now those dollars are going to Shasta because that's where the customers get the biggest bang for their buck. Power customers recognize some of our problems down here, and hopefully someday will be able to advance us some funds to help us with our O&M on these projects. But we've got a lot of work to do, and we find we're in a situation where we're just more or less putting out maintenance fires on these things, not *literally* fires, but kind of a

breakdown-type maintenance mode rather than a preventative maintenance mode.

Storey: Is it likely that these would be updated when you do major work?

Aiken: Yes, all three of the units here at Folsom are past due on a rewind, and we've got [overhauls] ~~rewinds~~ starting, I think, in the year 2000, one each year for the following three years, assuming that we get funded for them. When they go through the rewind, then they'll be brought up to state of the art, and I'm sure that will increase their power-production capabilities.

Folsom Dam, Flood Control, and Sacramento

Storey: In flood control, for instance, I think I'm hearing that Folsom's important in terms of dealing with Sacramento.

Aiken: Folsom is really the only line of defense that Sacramento has in terms of the types of flows that you get on the American River. To illustrate that, the capacity of the downstream levees is rated at 115,000 cubic-feet-per-second flow, and the '97 flood, we had inflows to Folsom of 252,000 cfs. So without a Folsom reservoir, the '97 flood would have inundated the flood zone down in the Sacramento area. No question.

Managing Flood Control Responsibilities at Folsom Dam

Storey: Nowadays, who decides how Folsom is operated? Is that an area office responsibility? Is that a

regional office responsibility?

Aiken: At Folsom, the flood-control criteria that we were operating to up until '95 was criteria set by the Corps of Engineers. As a result of the 1986 flood, it was determined that that criteria was inadequate to provide a level of protection that the Sacramento area thought they had, and certainly the level of protection that they need just for FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] purposes. So we negotiated a reoperation agreement with the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, SAFCA, back in 1995, whereas historically, according to the old flood curve that we operated to, is that we would keep the reservoir at what is referred to as a fixed 400. In other words, we would draw the reservoir down during the flood season to leave a space of 400,000 acre-feet.

The reoperation that we negotiated back in 1995 put a variable in there, and that is that depending on upstream conditions, the amount of space in upstream reservoirs, the amount of snowpack, the amount of water in the snowpack, and the prediction of incoming storms, we would operate anywhere from the fixed 400 up to leaving a hole, so to speak, in the reservoir of 670,000 acre-feet or space in the reservoir. That was felt in 1995 to give the Sacramento area a hundred-year protection, hundred-year flood protection, which gets them over the FEMA trigger on insurance.

The 1997 Flood and Corps of Engineers Calculations Regarding Folsom Dam

Then the '97 flood came along and the Corps of Engineers *recalculated* the hydrology, and it was determined that even with this reoperation, that was not now giving the Sacramento area the hundred-year flood protection. It only gave them something like sixty-seven-year protection, because the flood frequency curve, of course, increased with the '97 flood. So that's what's triggering this debate that's raging right now as to what will be the physical fix to get the necessary protection for the Sacramento area, and we're right in the middle of it.

Storey: The reoperating plan in '95 and subsequent plans, how does that affect our ability to deliver water to our contractors, or what kinds of *issues* does it raise, maybe is the question?

Aiken: Yes, what was interesting about that, when we negotiated this plan in '95, we dreamt up what we thought was the worst possible scenario that would cause us the great[est] amount of problems, and what that was was a very wet early season and then a dry second half of the winter season, but it was determined that that would probably happen *once* in seventy years. What we negotiated out with the SAFCA folks is that in those types of years, they would make up whatever water was lost because of the operation, the flood operation, over what would have normally happened if we'd have stayed at the fixed 400. Well, lo and behold, actually less than two years after we signed that document, we had one of those one-in-seventy years, and that was last year, '97. We had the tremendous flood, and

it was actually over the New Year's, December-January of '97. In fact, December and January were the two wettest months recorded out here. Then the rest of the year it was just dry. We had, I think, the three or four driest months ever recorded, back to back, same flood season. The absolute *worst* scenario we could dream about when we were trying to lay out this reoperation, happened the second year we were into it.

The upshot of that is we felt we were about a hundred-thousand acre-feet short of where we would have been under the old operation. So we went and negotiated some water purchases with Placer County Water Agency, Yuba County Water Agency, and Glenn-Colusa Water Agency to make up that difference. When we negotiated the deal with SAFCA, they were willing to accept full responsibility for that. Well, unbeknownst to those of us in the Bureau that were trying to negotiate this deal, that pill was fairly easy for them to swallow. We should have known something was up with that, because right after we cut our deal, they were working a side deal with members of Congress, and the deal that they cut with them got put into our appropriations bill that the Federal government would be responsible for 75 percent and SAFCA would be responsible for only 25 percent.

So when this occurred last year, the SAFCA people front-ended the full amount so we could go out and purchase that until we could get something worked through a supplemental appropriation to reimburse them. That's how we are currently, is a 75-25 split, and that came out

in, I guess, our '96 appropriation bill. The language in the bill has that breakdown carrying through for five years. The SAFCA people want to, in our renegotiations, use that as a starting point, but I'm of the opinion that just because of the language in the appropriations bill, Congress did not extend us that authority and that at the end of this five years, we go back to where *they* pay a hundred percent. So I'm sure that they will do what they did in the past, and that's go to Congress and get it probably in perpetuity, but we aren't there yet. And with their actions [and] on kind of snubbing their nose at Congressman Doolittle, I think they've angered him to the point where he will not go along with that 75-25 split. I don't know how the rest of Congress might sort out, but they will not have his vote this time.

Storey: And one would think that his committee might be important to them.

Aiken: One would think.

Storey: The other day, one of the guys in my office pulled up the regional web page and saw this projection for what would happen if Folsom broke. It's a nice model. It shows all kinds of red all over Sacramento. Is that something that you would have commissioned out of this office, or is that somebody else?

Aiken: I had no idea that was there, and I *for sure* would not have done that. I think that's ludicrous to do that sort of thing. I mean, that is absurd.

Storey: Yes, I think it might have been safety-of-dams or

something, issues.

Aiken: I mean, it's important to have that kind of information, but I don't think it's something that you necessarily want to put out on a web page.

Failure of Gate 3 at Folsom Dam on July 17, 1995

Storey: Well, I didn't mean to get anybody in trouble. We'll move on. I do not believe the gate failure had happened the last time that we talked. Would you tell me about that and how it was handled and then what the subsequent follow-on was?

Aiken: Sure. That was kind of an interesting day, July 17th, 1995. It was a Monday. It was in the morning. I was here in this very office actually loading up my briefcase because we were supposed to have a couple of days of meetings down in the regional office. My Chief Operations, Dennis McComb, stuck his head in the door over there and simply stated that, "Gate 3 has failed." I said, "Failed? What do you mean, failed?" He said, "It's failed." "It's leaking? Did we blow out the seals?" He says, "I don't know. Just reported that it's failed."

So I get up and I walk out into our parking lot over here, and there's one area there where you get a sight of the dam, and I looked over there and I just couldn't believe what I was seeing. Here was this water, just a big, huge spray. They can't see, but you can see in that picture over there what I saw. We immediately closed the dam road off and got to the top of the dam.

Notified State Parks of Danger to Boaters

My first reaction was to call up the state parks because they have the responsibility for the recreation on the lake, because we had no log booms up, and here was this gaping hole in the middle of the dam. Anybody on a boat floating anywhere within that influence of that pull would have been sucked out, and as we found out a day or two later, that's exactly what happened to one of the state park boats ~~that were~~ out there *guarding* against that very thing. Their boat got sucked through.

At any rate, I called them up to have them get out immediately and get all the boaters off of the lake. Fortunately, like I said, it was a Monday morning, so there weren't a whole lot of people out on the lake. There weren't a whole lot of people downstream recreating on the banks of the American downstream, so we were very lucky in that regard. Then we went through all of the other notifications that we had to make.

Dealing with the Press During the Gate 3 Failure

Within, oh, I guess, within an hour, Jeff McCracken, our [region's] Public Relations Officer, set up a press conference out here, and we immediately went out to the media and told them everything we knew as we were getting it. I think that was the most positive thing we could have done, being so open with what was going on, and doing it as quickly as we did. Then in subsequent days, as the press came out here, we were totally accommodating to them. We didn't

try to stonewall them. We answered the tough questions. We were up front all the way on it. As a result, we came across very positively in the way it was reported, whether it was in the newspaper or on television.

You know, that had a very high potential of being a very negative thing, you know, and the way the press is, they're always looking for something that they can nail any government agency with. But we took the high road on that thing and stayed on the high road on that thing. From a media standpoint, I think it was an absolute success.

Offers of Help from Other Bureaus and Agencies Arrived Soon after the Gate 3 Failure

The other thing that I did is we started getting in offers of help from all agencies, agencies all around us here. The Corps of Engineers were out here offering help. McClellan was out here offering help, McClellan Air Force Base. Cal Trans, Department of Water Resources, State Department of Water Resources, they were all saying, "Hey, is there anything we can do?" And the next day we did, we pulled in principals from all these agencies and just kind of laid out, "Here's the problem. This is the scenario. This is what we are faced with. What can you do?" Virtually all those agencies, kind of one by one, held up their hand, said, "We can help with this and we can help with that." And we just kind of pulled this interagency group together and people worked long hours. There was two or three days there where we had people out here doing some

design work to get in stoplogs that stayed out here twenty-four hours a day.

I was out here twenty hours one day. It was just one of those really neat situations, kind of makes the goose bumps go up your back, the way that all these people came together, different entities, cast aside their turf situations, particularly the Corps of Engineers, in dealing with us on this issue. Just everybody came out here, said, "What can we do to help?" And they all came together and we laid out a plan, built a series of stoplog gags, got the stoplogs in and regained control of the reservoir, got under way with examining the rest of the gates, developed our forensics report, developed designs and specs to get going on fixing *all* of the gates.

All Gates at Folsom Were an Inadequate Design

All the gates had the same problem the gate that failed had, and that is that it was an inadequate design from the beginning. We had increased friction in the trunions because of corrosion. Those two factors were the leading cause of the failure, and we were faced with that with all the other gates. So we got going with the contract to fix all the other gates *and* got going with a contract to rebuild gate number 3 and put it in place.

I just can't congratulate all the people that were involved in this thing enough, because it was done with such speed and efficiency that I don't think people would ever dream that a Federal agency could do it that quickly, that big a job that

quickly and successfully. So I got some modicum of pride in it.

Storey: How long did it take for us to regain control of the lake?

When the Gate Failed the Reservoir Was Full, and When Brought under Control the Remaining Water Was What Would Have Been in the Lake in a Normal Water Year

Aiken: We had the stoplogs in place and regained control of the lake by the middle of August. So, without looking at the records, it was probably within three or four weeks. In terms of water, that was one of those really good water years and we had a full reservoir. On July 17th, the reservoir was virtually full, and rarely do we have a full reservoir at that date. Under average conditions, we're drawn down. Actually, by the time we regained control of the reservoir, we were about at the elevation that we would have normally been in if it had just been an average water year and we were operating under normal conditions.

Operations Were Adjusted Because of the Failure of Gate 3, but Folsom Refilled the Following Year

The fact that we refilled the following year—well, we did two things in terms of water. We cut back the releases that were being made at Shasta to a degree, and the state cut back their releases at Oroville to a degree, so there was some savings there of water, because we were making up the difference in the Delta. So we were able to save some water that year, but, more importantly, the

following winter we refilled the reservoir. So there was no real loss of water, so to speak.

Reclamation Lost the Power Revenues That Could Have Been Generated by the Water Lost When Gate 3 Failed

What we did lose was the ability to produce power with that volume of water that we lost here. We figured that the dollar amount was probably in the neighborhood of two million dollars of power loss from that on what we could have otherwise generated power with that water.

Repairs to All the Gates Cost Just over \$20,000,000

Storey: How much did the repairs cost us, do you have an idea?

Aiken: Just over twenty million dollars, but that includes the repairs to all of the gates, rebuilding the failed gate, and also we had a lot of damage down in the stilling basin. So we, last year, drained the stilling basin out and completely redecked the stilling basin. So all of that was inclusive in that twenty-million-dollar figure. So that was a lot of work, a lot of serious work, and the price tag was reasonable, I think.

Storey: What about that volume of water hitting downstream? What did it mean for Nimbus and for other kinds of things downstream?

The Operator Opening Gate 3 Went down to Nimbus Dam and Adjusted the Gates There to

Handle the Increased Water Flow

Aiken: Nothing really. At its peak, when it first failed, we calculated that there was maybe in the neighborhood of 40,000 cfs going downstream. Our operator who was on the gate, actually opening the gate when it failed, Ed Taylor, he immediately jumped in his pickup and went down to Nimbus and made the adjustments on the gates down at Nimbus to handle that volume of water. Forty thousand cfs, we make those kind of releases most winters anyway, so it wasn't a real *threat* downstream.

The Primary Threat Downstream Was to Fishermen and the Homeless Camped along the Bank of the River

The *threat* that was downstream was any unsuspecting fisherman that might have been down there, *or*, more importantly, the concern was for the homeless people that tend to camp along the banks of the American [River] during the summer.

We Implemented Our Emergency Operating Plan When Gate 3 Failed

But we have our operating procedures and we went out with warnings to the people that were involved with alerting folks downstream, the sheriff's department, the different parks, entities, and whatnot, and fortunately, through that chain, people were all notified, and it was kind of a non-event in terms of the flows downstream.

Storey: Tell me about this plan that you implemented, who developed it, where was it developed, updating, all that kind of stuff.

Aiken: Which plan is that?

Storey: You said you went out and notified the people that needed to be notified.

Aiken: Oh, yeah, our Emergency Operating Plan.

Storey: Is that what it is?

Aiken: Yes. Matter of fact, Bureauwide and, of course, region-wide, we're in the throes of redoing that, and that for this office was just redone here within the last year. Steve Herbst and Dina Uding, I think is her name, down in the regional office, had the lead on that. We actually have gone through a tabletop exercise utilizing that. We had several meetings with all of these other entities that would be involved in that and walked through a tabletop exercise maybe three or four months ago. So I think we're in even better shape than we were when the gate failed.

Storey: Is this something that the area office asked them to do?

Aiken: This was kind of, if I understand it correctly, a Bureau-wide policy that came out that, hey, we'd better get all these emergency action plans up to snuff Bureau-wide, and I'm sure it was triggered by the failure, that failure and the Flatirons

failure² which occurred, I think, that following winter. So, between the two of them, that triggered this Bureau-wide effort to get all the emergency operating plans up to snuff. The region had that responsibility, and they started with us. That's still going on. I don't know who they're working on now, but they've provided us with ours.

Storey: This plan, what kind of form does it take?

Aiken: It's in a notebook form. The emergency occurs, you pick it up, flip through it that these are the people you need to notify, this is the sequence, so on and so forth.

Folsom Hosts Many Tours, Especially of School Children

Storey: Interesting. What other kinds of things go on here? You have a lot of tours.

Aiken: Yes.

Storey: You happen to be a metro area.

Aiken: We're right in the middle of a metropolitan area,

2. This refers to an incident at the Flatiron Powerplant at the Eastern Colorado Area Office of Reclamation near Loveland, Colorado, on the Colorado-Big Thompson Project. The Flatiron reversible pump (Unit 3) lifts water from Flatiron Reservoir, a maximum of 297 feet, and delivers it to Carter Lake. When the flow is reversed, the unit acts as a generator. In 1996 this unit lost synchronism which caused the generator winding to overheat. The subsequent release of combustible vapors exploded causing major equipment damage. There were no injuries or loss of life.

and we have a minimum of two tours of school kids a day virtually every day of the school year. You just see a constant flow of yellow school buses past here twice a day. That's important, I think, because it gives the kids and their teachers and the parents that come along an idea of what we're all about and why we do what we do. So I think the tour program is very important.

Working with State Parks and the San Juan Water District We Are Setting up a New Visitors Center and Water-efficient Landscaping

As we speak, we have partnered with our State Parks folks here that manage the recreation force here on the reservoir, and through resources available to both agencies, we're setting up a new Visitors Center that will have, of course, the typical interpretive displays both for the natural resources, the historical stuff, the Bureau of Reclamation stuff, the state parks stuff, but also we're going to extend this water-efficient landscaping [here at the area office].

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Storey: We've got a new arrangement.

Aiken: With the new Visitors Center that we're doing as a joint partnership, it's going to have all kinds of the typical interpretive things in there, natural resources, Bureau of Reclamation, the water district. San Juan Water District wants a piece of the room there. But in addition to that, the outside, we're going to have a demonstration area

of the water-efficient landscaping, and that's all part of the emphasis that we're putting on water conservation. We've done that around this office building, if you'll notice out here that we've put in water-efficient landscaping around the building here with native plants that don't require the volume of water that grass would take. We're looking forward to that. The state actually did the design and they're doing the construction on it. We're hopeful of having it done sometime by midsummer. We'll get it dedicated maybe this fall.

Public Affairs at the Central California Area Office

Storey: Do you have a PR person out here?

Aiken: Yes, we do. Louis Moore, he kind of heads up our PR side of things and also is the lead on our tours, the tour programs. This is really a new position that has come about since we've become an area office. Up to this point in time, we just had tour guides there, but particularly during the work that was being done on the gate repair, we had a lot of community relations that we had to be involved with because of the number of road closures that we had.

The Road over Folsom Dam Requires a Lot of Community Relations Activities Because of Recent Closures

The road over the dam is a major thoroughfare. It was never intended to be, but just because of its location and because [of] how population has exploded on both sides of the lake, it has become

a major thoroughfare. We have over a half million cars a month going across the darn thing. So every time we close it, we have some real heartburn from the communities and the commuters. That was part of it.

There Had Been Interest in Flood Control Operations by the Press

The media attention out here has really accelerated since the gate failure. Each winter there isn't a two- or three-week period go by that we don't have some television crew show up out here to talk about flood control operations. Right now we're in the eye of this flood control debate, so I've spent a considerable amount of my time, and Louis, our PR guy, has spent a considerable amount of his time trying to explain where we're at and how we got here in terms of flood control. It just made sense to have a PR guy here.

Storey: Any other major activities here in the area that we should talk about?

Working with Congressman John Doolittle to Take Traffic off Folsom Dam with a Downstream Bridge

Aiken: One of the things that we are pressing very hard for relates to the traffic over the top of the dam. As I mentioned, anytime we *do* have to work on top of the dam and *do* have to close the road down, it causes a great deal of consternation and inconvenience to the people who use that road. We are working with Congressman Doolittle's office to get authorization for a bridge that would

be placed across the river downstream from the dam and actually just hopefully remove all that public traffic across the dam.

Traffic over Folsom Dam Needs to Be Removed for Security Reasons

It would help us out immensely in terms of maintenance up there, but also, I think, more importantly is the security issue. It's very difficult to have any degree of security *on* a structure where you have a public road going right across the top of it. I mean, you can sit there and dream up all kinds of scenarios with the public road being right on top of your spillway gates. So I think it's very important not only to handle this increasing volume of traffic and making it flow better, but, from a security standpoint, I think it's a must, too, and the congressman agrees with us. They've indicated that they're going to put together legislation. We provided them with some language here a couple of weeks ago, and I guess they're probably going to massage it and maybe hook it onto a bill this year. I hope they do.

Storey: So, Folsom is actually in Doolittle's district?

Aiken: Right.

Storey: I didn't realize that.

Aiken: Yeah. In fact, most of my area office is within Doolittle's district, at least along the foothills, because even New Melones is within Doolittle's district.

Storey: So that's a priority right now.

Aiken: Yes.

Storey: I noticed a new bridge that's being constructed by the city. Is that going to help any?

Aiken: No, not really. What that bridge will do is tie the Placer and northern Sacramento County into the Highway 50 corridor. That's that volume of traffic. What we've got going across here is the Placer County and the El Dorado County volume of traffic. Both sides, both El Dorado County and Placer County, are just growing tremendously. In fact, the city of Folsom is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, according to statistics that just came out a week or so ago, and you can just extend that on east up into the El Dorado County there, because tremendous housing developments going in up there. Same over here on the Placer County side, and these are the people that are using the dam road are the people that are trying to get from one side to the other. So the new bridge that the city of Folsom is putting in is not going to relieve any of that traffic.

Storey: Now, who do you report to in the regional office?

Working with Staff in the Regional Office

Aiken: I report to Kirk Rodgers, who's the Deputy Regional Director in terms of administratively, but there are certain issues that I work directly with Roger on. One is the flood control stuff, the other is the Solano, Putah Creek stuff. He's got a

personal interest in both of those.

Storey: Who do you work with in the regional office, other than those two?

Aiken: Well, we work with Bob Stackhouse a lot and people in his office a lot, the water-rights people, the repayment people. We do a lot of business with them. We work a lot with Frank Michny, who's the Acting Environmental Officer. Of course, we work with the personnel, human resources on those issues, and the budget shop on those issues, Mike Finnegan and Roger Pollock. So we're involved with all of them. We've got design and construction issues, too, that we work with Ed Solbus. We actually have worked with Susan Hoffman on some issues. She's head of the Planning Division. She has a couple of sources of funds that are unique to the planning process that we've been able to take advantage of in the past couple of years.

CALFED and CVPIA

Storey: How does CALFED and C-V-P-I-A [Central Valley Project Improvement Act included in the 1992 Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustments Act, P.L. 102-575] affect you?

Anadromous Fish Restoration Program

Aiken: Well, it's yet to be seen how CALFED will affect us; we just know that it will. But C-V-P-I-A, we're affected by the anadromous fish, A-F-R-P, Anadromous Fish Restoration Program, in terms of the volumes and when those volumes of water

Bureau of Reclamation History Program

are released from the reservoir, principally for the fall-run Chinook and the Steelhead. So we're impacted by both those. We will be impacted also, I think, when a final determination is made on what we refer to as the B-2 water. That was 800,000 acre-feet of water that's going to be set aside for environmental purposes. Certainly some of that is going to come out of Folsom, so we'll be affected by that.

Contract Renewals

Of course, we're affected in terms of our contract renewals, just like the ag contracts, all these contracts that we had with our M&I people that came up for renewal during the period that the Environmental Impact Statement has been developed. We've had to go out and get interim contracts to get us past that point at which time that the final Environmental Impact Statement is made public and we have a record of decision. Then we'll go back and start negotiating again for the long-term contract with all of our entities.

Storey: So that's done out of this office rather than the regional office.

Aiken: Yes, what the strategy was on negotiating the contracts is, they got all of the contractors together and we negotiated out kind of a large over-umbrella-type programmatic negotiations. Then the *specific* issues to the *specific* water agencies were then negotiated out of the area offices. The big issues that are common to all of the contracts were negotiated down at the regional office, and then the specific portions of the

contracts that pertain to the individual districts then we negotiate with them on those.

Relations with Water Users

Storey: How are our relations with the water users nowadays? I guess yours would be different than the rest of the Central Valley, too.

Aiken: Yeah. Like I said, we deal with the M&I water users, and I think the relationships are very, very good, particularly with San Juan, who we have contracted with, who wholesales the water out to smaller agencies. I've got a real good working relationship with Jim English, who's their General Manager, and this is a major change from the relationship that we had with Jim up until I got out here. He was really prone to slam the Bureau at every opportunity, but he does not do that anymore, not to the degree that he did. We work very well together, I think.

We are right now in negotiations with East Bay Municipal Utility District down in Oakland for a major water contract, and it's a real dicey one to work our way through. In fact, we'll have another technical meeting with them Thursday of this week to go over some of the issues. We're quite a ways apart on where we think the contract ought to be, but we're very cordial and we're working toward resolving our differences. I think we've got a good working relationship with all of our districts. There's certainly no blatant animosity going on with any of them.

The Office Increased in Size When it Was Made

the Central California Area Office

Storey: Good. The reorganization that Dan Beard did, I guess part of the reason you're out here, what's happened to this office? Has it increased in size?

Aiken: Yeah, we increased in size from, I'm going to say, around sixty-five to seventy people on staff to a point now where, depending on the season, we have up to 130 or -35. Now, since we have all this recreation, our staff increases quite a bit during the summer because we put on park rangers and whatnot for the summer season. So our staff grows by these temporary people during the summer. Our year-round population, oh, is probably 110, something like that, with spikes going up to ~~100~~, 135.

Storey: I'm confused. I thought California did the recreation.

Aiken: California does the recreation right here at Folsom, at Folsom and Auburn. We have a longstanding contract with them to provide the recreation here, but [at] New Melones and Lake Berryessa, Reclamation handles it.

Storey: Oh, I see. How's it all working?

Lacking Police Authorities Reclamation Is Limited in its Ability to Manage the Resources

Aiken: It works fine, with the noted exception that I made, that without police authorities we're pretty limited in how we can manage the resource. I think at some point in time it's going to haunt us

that we do not have the proper authority to cite unruly campers and protect the rest of the resource *and* the people that are taking advantage of it.

Storey: But otherwise the reorganization's working pretty well, the devolution of power or responsibility from the regional office out?

Concerned about the Apparent Growth in the Regional Office

Aiken: Yeah, I think so. I think so. I am concerned right now that it seems like the regional office is starting to grow again, and that could have impacts on overhead. And our water and power customers might question us on that again someday.

The reorganization, in terms of the Denver office, we certainly have enough expertise back there to handle our O&M issues. If we ever got into a large job like this bridge, *or* if by some unforeseen miracle they tell us to build an Auburn dam, I don't know whether we have the expertise in Denver for that, but certainly for where we're at now in terms of O&M and the job that we're charged with doing, I think the help we have in Denver is great.

Storey: Anything else we should talk about?

Aiken: No, I can't think of anything.

Storey: In that case, I'd like to ask you whether or not you're willing for researchers to use these tapes

and the resulting transcripts.

Aiken: I don't have a problem with it, I'm not sure what I said all along, but I hope if something I said causes somebody heartburn I'd have a chance to explain to them why I said it.

Storey: Good. Thank you very much.

Aiken: All right.

Storey: I appreciate it.

Aiken: You bet.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 3. MAY 20, 1998.

BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MARCH 31, 2004.

Storey: This is Brit Allan Story, Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Thomas J. Aiken, Area Manager at the Folsom Office of the Bureau of Reclamation until January of 2004. I'm interviewing him at *his* home in Auburn, California on March 31, 2004, at about nine o'clock in the morning. This is tape one.

CVPIA

Well, Mr. Aiken, today I thought we might start out and talk about CVPIA [Central Valley Project Improvement Act] and how it might have affected operations at Folsom.

Aiken: Alright. Well, CVPIA was, of course, a very wide-ranging law, and, with the additional focus on the environment, it did change how *all* of the dams were operated, particularly Folsom.

Water Releases for Fisheries

We had *officially* ~~the~~, through the State Board, operated under a fish release pattern that was developed, oh gosh, I guess back in the sixties, 893, I think it was, Decision 893. And, *unofficially* we had been operating to what was referred to as D1400, which was the release pattern that was anticipated by having an Auburn Dam, but of course Auburn Dam still isn't there. But, we were operating under that to one degree or another, to that fish standard. That allowed higher releases for fishery purposes than 893, which is *still* the official release pattern. And, then when the CVPIA came along part of it has in it language that basically indicates that a goal of CVPIA is to double the anadromous fishery on all of the C-V-P [Central Valley Project] streams. And, which resulted in more of a commitment, I should say, to releases out of Folsom that were fish-friendly.

Sacramento Water Forum

And, during this same time frame the community, the stakeholders on the American River, got together and formed a, what they referred to as the Sacramento Water Forum. And, one of the big items of debate and agreement were fish flows on the American River. The environmental people that were members of the forum wanted very stringent strict numbers to focus on, and others wanted to be more flexible, but we still had the CVPIA's goal of doubling the fishery. So, during the Water Forum process, while Reclamation was

not a negotiating member of the Water Forum, we were there representing Reclamation and since we had our hands on the spigot, so to speak, at Folsom. And, we were there in an advisory capacity. And, throughout this, it was about a six-year process, the Water Forum, I kept reiterating that, you know, "Whatever you folks come up with in terms of fish flows on the lower American, they will have to be compatible with the goals set forth in the CVPIA." And, I think that insistence throughout the negotiating process probably was the main factor in the fish flows that the Water Forum eventually developed. In fact, when I left Reclamation, when I retired in January of 2004, they still hadn't finalized the flows but the principle *with* the flows that they're working on is that they be adaptive to circumstances, not set numbers. So, I presume that that is still the situation. Irregardless of that, unofficially Reclamation has been operating Folsom to a more environmental-friendly and fish-friendly releases. And, it's compounding the situation there.

Study of American River Obligations and Adequacy of Folsom Dam to Meet Them

What I asked for before I left Reclamation was a study on the American River, I just kind of overlaid all of these obligations that, you know, whether they're contractual obligations with our water contractors, obligations for the environment, whatever, just overlay them all so we can clearly demonstrate that Folsom just is not large enough, does not have the capacity, to

meet all these expectations.

“There Is a *Major Major* Train Wreck Coming on the American River . . .”

And, that study came out in draft form in the, about a year ago in March of 2003. And, when I left the Bureau, Reclamation had still not released the report to the public, which I think is a major mistake because the study does spell out quite clearly that we’re ~~on a train wreck~~, on the course of a train wreck on the American River that would make what happened up in Klamath pale by comparison. There is a *major major* train wreck coming on the American River, and that study points it out. And, why the powers-to-be with Reclamation haven’t recognized that, brought forth this report, and done something with it, formed 2025 partnerships, the 2025 Program that the Department has initiated, is beyond me.

Storey: Well, let’s talk about what the water obligations are and where the issues are. If you’re, if you can?

Aiken: The obligations, of course, are with our contractors, and what this study actually determined was that in about forty-five percent of the years we cannot meet our contractual obligations. Now, that improved somewhat with the Water Forum Flow Standards, if they get implemented, but of course you can’t really put a number to that yet. But, there is an indication that the Water Forum will improve that, but it won’t improve it over, say, fifty-five

percent. So, nearly *half* the years we will not be able to meet, fully meet, our contractual obligations. And, there are people who expect that we will, and, plain and simple, we won't.

The obligations for the fisheries will be impacted as well. And, in fact, the, just all of these different demands on Folsom Reservoir, you have environmental demands that are pitted up against other environmental demands. As an example, to meet delta water quality standards, Folsom, of course, is looked on because it's the closest spigot to the delta. And, when things go sour, so to speak, in the delta, Folsom is called upon to sweeten it up. And, those commitments usually come out of the, whatever's in the Folsom Reservoir in the late winter and early spring, this time of the year. Well, to meet those environmental commitments in the delta you are *lessening* the ability for us to meet the environmental commitments for the anadromous fish later in the year, because Folsom has a very limited cold water pool, and if you don't get a full storage with, you know, the runoff, and you *won't* get a full storage with the runoff while you're making these delta commitments, water-quality commitments, you're not going to have the cold water necessary for the *steelhead*, in the summer, the American River steelhead, which is, I believe, still listed as a threatened species. You will not have enough water for them *and* the chinook salmon, which require the cold water in the fall. And, that is spelled out very clearly, with the exception of last year, which was an excellent water year. The previous water years we ran out of cold water and could

not meet our commitments for the chinook salmon in the fall. I would not be surprised if that isn't the circumstances again this year. So, just plainly speaking, even though we have the C-V-P-I-A, with its various lofty goals, the American River's got some real problems because it just does not have the storage that's required for all of the commitments.

CALFED and CVPIA

And, this is exacerbated by what is referred to as CALFED, which is also tied into C-V-P-I-A. And this is the joint operations of the Central Valley rivers between the state and federal agencies. And by that I mean not only the water agencies but the regulatory agencies, Fish and Game from the state, Fish and Wildlife for federal, so on and so forth. They have mapped out an elaborate scheme to work toward resolving California's water issues throughout the state, but there is one very glaring error. They have no American River strategy in CALFED. And, to me, that's the Achilles heel of CALFED, because CALFED is going to be putting, my theory, putting more water into the delta but also pulling more water out of the delta for all of these different requirements. Well, they have *ignored* the American River, but they're assuming the American River's going to be there still for these yearly emergencies, so to speak, that, you know, you have to sweeten the delta up in a quick time frame and Folsom's the closest spigot. So, it will be called upon. That's going to impact all of the other problems that you have on the American River. And, †

~~think it's~~, I think it's a travesty that Reclamation is not really taking a serious look at the American River.

Storey: Did you raise this issue with the CALFED folks, and the Regional Director, and so on?

Aiken: I had the report drafted. It was actually done by contract with CH₂MHill. For whatever reason, the current Regional Director does not want it to become public. That's all I can tell you. (Storey: Hmm.) And, it's going to *burn* the Bureau, one of these days. It is going to burn them.

Storey: Hmm. Now, am I recalling correctly? Is Folsom one of the reservoirs that fills a couple of times a year?

Aiken: No. No.

Storey: I think maybe Friant does?

Aiken: I'm not aware of any CVP reservoirs that fill twice a year. (Storey: Yeah.) They're lucky to fill once a year.

Storey: Oh. Okay. So the . . .

Aiken: Well, when we've had large floods, then of course Folsom will. Folsom in, for all intents and purposes, during the '86 flood and the ['97] ~~'96~~ flood, filled and emptied one and a half times just in the course of the flooding. Controlling the flood, I should say, (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) with the volumes of water that

were managed. That's a whole nother issue, is the flood control on the American River. And, just this past week there's been a three-part article in the Sacramento Bee just relating to the flooding issues that face Sacramento.

Storey: Uh huh. How important is flooding?

Aiken: Critical.

Flooding at Folsom Dam

Storey: How, well, I- that was not well phrased. How often is flooding an issue for management at Folsom?

Aiken: You can't put a strict number on it but if you go back in history, Folsom was completed in 1955 and was virtually empty, and it filled in a matter of days during the '55 flood and saved Sacramento from flooding. It saved Sacramento from major flooding again in '64. It did in '86. It did in '97. But, there's been interim years that without a flood-control structure on the American River the American River would flood Sacramento probably on the tune of every five to ten years. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) But, with Folsom we've been able to contain the floods.

Reclamation Did a Paleo Flood Study of the American River

However, Reclamation did do what is referred to as a Paleo Flood Study, which goes back into prehistory. And, the findings there were that

there have been several occasions where there's been storms or floods on the American River that Folsom Reservoir could not handle, just simply could not handle. So, if you've got some level of history with this, it's safe to say that the day will come that Folsom can't handle a storm on the American River. It'll be of such magnitude. And, that was one of the conclusions that was drawn in this article in the newspaper. It was just, the series was just out.

Storey: Yeah. Did they talk to Congressman Doolittle, by chance?

Congressmen Doolittle and Matsui Have Agreed on Flood Control Plan for the American River

Aiken: Congressman Doolittle, at least up until recently, has kept very close tabs on the American River and the flood control issues associated with the American River. He and Congressman Matsui finally had struck some kind of a compromise that they'll go in, for flood control purposes, and raise Folsom seven feet. And, in exchange Congressman Doolittle will get a similar amount of money to apply toward water conservation and water storage projects in his district. So that was kind of the buy-off.

Still wrapped in controversy, I think there's a number of hurdles for the Corps of Engineers to get over before they can actually raise Folsom. And, unfortunately even after it is raised, that just brings the level of protection up for the Sacramento area to little over two-

hundred-year protection, which is the lowest of any major city in the United States, (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) in terms of flood protection. So, the day is coming, even with the modifications to Folsom, that there will be a flood on the American River that Folsom can't handle.

³Storey: Yeah. Was it maybe the one you mentioned, the '80s or '90s, where it got just a few inches from the top of the levees downstream?

Aiken: Yeah. That happened in '86. The '97 flood was a comparable flood, in terms of water flows, but we had more flood control space in Folsom than we did in '86. So it was a little more manageable. But, yeah, the '86 was very very close to a flooding disaster.

Tensions Between Storing Water and Flood Control

Storey: Could you talk a little bit about the tensions between storing water for delivery and flood control issues?

Aiken: Well it's very obviously a tension but you got to recognize that Folsom is a multiple purpose project, and so you've got to operate it for all these purposes *knowing* that at any given point in the year these purposes are diametrically

3. For the reader's information, there is a computer glitch in our files which does not permit us to edit pages 127 and 128. The worst problems on those two pages are: on page 127 the run together of "eventhough;" on page 128 throes is spelled "throws." Editor's apologies to those doing research in this interview.

opposed. And, you're, of course, going to have tensions. Now, in terms of flood control one of the schemes that is getting a lot of consideration now is what is referred to as "anticipatory releases," and there's a program underway now to enlarge the outlets on Folsom so Reclamation will be able to release a lot of, a lot more water a lot sooner in a storm. The current outlets, you're limited to about 40,000 cfs [cubic feet per second], until the water gets up to the spillways. By increasing the capacity to release through the river outlets, then you don't have to wait until the storm is up there. But, in order to get this two-hundred-year level of protection, you need that, you need the additional capacity of the raising of Folsom, and you have to rely more heavily on anticipatory releases. And by that, you try to forecast the incoming storm as to size and quantity, and take into consideration the existing snowpack, the water content in the existing snowpack, and take into consideration the upstream reservoirs that are not operated for flood control that are principally power and storage, and just how full they are. And, then make your releases, your anticipatory releases, ahead of the storm, from Folsom. Well, quite clearly the ability to forecast those storms has not reached that level of finesse. And there, if this operation comes to pass, there will be times when you'll make these anticipatory releases, the storm will split apart or just not materialize to the strength that was predicted, then you have already released all of this water that could have been used for environmental purposes, could have been used for contractual purposes. That water's gone, and then you have a dry year the

rest of the year. This, this was played out in 1997 with that flood. Up until, that happened on New Year's Day, basically, in '97, and up until that New Years we had a very wet season, and then we had that huge flood, and then we had the four driest months, winter months, on record after that. So, eventhough we had a flood in '97, we did not have a good water year in terms of storage.

Storey: Uhm-hmm. Hmm. Who contracts for water out of Folsom?

Aiken: There's a number of people that we have direct contracts with. Most of the water stored in Folsom is for municipal and industrial purpose, domestic water supplies. And, there's two contracts that are in perpetuity, one with the City of Sacramento, and one with the City of Folsom, because they had pre-existing water rights and pre-existing facilities to draw the water out of the reservoir. But, we do have contracts with them that we are to deliver "x" amount of water to the City of Sacramento, "x" amount to the City of Folsom. And then, in addition to that, additional contracts have been negotiated. You've got one with East Bay MUD [Municipal Utility District]. You've got one with San Juan Water District, which covers a multitude. It's a water wholesaler, that wholesales water out to a number of the smaller retail water districts around eastern Sacramento County. We have another contract with the County of Sacramento who, in turn, subcontract some of that water back to the City of Folsom. We've got contracts with El Dorado County.

We've got contracts with Placer County Water Agency. So, there's a multitude of domestic water contracts that come directly out of Folsom. Then of course, Folsom is part of the overall mix that reaches the contractors south of the delta. So, you know, both direct and indirect contracts. There's a considerable amount of water in Folsom that is obligated to contractors.

Storey: Now, what happens when we can't deliver a full supply to everybody?

Aiken: You just implement the shortage policy that's developed. Actually it's in the final throws of being developed, and is part of our contracts that, you know, under certain in-flow conditions each of these water districts' contract delivery amounts are cut back accordingly.

Storey: Are they all cut back the same?

Aiken: Uh . . .

Storey: If you're five percent low . . .

Aiken: I would say . . .

Storey: Does everybody lose five percent of their supply?

Aiken: It's, it's pretty much the same, but I, you know, I'd have to go look—each of these contracts are different. (Storey: Uh huh.) And, I'd have to go back and analyze the contracts—I can't just precisely say that they're all cut back this

amount or that amount. You have a general amount of twenty-five percent, which is pretty common. But, whether or not the contracts have more specific language than the twenty-five percent, I'd have to go look.

Storey: Hmm. I was just wondering if they had priority rights based on when contracts were signed, or anything like that?

Aiken: Well, we've just gone through renegotiating virtually all of the contracts in C-V-P. In fact, that's still in process. I don't think they'll actually sign the contracts probably until after the national election.

Storey: Oh. I wonder why? (Laugh)

Aiken: Gee. I wonder why? But, the contracts themselves have pretty much been renegotiated. They're kind of setting on the shelf until the politics clear.

Storey: Uhm-hmm. Hmm.

Aiken: But, as a general rule the municipal and industrial water users shortage supply is at seventy-five percent, but I think under dire circumstances that can even backed off.

Water Users Dealing with Water Shortages

Storey: And, do they have other ways of dealing with those shortages? Do they have other water supplies?

Aiken: Not really. You know, some have some ground water that they can rely on. There's been a number of, you know, tight water years, and some water districts are better off than others. Usually your foothill water districts have ample water, and they'll sell their water to these other entities to try to make up the shortfall. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) And, if any of that water goes through a Reclamation facility they'll have to have a Warren Act Contract so Reclamation does get some level of payment for the storage and conveyance of the water. But, they've done that. They've worked out water banks. Some districts have just fallowed land, and used the water either from other areas of their own districts or have sold the water to other districts. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) It's, the water marketing is something that has really come to the forefront here in the last ten years, whereas before that I think people pretty well hung to their contractual amounts and stamped their feet and "Blah blah blah," you know, "Give us more storage or do this, or do that." But, with so many demands for water, and such a limited supply, you have to get into these marketing techniques, I think, (Storey: Yeah.) to make it spread around.

Reclamation Supports the Hatchery below Nimbus Dam

Storey: Hmm. Now, do we operate that hatchery below, is it Nimbus?

Aiken: Nimbus. We don't operate it. We basically own it. It was built by the Bureau of

Rec[lamation]. . .

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MARCH 31, 2004.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 31, 2004.

Storey: Built as mitigation?

Aiken: Yeah. The hatchery was built as mitigation. We have a contract with the California Fish and Game Department to actually manage it. But, you know, we pay for the food. We pay for the upkeep. The Fish and Game is the managing partner.

Storey: But, that comes out of the Folsom Office?

Aiken: Yes.

Storey: What kind of money are we talking about?

Aiken: Well, I, to be frank with you, can't remember. I know we were spending around a quarter of a million a year, I think, just on fish food. The balance of it, I don't know. I'd have to (Storey: Huh.) go back through the records. Not something I paid a lot of attention to.

Drought in the Central California Area Office

Storey: What, what, during your period of management out there were there any serious droughts?

Aiken: Not really. I came out there in '93, and I think there's probably general consensus that the last big drought ended in '92, '93, the '92-'93 water year. We had some dry years. I can't remember

the years specifically. I think '94 was a drier year. [ringing phone] [tape paused]

Storey: Of the low water year in '94, I think.

Aiken: Yeah. The question was how many, whether we had drought during my tenure out there. And, I was there from January of '93 to January of 2004. And, we had a dry year, I believe '94 was a dry year. Not a drought year. We didn't have any drought years. I believe, let's see, '95 was a good year, because we had a full reservoir when the gate failed. Maybe '96, '97, '98, weren't stellar years but overall we had good water years while I was out there.

Planning for Raising Folsom Dam

Storey: How long have we been looking at raising ~~the~~,
~~of raising~~ Folsom?

Aiken: It started to get serious consideration, I guess, probably—well, it started to get consideration in '92 when Doolittle had introduced legislation to get Auburn Dam reauthorized, and then it kind of went on the back burner. And, the flood of '97 came, and I think that's when it really started to, the Corps of Engineers started to focus on it. And then Doolittle reintroduced Auburn Dam legislation in '98, which didn't go very far. So, then the Corps started focusing on ~~raising~~, raising Folsom.

Storey: Well, you know, raising a dam seven feet doesn't sound like much of a project. (Aiken: Well.) Can you talk about what's involved

there, for me?

Aiken: Yeah. It, you know, if you were talking about what is generally considered to be a dam and reservoir, you have a single dam and the reservoir behind it, because it's built in the canyon or canyon-like setting. Folsom is not. Folsom is built in the lower foothills, and it was built in the lower foothills because that was where the confluence of the South Fork and the North Fork came together. So, if you're going to have flood control you've got to control both forks. Well, by doing so, you have Folsom with eight dikes and another dam, an earth-filled dam, Mormon Island auxiliary dam. So, in essence, the reservoir that Folsom sets in is kind of a man-made bathtub, with all these dikes and auxiliary dams, plus the main concrete dam which is across the riverbed of the American River. You've got all of these other structures. And, when you start to raise Folsom, you're not just raising the concrete portion of it, you've got to raise the wing dams, all of the dikes, Mormon Island auxiliary dam, plus which there'll be areas that you'll have to put in additional dikes or new dikes, because of the higher level of water. So, it's not a simple thing. And, Folsom is in the middle of a metropolitan area, and surrounded by homes, and the Corps has not really looked into all of the environmental considerations of raising that dam and all those dikes. Because, you're going to have to, you put a parapet, concrete parapet wall all the way around that's, you know, that's over ten miles of wall that you'd have to put in. Or, if you're going to put in, you know, just raise the earth

material in it, you've got to find a source for that, and then you've got to drive it through city streets to get it there. And, I don't think the people that live surrounding Folsom are going to be too happy with huge trucks of dirt, for a couple of years, driving through their city streets. So there's a number of construction issues there.

There were two facets going on in terms of the concrete structure. The previously authorized outlet modification, where they're enlarging the river outlets and the concrete portion, were going through a design process. Corps had the lead but Reclamation was very heavily involved in that. And, the design kept changing and evolving, and at the same time another facet of the Corps was studying the raise. And, I got to looking at the raise and what's involved in that in terms of structure, and what they're taking out of the structure, in terms of excavating out concrete to make these larger outlets, and I just said, "Time out. Wait a minute. Is anybody connecting these two dots?" And, as it turned out, there wasn't a whole lot of looking at it from a standpoint of, "What is the impact of the raise and what is the impact of the outlet modifications on each other?" So, much to the consternation of the Corps of Engineers, they had to kind of rear back their, rein back the horses on the raise and take another look at it. And, they had a peer group look at it, and it was well that that happened because the peer groups said, "Yeah. You guys, you need to tie these together, because the amount of concrete you're taking out and versus the structural strength for

raising that concrete structure needs a closer look.” So, ~~That~~, that was probably going on when we interviewed last time, and it’s about the ‘98, ‘99 time frame. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) But, they have gone back now and they’re taking a closer look at that. So, hopefully the engineering aspects are coordinated.

Storey: Well, this raises an interesting question for me, though. The Corps, of course, built Folsom, (Aiken: Right.) but then they turned it over to Reclamation?

Aiken: Right.

Corps of Engineers Built Folsom Dam, Reclamation Operates Folsom Dam and Jurisdictional Issues Occur

Storey: But, it sounds to me as if they have ongoing responsibility for any construction work? How does all of this work and what kinds of (Aiken: Yeah.) issues come up between Reclamation and the Corps in the process? (Laugh)

Aiken: Big issues. The Corps of Engineers, of course, has overall responsibility for flood control. And, since this is a flood control issue the Corps has the responsibility for the outlet modifications *and* for the raise.

Issues Associated with Corps Construction on Folsom Dam While Reclamation Manages Water Deliveries

And, a very big concern that I had while I was

the Area Manager, and continue to have, is the Bureau getting swallowed up by the Corps' construction schedule to the detriment of the Bureau's operation and maintenance program. And, that's one thing that I emphasized when I left the Bureau was, "You folks have got to get some strong leadership out there that will keep Reclamation's O&M [Operations and Management] program, you know, on at least on a par with the Corps' construction program, so the Corps isn't dictating to us when we can make water releases, and under what circumstances, and so on and so forth." So, hopefully that'll be the case. But, I think it remains to be seen. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) When the Corps was underway with both of their outlet modification work and the design work, I was having a heck of a problem just getting their attention to our needs out there. They were just basically hell-bent-for-leather and barely gave me lip service about it. So, I established a new position out at the dam there, which would, I think we call it the River Coordinator, or some such thing, and actually hired one of the Corps' best people that was working on these projects. A guy named Rick Johnson, excellent worker. And, he has been a godsend to Reclamation out there because he knew who to get to at the Corps, and whose attention to get at the Corps so Reclamation's concerns are considered. And, ~~that, that was,~~ that was a very important position that was filled by a very important individual. So, that's worked out well.

Storey: Say we were going to raise Folsom in order to

store water, rather than ~~flood~~, for flood control purposes, (Aiken: Uhm-hmm.) would Reclamation then be raising the dam?

Aiken: Well. . .

Storey: And doing the work?

Aiken: I think that would be a logical conclusion that somebody could draw, that, you know, if it were strictly for storage, then yeah. And that's kind of the direction they're going on Shasta at this point. But, as long as it has any tie into flood control, the Corps's probably going to be the lead.

Storey: Hmm. Interesting.

Aiken: And, in addition to that the legislation, the language, specifically states that it's not for storage.

Storey: The raising?

Aiken: Uhm-hmm.

Storey: Yeah.

Aiken: So, in order to get any storage out of that somebody would have to change the legislation.

Storey: Uhm-hmm. Well, of course, one of the major changes has been the 9/11 attack and the issues of security and law enforcement, and so on.

Aiken: Correct.

Storey: How did that affect Folsom?

Aiken: Tremendous impact. Folsom, you know when Reclamation first started to consider its critical infrastructure, frankly they hadn't thought of Folsom. But, through persistence I think people quickly, my persistence, people quickly recognized the high-risk factor and the vulnerability of Folsom. And, as it has turned out Reclamation's critical infrastructure, Folsom, it's safe to say, has the highest risk and is the softest target. You've got that combination. So, when the decision was reached to close the dam road I breathed a sigh of relief, but I know that there's a continuing effort on the part of the city officials in Folsom to get that road reopened, on some level, some basis, which I think would be a mistake. But, it, there's no level of security that could be provided that you could open that road and be as safe as you are now without opening that road. Plus which, if you do open the road, the costs are going to be steep, to try to manage that. So you've got, right now you've got the highest level of protection at the lowest possible cost, by closing that road. And, there's a number of other security measures that have been taken out there. And, I think, as it stands today, you've probably got the, as secure a situation as you can have. And, anything like opening the road, even on a limited basis, is going to lower that level of security.

Storey: Let's talk about the fact that it's a very high risk

facility. Why is that?

Security at Folsom Dam, a High Risk Facility⁴

Aiken: Because of the population immediately downstream. Folsom, as I mentioned earlier, sets in a metropolitan setting. Depending on what study you look at, there's at least 300,000 people whose daily lives are directly in harm's way of catastrophe if Folsom were to fail. I think conservatively estimates have been at \$40 million in terms of property damage. So, when you combine, you know, the fact that you've got so many people, 300- to 500,000 people directly in harm's way, and the level of property damage that would occur, that takes it right to the top. (Storey: Hmm.) And, since you have a structure that, and by structure I'm including all of the dikes, the Mormon Island Dam, you are exposed on a *very* broad front to any kind of terrorist action. So, that makes it kind of the softest target. You know, you look at the other, the crown jewels so to speak, of Reclamation, Hoover Dam, Grand Coulee Dam, Glen Canyon, even Shasta, they're single, large, concrete structures, and Folsom is a hodgepodge of concrete structure with exposed flood control gates, earth-fill dikes, wing dams, so on and so forth. It's just a very vulnerable dam in a high risk area.

4. Readers, please note that this is another area where computer program glitches do not permit us to work. Look in the previous paragraphs for information related to this topic on security issues at Folsom Dam.

Storey: The road closing must have been politically sensitive though?

Issues with Closing the Road over Folsom Dam for Security Reasons

Aiken: Very much so. And we knew what, you know, the problems were going to be based on when the gate failed in '95, and the periods of time that we needed the road closed to do, you know get the construction work done on the gate. A very sensitive issue.

“Frankly, the City of Folsom Is Making More of an Issue of this than it Needs To. . . .”

Frankly, the City of Folsom is making more of an issue of this than it needs to. With the new bridge at the Natomas Crossing, it's not as big an impact as the road closure back in '95, before they had that crossing over Natomas. And, they've made other modifications to traffic routing down there, and it's no worse than any other part of the Sacramento community during commute hours. Some days it's even better. You can go right through it. So, it's become a test of wills between the elected officials of the City of Folsom and Reclamation's security folks. As simple as that. (Storey: Hmm.) The dire circumstances that they try to portray don't exist. (Storey: Hmm.) It's inconvenient, yeah, (Storey: Yeah.) but ~~even if~~, even if we had a new bridge at Folsom, and traffic were flowing, with the exponential growth in this area it's not going to be much different, I don't think, by that time that bridge is open and what you have there

today.

Storey: Well, I keep reading all these newspaper articles about, "Traffic Through Residential Areas," and all that kind of stuff. You think this is more an emotional kind of thing than a real thing, is what I think I'm hearing?

Aiken: Well there's, there's some level of reality to it, but *not* to the degree that the City of Folsom's elected officials have said. You know, there's inconvenience to the commuters. No question. And, there's inconvenience to the City of Folsom. But, *it's*, when you weigh that against the risk to the people downstream *it just*, there's no question the road needs to be closed. (Storey: Yeah.) The other thing that's a little curious to me about it is the City of Folsom stands to lose their water supply if something happens at the dam. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) Not to mention the rest of Sacramento, but, you know, they could be without water.

Water Meters in the City of Folsom

Storey: Hmm. Folsom is, I believe has been under some pressure to put in meters?

Aiken: Water meters. That was pressure brought on by C-V-P-I-A. All of our contractors have to have water meters. And, that was written into our contracts with San Juan Water District, which *does* sell water to a *portion* of Folsom. And then it was put into our contract with Sacramento County, who in turn subcontracts with Folsom. So yeah, it became an issue, but

it became a nonissue last November because the state has passed a referendum that everybody except the City of Sacramento have to have water meters in the state. (Laugh)

Storey: Why did they make an exception like that?

Aiken: Because of one assemblyman that fought it. But, I think it's just a matter of time. I mean, it didn't specifically say, "Nevermore will you talk about meters in Sacramento." It just said, "Not right now." (Storey: Uh huh.) But, already there's forces at work that will, it'll change. The City of Sacramento will have their meters.

Storey: I understood there was going to be a referendum in Folsom about whether or not they would accept meters?

Aiken: There was one.

Storey: Is that right?

Aiken: There was one. And, as it got written up *and passed* by the voters, it didn't specifically exclude meters, it stated that, "~~No public funds would be,~~ No rate-payer funds would be used to install the meters." So, the City of Folsom will just have to reach into a different pot to pull that money out, unless, you know, to put in the meters, unless they pass additional legislation.

Storey: Hmm. Interesting.

Aiken: They're going to have to put meters in one way

or the other, wherever they pay for it.

Storey: One of the other things that's new, I believe, is the, I'm not sure you call it the Water Education Center? That you have there at Folsom?

American River Water Education Center at Folsom Dam Began with Our Water Conservation Program

Aiken: Yeah. American River Water Education Center.

Storey: Tell me about where that came from.

Aiken: Well, it actually got its beginning with the Water Conservation Program that Reclamation had. And, Reclamation had a small room down at their Regional Office set aside for water conservation education, which wasn't getting much public traffic. And, so actually a couple of individuals on our staff out at Folsom made a pitch that we should combine that with the existing tour program that we had out there, and bring in State Parks as a partner, and get this Water Education Center built. And, we did that with water, or with money that was budgeted for water conservation at Reclamation. We got in-kind services from State Parks. We got "volunteer," and I say that in quotation marks, services from Folsom Prison for carpenters, and plumbers, and what not. (Storey: Uh huh.) And, Reclamation, my office, got a hold of a couple of these modular buildings that all came together as this Water Conservation Center. Folsom, historically, we've had a very large and successful tour program for students, school kids.

Tours Have Been Reinstated for Grammar School Children

And, of course with 9/11 we had to shut out the tours down to the project facilities, but we have reinstated that for grammar school kids. And, I imagine by now they're taking those tours again, but it's under a very controlled—we went through the security folks in Denver and they made recommendations as to how we can control it. We've got our own little tramway that, you know, we don't allow the school buses on (Storey: Down there and that kind of thing?) the secured part of it. So, they go to the Water Education Center and tour that with the facilities that we have there, then they're loaded onto our tram and we take them down to the powerplant and back.

Storey: Have you had any trouble with people, for instance, maybe who used to fish below the dam, or something, and they can't quite understand what's going on? Or, they fished up on the dam?

Aiken: Fishing was never allowed on the dam, so that wasn't, that wasn't a problem. There was one area just south of the dam, a large flat area called the Overlook that people used to come out and park and then walk down to the reservoir. That's been closed off as part of the security precautions. So, there's a little bit there. But, as far as recreation, it hasn't had much impact.

Centennial Activities at the Central California Area

Oral history of Thomas J. Aiken

Office

Storey: Hmm. Let's talk about the Centennial and what Folsom may have done there.

Aiken: Well, we did what I guess every other (Laugh) office did. We made arrangements to have the traveling show come out there, and then we had our own centennial celebration and actually found quite a few of the old construction workers that *built* Folsom Dam, and had a nice function for them. Beyond that, I guess, it was just like all the rest of Reclamation.

Storey: Hmm. You had like a picnic maybe? Or . . . ?

Central California Area Office Invited Retired Construction Workers Who Worked on Folsom Dam to Their Centennial Events

Aiken: Yeah. Uh huh. Yeah it was a picnic for all the retired construction workers that we could find, *and* Reclamation employees at the time. There were thirty or forty that actually came. Had some presentations. It was nice.

Storey: What about for your staff and their families?

Aiken: It was, it was kind of all rolled into one there actually. And, I don't know, nothing (Storey: Yeah.) extraordinary. I mean we just . . .

Storey: What else should we be talking about?

Background Information and the Visitor Services Plan for Lake Berryessa

Aiken: Well, probably one of the things that deserves equal attention is the new Visitor Services Plan for Lake Berryessa. That's been a critical issue. To make a long story short, when Reclamation built Lake Berryessa back in the late '50s we just packaged up the recreation program and contracted with the County of Napa to run the recreation program there, and then Reclamation just kind of walked away from it. And, Napa County really wasn't geared to handle that level of recreation, what evolved over there. And, ~~they have gone~~, they went out and entered into seven different contracts, private . . .

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 31, 2004.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MARCH 31, 2004

Storey: This is tape two of an interview by Brit Storey with Thomas F. Aiken on March the 31st, 2004.

Seven resorts there?

**Recreation Plan for Lake Berryessa Prepared by
the National Park Service Was Never Implemented**

Aiken: Yeah. And, these seven resorts, even though we had a recreation plan developed for us at Berryessa by the Park Service, National Park Service, it never really got implemented. It was one that was, you know, obviously geared toward public access to the reservoir.

**Napa County Allowed Concessionaires to Issue
Long-term Leases to House Trailers at Lake**

Berryessa

But, what had happened was the county let these individual concessionaires start putting in long-term leases on trailer spaces. And, virtually every one of those seven resorts ended up looking like a Hong Kong ghetto, because they had various assortments of trailers, parked *inches* apart in some locales, all around the lake. And, they entered into long-term, exclusive-use permits with these trailer owners. So, what *evolved*, over a period of time there, was that there were, oh, 1,600 trailer owners, for all intents and purposes, had exclusive use of Lake Berryessa. And, Reclamation got pounded on several occasions on audits by the IG [Inspector General] and GAO [General Accounting Office] for, you know, allowing this long-term exclusive use.

Napa County Returned Recreation on Lake Berryessa to Reclamation in the Mid-1970s

And, in the middle '70s, when we put a little pressure on Napa County, they just said, "Okay, it's yours." (Laugh) And, they handed it back to us. And, from the middle '70s until the late '90s every time Reclamation would try to implement a program over there to open it up, more open it to the public, it would get smashed flat politically. And, in the late '90s we were able to work with Congressman Mike Thompson, who had sided with Reclamation on, you know, "We've got to get this more accessible to public."

“ . . . so we worked on a new Visitor Services Plan which opens the area up more to [the] public . . . ”

And, so we worked on a new Visitor Services Plan that is out for public review, which opens the area up more to public –at least that’s the recommended alternative on the environmental work. So, there are obviously what would be a relative handful of trailer owners that are making a *lot* of noise because they stand to lose their long-term exclusive use of the lake. And, that’s a political football that’s being tossed around during this environmental review [process.] ~~purpose.~~

“ . . . the concessionaires have an option of . . . folding into Reclamation’s . . . new plan, or going out of business . . . ”

But, all of these contracts with these individual concessionaires expire in 2008, 2009. And so they’ve, they’ve, the concessionaires have an option of, you know, folding into Reclamation’s general plan, new plan, *or* going out of business. And so far, with one exception, they’ve kind of been either ignoring it or fighting it, the concessionaires have. And, I think they all have come to the realization that the paradigm at Lake Berryessa will be changing, and it *will* become more accessible to the general public, and we’ll get away from this exclusive-use of a federal facility.

Storey: Uhm-hmm. But we’re going to have to wait several more years before we can implement? (Aiken: Well.) Is that what I’m hearing?

- Aiken: Well. No. Not really, because the environmental document is out for public review, and as soon as we get through with the public comments, and there's a *lot* of people that support what we're trying to do over there, and we've got political support, then I think the next step will be for Reclamation just to say, "Okay, concessionaires this is the way it's going to be," you know. "You've got this, this, and this option." And, I think what we'll see is probably at least a couple of the concessionaires [will] just walk away from it and dump it back on Reclamation. A couple might, you know, want to try to put together a bid that they can put in on this next process, and a couple others will probably fight us in court. I can't help but believe that the situation is going to change, and you're going to have more public access, and it's probably going to be instead of seven concessionaires it'll be two or three concessionaires. Bigger companies, you know, like the KOA types or these other (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) national recreation outfits will get in there and put a good bid in and it'll be a more public-friendly place to go visit.
- Storey: Yeah. Anything else we ought to talk about? Any other big issues? Well, tell me why you decided to retire and what you're doing with yourself?

"I had a number of things kind of come together that made it a good time to retire. . . ."

- Aiken: Well, I had a number of things kind of come together that made it a good time to retire.

Visitor Services Plan for Lake Berryessa Came Together

We just had like this Visitor Services Plan come together. That was a good crossroads.

Closed the Road over Folsom Dam

We had the decision to close the road, which is a positive thing.

Tentative Decision to Build the Bridge below Folsom Dam

We have a tentative decision to build (Laugh) a bridge out there, although it's probably going to be the Corps of Engineers that does it. But, at any rate, that was a *goal* that I had. So, I had a number of those things kind of come together. The stock market came back, at least where I was invested it came back pretty good. And, just a couple other personal things that just kind of added up to, "Get out of there."

"... I was tired of the direction Reclamation was going ..."

And I was, I was tired of the direction Reclamation was going in. I'll be frank with you. It has turned to me, to my way of thinking Reclamation has turned into just another bureaucracy. We certainly aren't the can-do, go-get-em organization that we were during most of my career. And, just added up to getting out. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) So, I got out.

Storey: How many years of service?

Thirty-eight Years of Federal Service

Aiken: Thirty-eight. Two of them in the Army.

Storey: Yeah.

Likes to Paint Pictures and Work on His Hot Rods

Aiken: I spent a little over a year in Vietnam as a Unit Commander, which was an experience worth a million bucks that I wouldn't give a plug nickel to go through again. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) But, it just all added up. It was time to get out. So, I got out. And, painting, I like to paint.

Storey: Painting pictures?

Aiken: Yeah.

Storey: Yeah. As opposed to houses? (Laugh)

Aiken: Yes. Pictures. Pictures. I've done several portraits in the last year. So, I enjoy doing that. I got a couple of hot rods here in the garage that we dink around with. One's a '64 Corvette, actually, that I've owned since new. And the other's a '34 Ford street rod that I built a couple of years ago. And then I just had a number of projects around the house here that I just didn't have time to get involved in, that I've been working on. I built a little waterfall out by our pool. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) And a nice barbecue area down here.

Storey: But, nothing related to water, Reclamation, water management?

Approached by People about Taking Jobs Working in Water Management

Aiken: No. I've had, I've had a couple of inquiries, but right now I'm not interested. You know, I've had a couple of people call me up and ask me if I wanted to work for them, or do some consulting work, but not right now. Maybe later, if I get totally bored. (Storey: Uhm-hmm.) But, I'm not there yet.

Storey: Okay. Well, let me ask if you're willing for information on these tapes and the resulting transcripts to be used by researchers?

Aiken: Sure.

Storey: Great.

Aiken: Absolutely.

Storey: Anything else you want to add?

Aiken: Nope. I guess not.

Storey: Thank you.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MARCH 31, 2004.
END INTERVIEWS.

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