Minie Smith: This is an interview with Emmett Smith on June 29, 2006. The interviewers are Caitlin DeSilvey and Minie Smith.

Caitlin DeSilvey: Could we maybe have you introduce yourself and just say your name? It's good for this thing.

Emmett Smith: My name is Emmett Smith. I used to work for- I managed the Milltown Dam from 1971 to 1984. I retired in '86. (Unintelligible). My memory is failing me so this isn't going to be real accurate.

CD: Did you live there?

ES: There used to be four houses, what they called "The Camper" right above the dam. We lived in one of the four houses.

CD: Were the other ones occupied at that time?
ES: At first they were. One of them was owned by a fellow by the name of Ken Patterson and his wife, Harry McCann and his wife, and then Jack Madlock was the fellow I took over from. I guess all of them are gone now.

MS: Who was the middle one?

ES: Harry McCann. He was the supervisor; they'd called them in those days.

CD: So how did you end up working for Montana Power? What led you there?

ES: To Montana Power? I started out digging holes for Montana Power because I knew the fellow (unintelligible) was the town manager and he came from Lewistown like I did. I had a history with him so when I came over here, I was recommended to him by a church member. I went and talked to him and saw who he was. I told him I didn't want an inside job. He said, "This isn't going to be an inside job." So that was fine with me. That was in 1964 I think. Then they needed help out there at the dam, working there overhauling the machinery and the turbines. I volunteered to go out there and liked what I was doing, so I stayed on. So when Madlock retired, I took over. That was in '71 I think.

MS: So there were four people working on overhauling - that was the...?

ES: No there were four people. One of them was a retired power company employee and Harry McCann was the division superintendent at that time. He lived out there, he and his wife. Then Jack Madlock ran the place. The fourth house was where we moved into when I found out that I was going to be on steady (unintelligible).
CD: So before that did you live in Milltown?

ES: Before that we lived over in Fairview and Missoula. There were a couple of places in Missoula. I used to come over in this country from Lewistown to work at the Garden City Floral. Every time the guy I was going to replace, the price of bread went up five cents and he stayed another year. So I wasn't getting any place there. So I went on my own landscaping for a while. Then I got a job with the power company that paid better. It paid $2.30 an hour then, which was big money back then.

CD: That was when you started? Yes, that sounds like good money.

ES: Yes, it paid $2.30 an hour, something like that.

CD: So what were your duties then when you started as a grounds man out there?

ES: I didn't start as a grounds man out there. I started at the town digging holes for the power company. So I was on the power crew number one, the power crew that worked on the higher voltage stuff. From there, I went out to the dam when it opened up that I was going to be able to be there permanently. Then they provided a house for me and everything when we got out there. (Unintelligible) any way you want to spell the person (unintelligible) on the conditions.

MS: So did you do your shopping and everything at Milltown or in Missoula?
ES: In Missoula.

MS: That's (unintelligible).

ES: They didn't have but just that one store in Milltown at the time.

CD: That store that's there was sitting there then?

ES: Oh yes. Most of the stuff out there was there then and is there now (unintelligible). The night club or whatever, Harold's is what they called it- that was a going place out there at that time. I never spent any time over there because I didn't like that kind of stuff. It was there for a long time. I think it's still there.

MS: Yes, it may well be. So did your kids go to school at Bonner?

ES: No, they went in town mostly to finish their high school at the time. At about that time, they were in high school.

MS: Oh because it only went up to the eighth grade.

ES: Yes. We never did have any kids in school out there in Bonner. They were all in school at Missoula.
CD: Did they like living out at the dam?

ES: Oh yes. We had about 700 feet of lawn out in front that I had to mow. They liked to play out there and we used to have the company picnics out there.

CD: It's good for swimming too.

ES: Yes. The kids would throw their Frisbees and stuff on the lawn and then take a dive into the pond right off the lawn. They were pretty happy out there.

CD: Did they get to know the other kids in Bonner by just being out there? Were there a lot of kids?

ES: Oh not really. They were mostly in high school. So they associated with people from town because there weren't that many kids at that time. A lot of them just would come up to the dam (unintelligible). They came down through there a lot, but they didn't...our kids didn't hang out because they didn't have those kind of friends out there. Their friends were from their high schools in town. So that's where they were then.

CD: The local folks would come down quite a lot?

ES: Oh yes. We had a bunch of old timers out there that liked to fish. They were good people, the Norwegians and Swedes and Finns.
CD: (muffled noises) Okay, where were we? We were talking about fishing. I was curious, where was the prime spot to fish? People didn't go out in boats.

ES: Oh well mostly depends on them I guess. Usually they'd go in the front of the discharge area where the water comes off underneath into the pour basin downstream in the river. That's where they'd fish because that's where the current turns around.

CD: Oh if it comes over the spillway it kind of...

ES: Yes. Then the water from the turbines comes along the building and it makes good fishing certain times of the year, but not very high water.

CD: What kind of fish?

ES: They catch- they're looking for trout and whitefish, but there are quite a few suckers and squawfish in that river. They've practically taken over some places. That's the end of the river run for any fish. So they at one time congregate there. The trout come up there two different seasons and that's as far up the river as they can get. They spawn there or they go downstream. You had a few bull trout come in there, but (unintelligible). That's about it. The big ones were suckers. They caught a lot of suckers. They weren't good for much.

CD: They're not good to eat?

ES: Not these kinds, well, some of them are if you're desperate. They'd be a little bit greasy.
CD: So did you ever give the fish a lift around to the top of the dam? I thought I heard a story once.

ES: Oh we tried that a couple of times, but then the Fish and Game Department- I was kind of at odds with them a lot. They didn't like having it done, so I didn't do it. I never knew when they were spotting me out there. We had an experience with one of the Fish and Game representatives during the flood in ’75 that was kind of trickery involved. So I didn't get along with them guys very well.

MS: It was like a lookout on the (unintelligible). Bill had it up on the wall, the picture.

ES: That picture was taken in ’75 I believe. All this stuff congregates in back of the dam. The dam is the thing that goes across the top. The back of it is anything behind it all up the river. It accumulates there during the high water. It comes down and we have a layer there- a boom- that keeps it from coming into the intake for the turbines. If we didn't have that, it would- so this stuff gathers behind during the flood season and piles up to maybe an acre or two in size. Then we have to get rid of it because the strain on the dam, on the wear, is too much and it will break it out. So we shut all the machines down, the generators, and in a matter of a few minutes, we have to get the gates all the way wide open.

You'd have to count before the flow of water added by shutting down the machines. When that happens, then this whole big mess springs out on an arm and that's what's going over the dam there. The whole thing, hell, houses and animals, livestock and everything, it's one hell of a mess and it happens quite often during the period of high water. You have to shut down quickly and you have to get that over quickly and usually it doesn't take very long. It takes a matter of maybe
five minutes and the whole thing swings out and you've got maybe half (unintelligible) cross the dam and all this debris coming down there.

CD: And it all heads for Missoula.

ES: It all heads down the river to Missoula. I'm supposed to notify that have pumps in the line down the river because they'll turn off their pumps when it comes by. We would have to then in order to preserve the dam structure itself. Once in a while, those things would hang up- great big trees would hang up on the top and you'd have to go out there off that bridge and cut them loose with a chainsaw. It's risky, but then it had to be done; so much for that part of it.

CD: That's the greater part of your job?

ES: Yes it wasn't bad. It was dangerous, but we were (unintelligible) and everything. We never really had anything serious go wrong. It was interesting. You only knew it was going to end because the high water doesn't last forever. The big problem out there is high water and ice. They're two different seasons of course.

CD: How often would you get serious ice jams coming down the river?

ES: I don't know. There were several times we had them. It wasn't our part of it necessarily. It would jam up there above the mill where the river makes a big bend. Then you had the little dam at the mill that they just took out here this past year. That would accommodate some of it. If they didn't let their- they do what they call "letting the boards down." The dam sits up like this here and the bottom is in a trough. The front is anchored at the bottom and this is the dam. You have
to be able to let these boards down below. You hook on them with a big hook and let them down to throw that much water out. If they don't do that in time at the dam at the mill, it would just wash the darn poor people out.

Some of the times that happened too. A couple times I'd pick it up and that trash would come down the river. Probably three, four, or maybe five times all together in the years I was out there-usually you had warning if you were lucky. It got to be pretty much a fact. The highway would mention or the radio would say something about a jam up by Rainbow Bridge or something like that, Rainbow Bend. Anyway, we'd know about it and I'd know about it. You can tell when the river flow crosses at the jam some place.

CD: Because it's all holding it back.

ES: Because it's all holding it back and you just don't want to hold it back too long, that's all.

CD: Were there any other sort of scary times when things happened where you had to really...

ES: In my time we fished two bodies out. One of them, somebody fell in up the river by- I guess up somewhere around Johnsrud Park, that cliff up there that they used to dive off and still do. They still get in trouble. Then one time a friend of ours, some friends came up to visit and they had a canoe. They were fishing at the point of the cliff; you know where the cliffs are? You've been out there. Well there's an eddy there and it's pretty good fishing. But they shouldn't have been doing it in a canoe because the water was up pretty good at that time. They didn't watch what they were doing and the canoe got swept into the discharge and tipped it over. It dumped them both out and one guy got picked up by some people fishing in front of the plant there.
He, other guy, a friend of ours, we picked him up down below the dam just aside of the trestle. He floated upside down and we dragged him out. We just happened to drag him out and he was unconscious. He was dead for all the world. He had drowned. So we had to pull him up out of the bank, a pretty steep bank. They got him up on top, put him in the back of the trunk, and gave him some artificial respiration. Pretty soon he started coughing up water. So we took him up to the house and took him in the house. We laid him on the floor and called an ambulance. They came out and in the process, I'll tell you this because it happened, while he was lying on the floor he was pretty much out of it. My wife was going to help him, so she knelt on his chest and he let out a hell of a holler. That was a pretty good sight.

MS: He was relieved.

ES: Oh yes.

MS: He was (unintelligible).

ES: He was lifeless at the time, but anyhow, the ambulance came out and we took him into the hospital. The doctor said that's the highest content in the blood- that's bad.

CD: Carbon dioxide.

ES: Yes the carbon dioxide in his blood was the highest they'd seen.

CD: Because he hadn't been breathing.
ES: Yes. He was still alive. He came out of it pretty good. He went out next year and fished. He had a big story to tell. He came from California. Of course, he was going to school up here as a teacher down there and his summer- his duty was to come up to the schools and learn more about whatever he was teaching, history I think at the time. So much for that.

CD: Wow. That's quite a story.

MS: Oh yes.

ES: I better tell you about the other one because it's well known. We had one guy come down and they were fishing in front and the water was pretty violent. They got swept in and (unintelligible) and one guy disappeared. They never did find him. They had the sheriff out and the river patrols up and down the river. At the time, the plant was shut down because of high water and you couldn't keep the screens cleaned to keep the plant running without damaging a lot of stuff, so we shut down. We began to smell an odd smell, but it's not hard to understand that because the water wanted to come down and in a flood it's not very fragrant. It's got everything in it. It's got dead animals and manure from stockyards and farms. So we didn't really pay much attention to it.

Finally this friend went through this drowning accident and came down. He was fishing there and (unintelligible) out in the back going to the plant there because I don't let everybody fish there because I don't have the time to keep an eye on them all the time. So he came up to the house one day running and he's just out of breath and white as napkins. He said, "Hey Dad there's a body fishing that came floating out from underneath the building." That was the body. The name of the guy was Bruce (unintelligible)-White I believe. His parents had come up from San Diego to look for him along with everybody else and they couldn't find him. He floated out
from underneath the corner down there from underneath the building and he was so dead his Levis had split. He bloated up, you know.

CD: When was that?

ES: Oh God, when was the day? I can't tell you the date because I'm losing my memory a little bit. I would say it was in the Eighties, during one of the high waters, which came every year. It was sometimes bad. Sometimes it turned out good. Anyhow, the county had to come out and haul them in. they got him in a raft and the guys that were doing it had masks on. He was in pretty bad shape. They notified the kid's parents. Apparently they had been on the marijuana cake. That's what they found in his pockets.

MS: So the plant was shut down for a week or for a longer period of time?

ES: We had periodic scheduled shutdowns and there's always a shutdown after high water because there in high water that dam operates just like a (unintelligible). This is the dam and you kick out these here out of a trough and the four by eight section of water goes down on each board and there are 80 boards or something, 67 boards across. You let them down as the water comes up. When they're all down, you can't control the water coming in. we have big gates out there that we raise up besides- it's going to go over the dam (unintelligible).

It goes over the dam. So then we shut all the machines down because you can't keep the screens clean up above. The intake is so piled up that they can't operate. So then we have that shutdown and there's not a planned one really, but we do shut the machines down at different times for different reasons, but not a general shutdown unless a motor froze up several times. We had to
shut down for a short period of time. We tried not to shut down because they heat the building. That's where the heat comes from in there.

CD: Oh really?

ES: We had one old heating mill to one of the original Hotpoint stoves I think to keep me warm in the office put in after that one. It was pretty cool. We had to keep the water to cool the transformers running all the time. That was kind of a hard thing to do, but we did.

CD: So you were heated just by the generation?

ES: Yes those generators are generating current. They're hot. They put out a lot of heat, hot enough to burn your hands if you touched the core of them.

CD: So it was just sort of a byproduct?

ES: Yes that's exactly right.

MS: I remember Bill saying, after the dam had shut down, that it was really cold out there.

ES: Oh yes. It's the most terrible feeling and the most terrible sound to hear nothing running in that place. That's when we've been out to see him. We've been out there several times to talk to these guys that are out there now. There are two of them I think. To walk in that place and hear
nothing is just kind of spooky. You know that something isn't right. I understand you're going to get- the museum was going to be donated a machine.

MS: A generator and the governor and...

ES: Oh the governor too?

MS: I think so.

ES: Do you know which machine you're getting?

MS: No, but hopefully one of the Woodward ones.

ES: The Woodward governors, that's how (unintelligible).

MS: But I don't know for sure.

ES: The oldest ones are numbered out there, one, three, and four. Two and five are newer but they came in '27, 1927. The other three are original from 1906.
MS: I think they were going to give them the one that wasn't working. Remember the guy was there at Northwestern Energy said that because there's apparently a market for- there's still a market for the turbines.

ES: Yes the turbines and the water wheels. You might be surprised.

MS: So they were going to give the one that didn't work over.

ES: That's probably the one back in the corner.

MS: Yes the first.

ES: Yes that's number one. That's one of the originals. It shut down now I think because it plugged up the stick and they had to run it for a long time. With all this buy-outs and buy-selling crap and all that stuff, they decided not to do anything with them. When they break down, they're (unintelligible).

CD: When did they start to sort of do that, just kind of let things go?

ES: I don't really know that because I wasn't working there when they started that. I imagine when they found out that this Northwestern was going to buy out; I presume they decided that it doesn't generate enough to make a lot of money, so they decided just to let them die down because the older machines are harder to get parts for. As a matter of fact, you probably can't on a lot of them. We built a lot of parts for some of those machines.
CD: Oh you did in your shop there?

ES: Yes. We had helpers. I didn't do the actual building of them. We had guys from other plants that could specialize in one thing or another. The two newest ones are 1927s I think. That's the number two and number five. Number five is the first one when you come in the door, five, four, three, two, and one. There are two exciters(?) out there, small ones. I'm pretty sure they wouldn't give you them because they're special and the same size exciters that they use on some of the destroyers, they tell me they were used for the older destroyers of course.

MS: I don't know whether it was all decided, but it seems like that when he was there, the guy who came to the meeting, he was certainly talking about the one generator that didn't work.

ES: That's the one farthest back. It's one of the originals. Out there now there are the original cost sheets on what those units cost, 5,000 to 9,000, the big sheets. They're sitting in that tray or table in front of the office there. Each one of them has a cost of those machines when they were bought. I remember that. I looked the other day, last week, two weeks ago when I was out there. I saw those sheets were still there. Whoever gets a hold of them has got something. I would suggest that the museum get them because that's (unintelligible).

CD: Yes, exactly.

ES: You want to have somebody that knows what they're doing or that's interested should look at those sheets because all that stuff, these price sheets, since 1906 or 1908 see the originals and...
CD: We saw one of them, but I didn't realize there was more than one.

ES: It's about on a three by six sheet. They were price sheets. I think there's only one or two that have the prices on them. I know that was there two weeks ago when I was out there.

MS: I have seen the one- where they had the different bidding prices.

ES: The ones that they had when I was there weren't in rolls. They were flat out on that big blue table out in front of the (unintelligible). That's where...

CD: We did make a copy of one of them that had the prices on it.

ES: You got a copy of it?

CD: Yes.

ES: If you're lucky you could get the originals that are still out there.

MS: Yes that would be neat to get because I hope that would be one thing that could have been included, but I got to collect all the stuff. I didn't get to choose.
ES: If you (unintelligible) that big long table there in front of the switchboard, you ought to take a look at it.

CD: Yes, okay.

ES: These guys have no interest in it now, and anything out there. They're just there to maintain the presence more than anything else and to control the river until the let down.

CD: How do they feel about being shut down?

ES: These guys aren't attached to our state. They come from different places. One of them is from a steam plant back east. I don't know where the other one is from, but they're not very connected to this. This is a job for them. That's what it is.

CD: Did they come in after the shut down just to keep things ticking?

ES: No they came in before the shutdown, after Northwestern took over.

CD: Oh okay.

ES: These two guys are the final two that are there and all they're doing is keeping things going and running the discharge, the lowering it down now. They're stipulated not to let it down more than an inch an hour or an inch a day I guess. They're talking about a letdown of six or eight
feet. That's quite a few days. That's what they're doing and I don't know if that's going to satisfy the people or not.

CD: For the work being done?

ES: No for what's in the river. The reason they're doing it so slowly is to minimize the amount of silt that's going to come down the river.

MS: It sounded like they were monitoring that. There were lots of monitoring stations.

ES: Yes there are quite a few. My opinion is that they're not going to be able to find that it's not going to go as easy as they think. They're going to run into holdups. They're going to have to stop or something, which isn't going to help. If they stop, then they're going to have to start it up again from a certain point.

CD: So you were working out there when the dam and the reservoir was all designated as a superfund site in '81.

ES: Yes I was. Of course that didn't mean much in those days or at that time. But it got to mean a lot because they were on us like a blanket after that. People started complaining because we had annual shutdowns necessary to maintain the dam. That's where the trickery came in on a couple of them. Basically things were too cut and dry to run it now and it's not going to operate that soon.
CD: This plan has been gone.

ES: The people, whatever is running, is not going to be without incidents. You're talking about a serious problem as far as the silt is concerned back there. That's the part that I am very adamant about. I don't think they're going to take enough out of there because like I've told other people, it's called heavy metals and that's what it is. Heavy metals don't float. They accumulate in the silt that's come down ever since this dam was built. It built up behind it and the dam used to be almost on a pure rock bed. The old timer out there knew it before the rivers were dammed up. He said there were a lot of places that were apparently all gravel-bottom. Since they put the dam in, of course it stopped the silt.

It settled behind it. I don't know. We had a crew, a couple of guys from the hydrology department at the university. I cannot tell you the date, but it was back in the Eighties. They came out there. The pond was frozen over and they took core samples out there at different places. This part of it is paper on the hydrology or whatever they were doing. There were two guys doing it. They found out- they took the different depths of the silt from what they used to call the duck bridge up above to down into the lower end of the pond. Some places that silt was 15 or 20 feet deep. It sat on the bottom and the heavy metal that came in year after year just naturally percolated down. So taking the top off the cake doesn't get at the cake. They want to do something about the heavy metals. There is a lot of it there. There's led, copper, zinc, some mercury, and gold. There's a very small amount of gold, but it was enough to make them question dredging it out of there one time.

CD: Making it worth it?

ES: When the gold price was high back in the Eighties, it was up around 500 like it is now, it's about 650 or 700, and they took a look at it. The engineer I know was telling me about the high
note. That's all I know. It's pure (unintelligible). They took a look at it as a possibility because the other stuff, they thought it could possibly work. It didn't get to it. So they're going to take the town (unintelligible) yards out. I guess they're talking about whatever the hell it is and leave the stuff on the bottom. How they can justify that, unless they can control what's on the bottom, the next whatever filling they're going to have, whatever water is in there is going to work in that stuff that's there. It's going to go into that water. Missoula pretty much owns Missoula water with the exception of a few out of the Bitterroot, comes from the aquifer basin coming out of the Blackfoot that's coming down the Clark Fork River. Once I've been told that by experts.

CD: Do you have any trouble with water when you were out there? Do you remember any drinking water...?

ES: Yes we had trouble right at the dam because the regional well was still there when I came there. It was kind of what they would call a sand hole. The bottom part was mostly a layer of sand from prehistoric river doings there. As the trains got bigger and longer, it kept vibrating the ground and the sand kept falling in. Our water was pretty much affected so we drilled a new well out there at the far end of the camp, just this side of the bridge up there. It was very badly contaminated with iron. Our clothes would turn pink or lavender or orange, whatever you used in it to wash them. The water was hardly palatable. We put up with that for about two years.

Then we tried everything from the Culligan people to bring out filters and stuff. None of it would work so we decided to build a new well. So we drilled the new well right across from the second house, between there and the river track. The new track came in from darn good drinking water, pure water in a matter of 200 feet. One was in the quality of Bitterroot- or the Blackfoot. The other one came in from there. We got the clean water. They put up with that darn water for many years. It wasn't so bad until the sand started caving in. That was causing vibration because it wasn't 100 feet from the river, and the heavy pounding of all the loads that they were carrying on
by the train. Anyhow, they got good water out there. The grounds from the pump they had out there sitting out front of the little square house brings it out of the (unintelligible).

MS: Now I have a map from when (unintelligible) built the dam and I've been trying to find out more about this.

ES: Oh the old bad guy.

MS: The old bad guy. Do you know anything about Riverside Park?

ES: No I don't. I know it's out there. I know there is a place called Riverside out here.

MS: (unintelligible). This is the park that we planned and built to be a miniature, like they did in (unintelligible). So there were only three houses (unintelligible).

ES: There are four houses out there.

MS: Yes so this is originally the (unintelligible) and the three.

ES: (unintelligible) but I don't know.

MS: I have no idea whether this is accurate or not.
ES: Yes.

MS: This is the park he had built up and the thinker came out and stopped there on Sundays so people could.

ES: This had to be the street car line.

CD: Oh the rail line was…

ES: The rail line was over here. (unintelligible). Yes, it was Northern Pacific Railroad.

CD: The street cars neared to where the access road is now that you drive in.

MS: The street car line is the bridge…

ES: The street car, you come off the street car line right where you turn off Highway 200 to come down to the dam. That's where it is.

CD: Did you go in there?
ES: No that's the highway bridge. There used to be a bridge there. There's just a turnoff. As you come off the foot of Brickyard Hill on this side, they cut through the old right-of-way for the railroad. They cut down and hauled it out and got it flattened out where there are big fancy houses right in front of Brickyard on the south side. I'm not aware of where this was at the time. There was no sign of it.

CD: In 1911, in the newspapers there was a lot of publicity about it. Then in 1912, I couldn't find anything.

ES: I don't think it materialized. I never heard anybody talk about it out there.

MS: They had a whole page on *The Missoulian* in 1911.

ES: They had it on the park?

MS: At the park, yes.

ES: It was projected or it was done?

MS: It was done. It was opened, but then I never could find anything after 1911. I didn't look in 1913.

ES: I don't know anybody out there that ever talked about a park out there, Riverside Park.
MS: Yes. It had a dance floor.

ES: Holy smokes.

CD: What else did it have?

MS: A dance floor and a little pavilion.

CD: Where did you get the plan?

MS: In the archives at the university. I have a lot of the Montana Power Company papers.

ES: I'll be darned. It's all laid out there too?

MS: Yes.

ES: Gosh, that has to be over there in the flat some place.

MS: Some place, yes. It's hard to find people to talk about it. The Bonner pictures are not...
CD: There is a couple that sort of say Riverside Park, with a question mark, like they're not sure.

ES: I'll be damned. No, I cannot tell you where that was. It has to be on that flat over there. Where's the interstate here? Here's the river and this is...this is the road down to the dam. Boy, it looks to me like this would have to be right down where a new trailer park, where the new homes are built out there. We used to call that the- the Trigs, that's all it was. No one was out there. It was kind of a parking place for college kids. There used to be a road that ran through it. Now it's (unintelligible) mobile home type things or whatever it is. So that had to be probably where that was because, hell, the river is right here. These would be just a matter of a couple hundred feet from it. I never heard anybody talk about Riverside Park as being an entity. It always the location. That's all I ever knew about it. I never saw anything. And there's nothing to stand for it where it used to be.

MS: Yes. I think it's curious that they moved it.

ES: Somebody could walk that for you, could probably tell you, like using this.

MS: Oh that's a good idea.

CD: Yes send somebody out there.

ES: If there was any big structure or construction out there involved in that, like a couple of yards worth...
(Clock ringing)

MS: It had a dance floor.

ES: I'll be darned.

MS: Meeting room and refreshments...

ES: It must have been like a fairground.

MS: Yes.

ES: A carnival. I don't know. I never saw a picture of it or ever heard anything about it.

MS: That's interesting just in itself. It confirms what I've not been able to find too.

ES: I'll be darned. That's the first time I even saw a drawing of it. It is zoned or surveyed there (unintelligible) end of the street.

CD: Those little avenues.
MS: That's interesting too that there were only three houses.

ES: Yes there are four. I bought one for a dollar and tore it down just to get rid of it because they weren't going to rent them anymore. The company used to rent their houses to employees or supervisors in all their company dams up at Kerr Dam and Thompson Falls, here, and Great Falls. They always used to rent to the employees so they would then due them pay, actually (unintelligible) if you were unlucky, it cost you thirty dollars a month to live in, which is right now, kind of inevitable. Anyway, all of them were nice places. They were big things.

CD: (unintelligible) the old bad guy?

ES: I read more about it since, but we went down to Jerome, Arizona one time and did a little gold (unintelligible). And we stopped at Jerome and went to a mining museum. Up there we came out to this guy named Clark. There's this picture there and he had a dam up in Missoula, Montana. He's a real wealthy copper baron and all that stuff. We see the history of him and here we are down in the middle of the damn desert. This guy's name comes up in this picture in this museum. It tells all about him. I thought that was pretty neat because he worked at the dam where I came from, or built it. I guess he was kind of mean.

MS: It sounds like he wasn't a very nice person.

CD: Did you have any opinion about the dam that he built or the powerhouse? Did he do a good job on that?

ES: Oh I talked to him several times.
CD: He did?

ES: He didn't really. Well no, at the time they built it, they way they built in those days, they didn't use great big piles of cement and stuff like that. They built it out of what they had on hand. This guy was into the lumber business also, the timber, and all the timber was right on hand around here, right close to him. So they (unintelligible) eight to ten feet square like a log house, and then you fill it with rock. Then when you get them built to the right measurements, then you put a rope over them and that's the spillway. That's usually a problem. Then it comes to the top of it and they run a dam and they want to raise the water, so they put these, what they call flashboards in there at an angle. I think they're at a 32 degree angle. I forget it now. They're built that way. And they're 67 feet across, each one, I said four, but three and a half is what it is. Each one as it's let down at a certain water height, spills so much water, cubic feet per second, which is critical because you have to know how much you're spilling to how much is coming in and how much machine (unintelligible). The fact that it was so old and almost every year and usually every two years we had to replace a lot of the planks on top of the spillway, stuff coming over and stuff beating down on them and getting across them. It just tears them up. They're put down. They're two by 12 timbers laying one on top of another and there's a base under them of course under the same thing. they're held out by ten spikes. It's a lot of work to do that. it's rough lumber. We had to go up to almost Drummond to get the lumber we needed. If it isn't rough cut like that to our dimension then it has to be all fir, not pine.

CD: Why that? So it doesn't rot?

ES: It doesn't rot as fast and it's got more resistance when you hit it. It's got wider growth rings on it. It's denser wood. It's always the fir.
CD: And there's no kind of treating that happens?

ES: No it's just regular. They wouldn't let us.

CD: Oh right because (unintelligible).

ES: Yes. Any lumber has to be treated and it always has copper treatment of one form or another.

CD: So what about the original dam? Would they have soaked it in any (unintelligible) oil?

ES: They probably would have used, at the time then, some of that stuff had asphalt (unintelligible).

CD: Just put it on it then?

ES: They dipped them in or coated them. They probably dipped them because they used so much- the timbers that make up the cribbing are usually eight by eight or ten by tens. Then there are eight foot squares or ten foot squares and then they're filled with rock. The rock came right off the cliff there. It was that handy. The pine from all the trees around here and the Fur came from around here and up the Blackfoot, I presume, Clark owned a lot of timber land up there and used his own stuff.
CD: Do you know would the timber for the cribbing have been milled in Bonner even though he didn't own that?

ES: They had to have Western Mill.

CD: We didn't know that until 1911.

MS: He had a mill in Petty Creek.

CD: So he would have brought it.

MS: Which moved over from? 

ES: Petty Creek is right over here.

MS: He moved it from there to...

CD: Maybe he would have milled his lumber over here. That's interesting considering that (unintelligible) Daly's mill like that.

ES: These guys did this for a reason. They accumulated this property of this timber, whatever in the heck you want to call it, with something in mind. He had to have material for the mines up
there in Butte, stopes(?) what they called them, the heavy timber to hold the mines open so they didn't fall on you. So what he really did was get everything handy. When he did it, then it was built to supply the mill over there, Bonner Mill, which is not the Bonner Mill but some gals own it, the Simpsons.

MS: And the electric street car line.

ES: Yes that came in because he had the dam to run the machinery over at the mill and it generated enough at that time, well hell, he decided, "Why don't I put a street car line in to Missoula?" And they did. That ran pretty good for quite a long time.

MS: So it wasn't in the grid, the power, when you first came?

ES: There was no grid. At that time, that's too far back for me to remember, but he built it just for his own use. Whatever else he could provide- I think they provided some to the city at the time. It would have been a meager amount at the time. Nobody had anything. When I was a kid, they had one light hanging down from the middle of the ceiling with a bulb in it. That was it. That's 84 years ago. But anyhow, it was his idea for the lumber mill to provide electricity for the mill and it turned out he could provide it for the street car line too because I think the street car line- I don't remember when it was put in, but it was right in that time period. I think it was right about 1910 or 1911. I've been around for quite a few years. There are all kinds of signs of it, like I mentioned coming down Brickyard Hill. You see where there are nice houses built out there on the road that goes into East Missoula and then a bit farther on, there's kind of a big V that used to be the streetcar line.

CD: Oh (unintelligible)?
ES: Yes and they cut the berm out because it was all filled. They got some usable land in there. Like I said, when you come out to the dam from Highway 200, the minute you turn there you're coming about 50 feet off the old mill right-of-way for the streetcar line. Of course that's all been preempted now by people who got (unintelligible) on it and didn't want that and they cut it off. They took it out.

MS: When you were working there where was the electricity going? Was it going to…?

ES: It was going into a grid. It went into a grid. A grid is a large area of power brought in by a generating plant. Then where it goes, where that kilowatt goes, you have no idea. It just goes into a whole bunch- into this river pump. It's used up.

CD: Do you know if there was ever a mine that put power directly into the Milwaukee electric line?

ES: Oh yes.

CD: Did it go from the dam directly or would it just go into the generator?

ES: It went into the grid. I think their power came from this substation- it was right on the other side of Higgins Bridge. There used to be a steam plant there also.

CD: Okay, so it wasn't ever like a direct line between?
ES: No. It didn't generate enough to do that. Your electric line is DC current, the train. That's why they have these converter stations there every so often. The generating current is AC to DC to run that train. There has to be a converter station (unintelligible) out east of town here just a short ways. It's by Clinton. There's a frame building. There's one down here on the Mullan Road. They had to be there because DC current doesn't pass very easy. It loses power. So they had to have these reducer stations every so often all along the way. When it just went into the grid, it did I guess provide power at the time for everything around the mill, which included their houses over there. They had a string of company houses over on the other side. They were provided. I don't think it ever went into general circulation. It just went into the grid. They weren't a power company. They distributed power out of their own enterprise.

CD: So when you look at the power house, there's that spot where the lines come out in the corner there.

ES: From the front?

CD: Yes. And they just seem to go over on sort of ordinary lines. Do they just tie into the grid at one of the power (unintelligible) there?

ES: Yes there's a power (unintelligible) where they connect to up there.

CD: And that's as complicated as it is? It just comes out, ties right into an ordinary little...

ES: Yes.
CD: Okay.

ES: In fact with the output, it has to last the carrying line up there.

CD: It just seems like it's not that much when it comes out of the building.

ES: I guess.

CD: It seems like (unintelligible).

ES: The generation from the plant was, at maximum, was three megawatts, 3,000 kilowatts an hour. That's the most it could do continuously. That was all the machines running, which usually always depends on the river flow. So in mid-winter you've got one machine going, maybe if you're lucky. Then in high water, you've got all five of them going and wishing you had more.

CD: That's when you hit 3,000?

ES: Yes that's when you were (unintelligible). It didn't do that very often. The machines were so old, at my time they were old then. The best you could do was about 2,500.

CD: Most of the time?
ES: Yes. That was probably the maximum. That isn't bad when you think about the age of the machinery.

CD: I've heard 3.4 is the max.

ES: That might be listed as the max.

CD: Yes when it was built?

ES: Yes. Nobody ever hit that.

MS: On the sheets, when they were trying to sell it...

ES: Yes I'm sure.

CD: It even went back to day one.

ES: Ask them to prove it and they can't do it. I think it says that on the big sign they had up there before they took it down. Anyhow, it was a three megawatt plant.

MS: So the inside has that long panel where all the- was marble underneath?
ES: Yes. That used to be marble. All of it was marble. When they replaced them, we used one of it for a table that was up at a camp up there, as a barbecue table. They had lots of holes in it where they had the meters and everything on it. That used to be marble, an inch and a half thick or two inches.

MS: So it was replaced or was it painted over?

ES: They replaced. It they painted it over.

(Tape missing audio)

MS: I can't believe I just did that.

CD: Okay we're very technically challenged.

ES: Yes.

MS: They made it (unintelligible) check this out again (unintelligible). Okay.

ES: (unintelligible).
ES: One of the things they don't tell you about, but that's why your rent is probably cheaper too, the fact that you don't own that house. When you're through you're through and that house stays there. You don't have anything to do with it except then it's maintained by the company too. That's one reason why they got rid of them at the Milltown Dam because they were old. They were 1900 and 1910 houses. That's older than anything in this town I think.

MS: What was it heated by?

ES: Ours were all heated by electricity right from the plant. Back in the late sixties or early seventies, they put in a big chipper at the mill out there. They could start that chipper up in the morning and knock the plant off the system. It took that much power. It had 3,000 horsepower. It was an induction motor so when they flipped the switch to start it up, it would take all the power in the world it can to get that thing started. As it picks up speed, it takes less. If it was a cold day or a low-generating day, it would jump the whole plant. It wiped out the generation.

(Tape missing audio for several minutes)

CD: Sometimes it was just going there and it wouldn't go in.

ES: Yes and then when the mill took more power to start that one machine, then our whole group of them could make, like I say, it's in a low generation period, like maybe low water or the middle of winter when the river is low. Whatever was running in the back would just go off the system.
CD: It seems like they'd call you up and say, "Hey we're about to start that big machine."

ES: Oh that's happened and it did finally happen. I got in connection with the guy than ran the place, Ty Jacobsen and the guy that was in charge of the current over there. I told him what happened and we got to be pretty good then. They'd tell me whenever they were going to start the machine up. I always knew it was going to be every morning. So I was ready for it. you can't stop it. if they want to put that machine on, they know it does it. It's that big of a machine and they have to have it.

CD: So if your plant went down, would the machine stop?

ES: Their machine?

CD: Yes.

ES: No because once it's on the line, it would be kicking right off the distribution. We're just a feeder. So you feed into it and if it's between you and that line, if it's needed, it will knock you off.

(Tape missing audio for nearly five minutes)

[END]