

**Oral History Number: 216-001**  
**Interviewee: Vincent “Vince” Simons**  
**Interviewer: Ed Mosier**  
**Date of Interview: November 1988**

Ed Mosier: Okay. You say that they started when, Vince?

Vincent Simons: They started hiring men to set it up the 19th of August.

EM: 1933.

VS: 1933.

EM: Is that about what it looked like, in number one there?<sup>1</sup>

VS: Yeah, see the derricks up there. When they first started, the derricks wasn't there. Here's a picture of the camp in Pioneer. See, I got this very same picture here.

EM: Okay. But this is the only one I've got here.

VS: See, that derrick came up later. They set that up later. You can see the hull (?), there's some of the hull set up there.

EM: That is in 1933?

VS: Yeah—

EM: Okay, this picture right here is 1933. And about what time? September, would you say, in '33?

VS: No, that was later. I'd say that was probably October.

EM: October '33.

VS: Because, see, the derricks, that's what they lifted all the stuff onto. They didn't need it to start with. If I get this starting picture here—

EM: Well, I've got a set here.

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<sup>1</sup> The photos discussed in this interview are held in Archives and Special Collections as #69.0019, 88.0095, 88.0096, 89.0124, 89.0125, 89.0127, 89.0131, 89.0138, 89.0139, and 89.0143.

VS: These were all marked and dated, when I got home—

EM: Now this is when they laid the keel. This is the keel here, isn't it?

VS: Yes. I think I got that earlier than that. I have a... this one [unintelligible]. Got numbers on them. I had mine all numbered.

EM: I've got mine numbered too.

VS: This is number four.

EM: Which one?

VS: This picture. This is number seven.

EM: That's what I've got too. I got number four too. See, this is number four here, see?

VS: Yeah. This one here is about six. There's six. That's seven.

EM: Now, I just want to identify, this is number five. This is when they put up the uprights? Here?

VS: That's this one. This is number six.

EM: That's okay. I got mine numbered. I have to go by my numbers.

VS: Well, my numbers are—

EM: In sequence.

VS: Oh. See, this fellow that took pictures, he'd sell them to us.

EM: What do you call this construction right here?

VS: This is the bow end of it. This is the stern end.

EM: And this is the bow up here?

VS: This is the main deck—the first deck that you'd walk in on. This was inside of the hull, this part here. You can go down in holes down in there. Then they put these sticks...these here big heavy beams up. [unintelligible].

EM: This is still looking at the bow end here?

VS: Yeah. This is all the front end, the bow.

EM: That's the bow end?

[Break in audio]

VS: Crane.

EM: That's the crane. Now how much could that lift?

VS: It lift everything we'd put on there. I wouldn't know how much that thing—

EM: That's the derrick, right?

VS: [unintelligible]

EM: Now here's a picture—this is number eight in my series—but anyway, this is the machine shop?

VS: That's the machine shop.

EM: Okay. What's in these bags here? What's all these bags here? Do you know what was in those?

VS: Oh, that was a caulking compound. They use a kind of a wool or something. See, they had to seal all those boards for cut out slopes—the decking and the bow on the sides.

EM: And they had to be caulked.

VS: They had to be prepped with that com...what the hell did they use? Tack of some kind. Those were specialized boat gunners from Seattle that did that caulking. And they put tar on top of that so they would never...and they [unintelligible].

EM: Okay, this is number nine here. Now they've got the uprights up. This is the main super-structure here that's going to hold the buckets?

VS: Yeah. That holds up a lot of the weight.

[speaking at the same time]

EM: —the bucket ladder?

VS: Yeah. See how they framed them off. Like how the beams run this way.

EM: Now we're up to where they can start putting the decking on here.

VS: Yeah, that decking was all laid. Of course, they kept working and—

[break in audio]

EM: Now this number ten. There's another picture of the super-structure here. What'd this boiler...they use that boiler for?

VS: That was to keep the dredge warm. That sat right over on this...let's see, what's port and starboard, I forget now. [laughs]

EM: This is starboard over here, and this is port.

VS: Yeah, that's right. This is the port side. That was set right over here on this far side. Sat right about in there.

EM: On the starboard side?

VS: Yeah.

EM: Up front.

VS: Towards the front. It was...just before they went out of the housing.

[Break in audio]

EM: What is this called?

VS: That's that front gantry.

EM: Gantry?

VS: Yep. That's the big gantry, front.

EM: What did that lift? That lifted the bucket ladder?

VS: Oh no. It was a bigger set came out here. This is just... what they use that frame gantry for? Just a kind of a brace gantry. But the big gantry was real heavy, and it stuck out on a slope here.

EM: Okay, we'll get to that later. That's a light gantry there. Is there anything significant about that picture?

VS: That's well along in the construction.

EM: This is the ladder going up here.

VS: That's just for men to walk up and down—get off.

EM: What's this up here? What's this up here?

VS: Well, that's where that screen goes...Is that screen in there? Let's see.

EM: Not yet. Screen isn't in yet.

VS: Isn't that the screen frames there?

EM: No. That's the frame for it, but it isn't in yet. That's coming up next, I think.

VS: Oh, yeah. It sets inside. I see now what it is.

EM: A screen framing there?

VS: These beams...what the heck were they? Eighteen by eighteen or something like that. They were heavy, wooden beams. And that was the finest lumber that you could buy. They wasn't a knot in them. It was out from the Washington—

EM: Fir, it was fir?

VS: No—

EM: What size did you say they were?

VS: What?

EM: About what size did you say they were? These—

VS: Those beams? Some of them were 18 by 18. I know that front gantry one, they were big.

[speaking at the same time]

EM: —Douglas Fir.

VS: And the decking was. There wasn't any flooring to put in the [unintelligible]. Not a knot in that decking.

EM: Is that right?

VS: It was all tapered, see, so it would be tied. When they laid it down on these frames here. It would be tied together on the bottom. These were upside down on this...when they put them up. And those guys [unintelligible] from the bottom. See this was a big plank [unintelligible].

[Break in audio]

EM: Now this is a close-up. That's the screen, the heavy screen.

VS: Yeah, that was before it was ever lifted up. They were putting it together on the ground.

EM: Everything's in place there except the actual...that's the screen drum frame.

VS: That's the screen frame. The screen plates aren't in yet. They didn't put them in until after it was in the bolts. Then they put all those big—

EM: The finer screens [unintelligible]

VS: [unintelligible]—

[Break in audio]

VS: —guy on the dumb thing? No.

EM: No, there's no guy standing on it. No.

VS: Paul Trost...let's see, was he on that picture? Yeah, Paul Trost. He was a cat. Goddang, that guy could run them beams that was only that wide, he'd run on them. Way up high. No, Paul Trost isn't on this picture.

[Break in audio]

EM: The bridge is getting a lot of it built up to here. This is the bucket tunnel here, isn't it? This one where the buckets went?

VS: Let me see now.

EM: I was looking at the bow end of it.

VS: Yeah. See, this picture...there's a bull gear, and here's one [unintelligible]...you don't have this picture.

EM: I do. I have it here someplace here.

VS: There's the bull gear right...you can see that's the bull gear I believe.

EM: That's the bow.

VS: Let's see...you got the house on there? That's the winch room, that there. Is that [unintelligible]—

EM: [speaking at the same time] Yeah. That's on there. Well, not yet. The winch room—I got another picture for that. Now this is the—

VS: [unintelligible] This is 22.

EM: Showing the bull gear on top. And the bucket tunnel.

VS: This is the bucket tunnel right here, see, and it runs all the way back to that.

EM: Okay.

[Break in audio]

VS: This [unintelligible].

EM: Yeah. You can't recognize anybody on the stand there. Okay.

[Break in audio]

EM: In 17, you don't recognize those people, okay.

[Break in audio]

EM: —what that is on the dredge...on the—

VS: Yeah. What is that on the frame?

EM: I don't know.

VS: I don't think...that is—

[Break in audio]

VS: I think they call it kind of an A-frame

EM: That was the A-frame here.

VS: Yeah but—

EM: But you don't know that that load is there, it's just a bundle of stuff?

VS: [unintelligible].

EM: What's this here?

VS: That is the main mast of the crane. See then the crane would run through the cable here and here and then they'd lift. Yeah, this went up first, and they took up this arm here. This was the main frame of the crane, and that was a wooden crane [laughs]—that wasn't steel. Now those wires were—cables. They had a creaking [unintelligible] when they lift things.

EM: But it was Douglas fir. That's good timber.

VS: Yeah, that was...that came in a piece—in sections. They didn't set that up, only that they set it up straight. That was quite a job they'd lift that crane up. How they got that started you know...they had was dead-men, dug cables run through those [unintelligible], and they'd pick that up and they anchored these long cables. You don't see those cables on the [unintelligible].

EM: [unintelligible; speaking at the same time]

VS: [unintelligible]. They went all directions. And this here—that was a swinging boom. They could swing around that main post...all the way around. They did that with cables with this winch down in here. And the cables would do the lifting.

EM: I don't know what that is, a bucket of bolts or something I guess?

VS: This fellow up here is Paul Trost. I could remember that because he was always...he'd always guide these guys where to put the loads down. He'd guide them down, and he'd haul them. He was good. He was a hell of a good—

EM: Paul Trost. We don't have his picture?

VS: No, I don't have a picture.

EM: Now is that a transformer?

VS: Where?

EM: There.

VS: Where's—

EM: On the crane?

VS: This thing up here?

EM: Yes.

VS: That's that save-all. See those bull gears are on. See, I said there. Yeah, that's the save-all. They'd lead that down onto that bucket line—tunnel. They dumped in the top and this was a save-all.

EM: It picked up spill over from the gravel?

VS: Whatever it was [unintelligible] out of the buckets, as they dumped. Some would stick tight. It was a hell of a [unintelligible], nozzles shot in those buckets. See, that was gold came out. We got good clean ups out of that save-all. See, with the save-all, that saved the remnants that didn't fall into the screen. It fell in here and then fit into the screen way up there.

EM: Okay, that's the save-all?

VS: Yep.

EM: Okay.

[Break in audio]

EM: Now this shows the tunnel, and also shows the winch room up here, right?

VS: Yeah, that's the winch room.

EM: I think this is what—

VS: And there's that round cluster.

EM: I think it is. Looks like it's sitting on top of the bull wheel.

VS: It isn't down in place yet. That goes way down—that was the main drag shaft.

EM: For the bucket?

VS: It goes to the big bull gears. Pretty sure. [unintelligible].

ES: Well, something had to drive the... [speaking at the same time]. Something had to drive those—

VS: It had the little pinions on it that throws those big gears. They had one of those broke out one time, and they tried to blame me for it—throwing something in them. [unintelligible] was working on that dredge after I did. And this [unintelligible] up ahead of me, and I went and told to [unintelligible] and I says, “I want a raise.” I talked to Claus [C.J. Wohlers], Claus was my—

EM: Boss. But this picture number, 920 here shows that, that’s their drive gear for the—

VS: The drive gear and the shaft and pinions.

EM: Shaft and pinion for the buckets.

VS: Yeah. That rolls those old big bull gears.

EM: This was an electric dredge wasn’t it?

VS: Electric operated. We have the picture where that...did we take that picture down already? Did you write anything about that one?

EM: Not yet

VS: Okay. This goes ahead of that one—

EM: Well, don’t make much difference. I’ve cut this [unintelligible]—

[Break in audio]

EM: You don’t recognize any body?

VS: No, no. They got their backs turned and everything else. I was probably in the bunch.

EM: What about 21? That’s just showing the crew eating lunch or something.

VS: Yeah, that’s the crew eating lunch.

EM: Okay. That’s—

[Break in audio]

EM: Number 22, yeah. That's the screen frame, okay, without plates. Okay. Now—

[Break in audio]

EM: Now, this shows...those are the big bull wheels there.

VS: Yeah, those are the bull wheels. Oh, that cluster is...there you can see that kind of a cluster. Now, that's a save-all. That's where the buckets dumped in then, see. They went over the top. These bull gears pulled those buckets. That's a upper tumbler, that's what that is. That's the upper tumbler. Well, that shaft was in that tumbler, and these wheels were hooked onto that shaft with the tumbler.

EM: I see.

[Break in audio]

EM: This shows the wheel house, that's 924. What are those two big—

VS: Those are big steel plates—there's two of them. There's four of them, see. There's four of them—two on each one—and that's where those big beams went up there to the big gantry.

EM: Okay. [pauses] Where'd the buckets fit in relation to that? The buckets weren't in here, were they?

VS: No. The buckets didn't do anything there. That was only the framework. It went up to the head gantry that did lift the buckets up and down. These were [unintelligible] routes here. That's would stiffen that whole housing. See, they had [unintelligible] in the dredge. Those great big heavy [unintelligible]—

EM: Weights.

VS: —two-inch [unintelligible] with turn buckles in them. These here black lines.

EM: Oh yeah.

VS: And when they hooked that on the bottom of these and this frame ones up here, that helped to hold everything sturdy—rigid.

EM: It'd have to.

[Break in audio]

VS: I don't think we're giving 15 cents...10 or 15 cents apiece for each—

EM: For each picture.

VS: And a lot of guys bought them.

EM: Sure, well these must be [unintelligible].

VS: This here is the [unintelligible] going up. This is the head of—

EM: Yeah, it's some of that other construction. That's the winch room—

VS: Here you can see there isn't even a floor up there yet. That was the top deck. You could walk up from the outside.

EM: I was up there once. See, I only lived a mile from this thing, you know. Over there on Pikes Peak Creek at Frank Brand's (?)—

[Break in audio]

EM: Over at Frank Brand's is just where I was raised.

VS: On which one?

EM: Well you know where Dick Morris (?) and Claus lived over there—

VS: Yeah.

EM: —before he got married. You know where Dick lived over there at there at their old homestead on Pike's Creek? Our ranch was right next to it in the creek bottom there. Remember that?

VS: Yeah...let's see.

EM: Frank Brand's house—

VS: Frank Seal (?) lived in that house later on.

EM: Yeah, yeah. Frank Brand owned it to start with, and then they sold to [unintelligible].

[Break in audio]

VS: Up that creek, I half owned...I was in ownership on that land too. What place was that? It was a [unintelligible]. I know that name too. [unintelligible] because they had ground right before they quit digging.

EM: They could have swung right down and come right up Pike's Peak Creek, too.

VS: Yeah, but they didn't. They came down along the hill, and that's where they died. That's where it quit.

EM: They hit the big boulders in there too.

VS: Well, it didn't pay as good.

[Break in audio]

EM: [unintelligible] on that.

VS: [unintelligible], my uncle, owned that.

EM: Oh, he was your uncle?

VS: Oh yeah, [unintelligible].

EM: I know [unintelligible]...you see—

VS: [unintelligible].

EM: [unintelligible] used to work for us. You remember that old Model-T Ford he had with the brass—

VS: I wasn't there then, actually. I moved there in '31.

EM: Oh, okay. This was before your time.

VS: [unintelligible] to set this up, and then they did...nothing happened. So I worked on ranches around. Then in '33, in August, they got somebody from California to put up the money to set it up. Mosier was his name.

EM: Mosier was his name. He was the financier.

VS: He was the financier.

EM: And kind of a silent partner. He never came up there hardly, did he?

VS: He was up...I seen him once or so. Kind of grey when he came up. Old fellow. And Cleveland was a part owner too. That Cleveland come up there a lot.

EM: Okay, just a minute, I'll get this—

[Break in audio]

EM: You say that there was another Mosier dredge.

VS: Yeah, number 2. That was the biggest—third biggest—dredge in the world.

EM: And where was that? Over by Immigrant?

VS: You know where Chico Hot Springs?

EM: Yeah.

VS: It was just above...It was in the old town of Chico, they set it up. That was an all-steel constructed dredge, except the outside wall housing.

EM: Yeah, but it had a steel hull.

VS: Oh, it had a steel hull. We put them sections all together.

EM: Did you work on that one too?

VS: I started on it almost immediately when they started. They only had in three or four sections of the hull bolted together, and I helped bolt them together. They'd bring up them sections—they were all—

EM: This is over at Chico Hot Springs?

VS: Yeah, they were all plugged with corks in the holes. Then we'd knock the cork out and shove a bolt in there with corking on it and the guy on the other side would put corking and a washer and a nut on it, tighten them right up. That's the way we set that one up. [laughs]

EM: That was a bigger...the buckets were bigger over there—

VS: Oh, they were bigger.

EM: What size buckets were on that one?

VS: They were 9, they were 11 something—11 and a third or 11 and a half. I don't know for sure now.

EM: Yardage?

VS: Cubic feet. Nine cubic feet by—

EM: Okay, on 26—

VS: I almost had a picture of that, but I don't.

EM: But that just a bull gear going up there.

VS: That's one of the bull gears. That's one of the bull gears. There was two of them. If a man was standing beside of that, he wouldn't be—

EM: —very big.

VS: Be about like that.

EM: About what do you say was that across then—about 20 feet?

VS: No, they weren't 20 feet.

EM: Fifteen, something like that.

VS: No, they weren't that. They were about 15-20 feet, something like that.

I have a picture. See, that's this picture right there. I got a picture here, I just looked at it. Both gears set.

EM: These drove the bucket chain, didn't they?

VS: Yeah. The pinions drove...Here's the one I was looking at. That's the bull gear, here both of them are in—

EM: And this is 27. That just shows the dredge—

VS: Yeah, the bull gears aren't up there yet.

EM: Aren't they?

VS: No, they're not on there. They'd stand way up here. They're higher than the winch room.

EM: But now about...November, that must be about November, '33, isn't it?

VS: Yes. We started operating...it was completed in December.

EM: Now, what do they call that now?

VS: That? See, the screen revolved inside of that. That was a big...

EM: That's a hopper?

VS: No, the gravel from this hopper...This is the hopper. Then it run into the screen, then it just revolved and this distributed the gravel.

EM: That's the sluice head there, isn't it?

VS: Yes.

EM: Sluice heads? Yeah, I guess you call them—

VS: Yeah, this is the distributor. That's housing—distributor housing. I'll call it that.

EM: Okay, distributed the gravel down over the sluice—

VS: Yeah. See, that was on a slope, I guess, and as it turned over, then the gravel to wash out of those screens and go down those different...out of those little different holes.

EM: Into the sluices?

VS: Into the sluices. That's this bottom part. See, you can just about count them—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. I think there were nine tables on each side.

EM: There were nine sluice tables?

VS: I think there were nine on each side. Could have—

[Break in audio]

EM: This small picture here. This is 29. Now, that is...that's the one—the wheels are in and the winch house is in, and they're putting...what's this? The back end of the winch house, or what is it?

VS: No, that's this thing. Here it's here, and they're just lowering it in there, see. That's that distributor. That's [unintelligible]. That's this one here.

I know that darn distributor...this hopper real well. See, it's going down in there.

That a bull gear? That's a bull gear.

EM: Yeah, that's...the bull gear that's in there.

VS: Yeah, here's the bull gear.

EM: Yeah, that's it. That's right.

VS: Well, that's just about this picture here, only this is on the other side.

EM: Yeah, that's right. Okay.

VS: This is 23 on mine.

EM: Oh, is it? Twenty-six. I had November. Oh, this is November, wasn't it?

VS: That's yours, that's not mine.

EM: That's 27, yeah, okay. Then 28. Now, this shows the dredge operating here.

VS: Yeah, see, I don't have that picture.

EM: That's the bucket line.

VS: There's the bucket line. Here's that front gantry, and those plates you asked me about?

EM: Yes.

VS: See them old beams on the way up here and this one up, and there were plates on this top of these timbers, and that...see those cables, how they held them back?

EM: And this raised and lowered the bucket chain.

VS: This was a gap chain. Here's the winch...here's your big...oh, those big block and tackle [unintelligible]. And the cable runs through them, but it went on top of the deck into the winch room there, where the winches were, and this was the bucket line. See, there's water in there now. I didn't get that picture.

EM: Okay, that's the front gantry.

VS: That's the front gantry there.

EM: Yeah, that held the bucket chain.

VS: Yeah. I'll just step on out of the way here. I don't want to mix [unintelligible]. Now, each bucket was nine-and-a-half cubic foot.

EM: Nine-and-a-half cubic feet. Okay, and how many buckets?

VS: [laughs] I can't remember that. There was a heck of a lot of them. They were hooked one end to the other, that's where they linked. The back end of the bucket hooked to the front of the other bucket. That made the bucket-line chain.

EM: Continuous chain.

VS: I couldn't possibly tell you how many buckets there were. There was a hell of a lot of them.

EM: About how many a minute would they dump?

VS: How many did they dump a minute? Gosh...They was just steady dumping. The [unintelligible] just kept a-going, dumping. There were six sides to that [unintelligible].

EM: Would you say about three a minute or two a minute?

VS: Oh, it was more than that.

EM: Was it?

VS: I'd say five or six at least.

EM: Five or six a minute?

VS: Oh heck, yes! Quite a lot, maybe more. But I'll tell you what they done, they...I can't remember what they did.

EM: Now, the bucket chain went down how far?

VS: They could dig down... [pauses] I know more about that [unintelligible] dredge. [laughs]. This one here...how deep did they dig?

[Break in audio]

EM: —not close enough. You said about how far now? About 30, about 40 feet?

VS: Forty feet under a ladder and 20 above. That'd be 60. They'd carry a 20 foot bank. Yeah, they did. They carried a 20-foot banks sometimes. That wasn't very often. Most of the time we was going downhill, but when we dredged up hill, that bank was a good 20-feet high [unintelligible] before they turn around. Winter was coming on. They wanted to get the hell out of there.

[speaking at the same time]

VS: —there was a lot of ground they could've dredged.

EM: See, Artie (?) was related—

[Break in audio]

EM: When did you come too...Vince, when did you come into Gold Creek area?

VS: It was around September of 1931, on the 24th to the 28th, in that area.

EM: Yes, okay. And—

VS: There was nothing to do, that was Depression in South Dakota.

EM: Yes, and every place else—

VS: And I helped my dad all summer. Montana never knew what a depression was. So when I went...My dad was stuck combining, and I got a letter from my Uncle Bernard. He was there that spring, and he said, "If I call you, will you come?"

EM: Now this is Bernard Savre (??)?

VS: Bernard Savre. He says, "If I give you a call or send you, write you, a letter, will you come out? And I'll get you a job." See, he was figuring on this dredge going in. So when he sent me the notice, and I told my dad, "I'm going out"—we didn't have no money—I told my dad, I said, "Take me down to the railroad. I'm going to hitch the railroad, hook the railroad," you know, hobo. I was going to be a hobo."

EM: Hop a boxcar?

VS: I was going to hop a boxcar. Now my dad took me down there—and I didn't have no money and I didn't take any from him all summer because I knew he didn't have much—he gave me

two silver dollars. I didn't want them. "Dad," I said, "keep it." I knew he was hard up. He forced me to take them two dollars—

[Break in audio]

VS: —I was way down in the southern part. Cut through Billings. And Livingston, and Helena...let's see. We got to Livingston, those fellows, "We got to go out and bum something to eat." So we got to—there was four of us—we all went our way, and the boy from Missoula, he was a little bit afraid. I said, "Don't worry. Let's just go out, walk, and come back," I said, but "You don't have to beg." Couldn't. He was too scared. He was afraid. Anyway, when they came back, I didn't bum anything. I went to the stores and bought mine, and I spent—

EM: With the two dollars you had?

VS: I spent 65 cents. Things were cheap. You could buy a loaf of bread for eight cents, and I bought a bunch of meat for 35 cents—all sliced meats—and some cookies and stuff. That cost me 65 cents. So we had a good [unintelligible]. Those other two guys, they went to the houses. Here they come back, one had a brand new overcoat on he'd talked a woman out of it, and a lot of food. The other guy did the same thing, only he didn't get a new overcoat. But we got in a reaper at Sheridan. It was cold, there was snow on the ground. We got in a reaper and stayed in on that. When we got to Livingston, that's when we bummed food. I got back on the freight train, there was about 400 men on that train riding west. It was loaded with men. But I run for that reaper and I lift that lid up and started down, and there was a bull on that reaper and he come over and was going to kick us out, eyeing that young fellow. We started down the side of the train, as you get the heck off. Went down that ladder. I went down first and I stopped on the bottom rung, held close to the car, and that kid come. He wanted to jump. Train was moving, I said, "Don't jump." I said, "Let him come down and kick us off." I said, "He isn't looking." And then he was gone. Pretty soon those two fellows we were with—they was in that reaper—that wasn't a very big hole, "Come on up," he said, "he's gone." He said, "the whole gang on the old train saw what was going on." He said, "If he didn't touch you kids, we were going to kill him."

EM: Oh, okay. How old were you at this time?

VS: What?

EM: How old were you at this time?

VS: Twenty-one. '31, 21. I know my age. So, that fellow that was going to kick us off I found out later what his name was—Thibodoux (?). He was a highway cop out of Deer Lodge for a long time afterwards.

EM: What was his name? Huberdoux?

VS: Thibodoux (?).

EM: Thibodeau.

VS: Thibodoux.

EM: Thibodeau?

VS: Thibodoux.

EM: Thibodoux, okay.

VS: He was mean. [laughs]

But the dredge didn't start up there. They were hauling stuff in—some of the timbers and—

EM: Art Thompson (?) was hauling in his truck for them.

VS: Yes, Art Thompson did a lot of the hauling. There were other, there was Katz (?) came up there, too. I don't know what they did. The pit was already dug, but it just stayed there. See, that dredge was to go up in '31, run out of money—Depression. It didn't start up until August 19 when they got to go, and I drove from Gold Creek up to get a job in my car, and I had—

EM: This is '33? August '33?

VS: '33, August. I had to stop, I think it was, four times or five times to rake the snow off my windshield. The wipers couldn't keep it off. It was coming down so fast, and it stuck on the windshield. But I made it to Pioneer, and I got a job. I went to work then two days later. See, they couldn't use us right away because they didn't have enough help to do that work.

EM: Okay. Now, now, who were the people on this dredge?

VS: What?

EM: Who were the people that owned this dredge?

VS: Mosier, I forget his initials. M-o-s-i-e-r, I think it was.

EM: Just like you spell mine, yeah.

VS: Mosier. And Cleveland...What the hell was his first name? I forget it. Cleveland and Mosier were the...but there was the Gold Creek Mining Company, see? They's the one that start that

dredge first. Then they ran out of money. Then when they finally got financed from California, then they had a share in that dredge. See, that Gold Creek Mining Company, and they called that the Pioneer Placers. Where's that sheet? [unintelligible]

EM: Pioneer Placer Dredging Company.

VS: Yeah.

EM: Pioneer Gold Placer, Powell County, Montana.

VS: That was the paperwork they had, I—

EM: Yeah, okay. Okay. These were both from California?

VS: Yes, from San Francisco, I believe.

EM: San Francisco, okay.

VS: I'm pretty sure they were. Anyway, Cleveland was from over around Yuba City [California], too. They could have lived other places.

EM: Now, you say this dredge was dismantled in Mountain Home, Idaho?

VS: Yes, it was Mountain Home, Idaho. It had operated there first. I don't know how long. That I don't know. And it was dismantled there and shipped to Gold Creek and trucked up to Pioneer—the parts. They made the whole thing, and the lumber was all bought from Washington—

EM: Did you say—

VS: —what the heck was that big company out there?

EM: Weyerhaeuser?

VS: Weyerhaeuser Lumber. That's where they got their lumber from. And it was perfect lumber, and it laid there for two years. [unintelligible]

[speaking at the same time]

EM: From '31 to '33, that's right.

VS: Yes. It laid...I was all, everything was there to put it up. And it was up—

EM: And you say the people that built the hull were shipbuilders from Seattle?

VS: No, there was a carpenter in Deer Lodge. Byrzina (?), he was worked out at of that lumberyard.

EM: That was—

VS: Melody (?) is here in town.

EM: That was Melody's father?

VS: Yes. He and two other carpenters...I kind of know that part...that's out of my head. See, that's 58 years ago. Fifty-eight years ago I couldn't bring that up. [laughs] This is '88, oh yeah, that's 58 years ago. Say 57 to be sure. Byrzina was the three men that they were down there and they were measuring before they had put these stilts up to hold that dredge up. You had to work underneath to get that floor.

EM: Frame.

VS: Those were all ten by tens, I think, that held that first, big wide plank. It was 18 inches wide.

EM: Okay, so you started to build it in '33, and you went in operation in December, right?

VS: Three months it took to build it.

EM: And how long...How far down the gulch did they get? About a mile?

VS: Back and forth up there, and then they went up and down once they got out of there. Then they brought Wall (?) out, then they went back and they went passed Wall. They went—Wall's nephew from Wall City there, where Wall's is, he had a barn there?

EM: Because that was the old...I remember the people that owned that ranch before. I can't think of their name—

VS: Kiss (?)?

EM: —they run sheep.

VS: Mr. Kiss?

EM: No, it wasn't Kiss.

VS: Okay, I don't know that either.

EM: Hodge (?). Was it Hodge?

VS: No—

EM: I think it was Hodges, wasn't it?

VS: What?

EM: Hodge?

VS: I don't know what was there before.

EM: Yeah, because that was before your time. Oh, okay. [unintelligible]

[speaking at the same time]

Wall is there now.

VS: Wall was living back east, but his son...his nephew was running that, that was Wall's place, where that Wall City is. And he had that big house up here. Claus finally moved in that.

EM: One up on the south—

VS: After they bought Wall out, see? Then Claus moved from that log cabin that he built down from his folks, and he moved over in that house. But, when they...it was Wall's land, and Wall thought he had them [unintelligible]. They dredged this all off in the fall, the winter time. This nephew—

EM: Does dredging work all winter?

VS: Oh yes. We only shut down once for 30 days. It got so dang cold it froze the dredge in. But then it started up again. Never shut down again, only for repair. We got down here close to Wall's ground, the nephew was supposed to let Wall know when they're...so they wouldn't go through. They couldn't get down. But he didn't do it. He had his business, and he didn't want to shut that dredge down and be out of business—this nephew. He was pretty good age, too. He was close to 50. So what did the dredge do? They went right down along the hill, and they just dredged flotation. And in a month we went all the way alongside of Wall's place, and then they got in their own ground again, started working.

EM: Went deeper.

VS: Yeah, they went down and got the gold then. They kept track of what they mined, what the cleanup was, so they'd get the share, too, but they didn't get stopped along Wall. They went right down along the hill, which was Wall's land in there. Then they started mining again, and Wall came back that summer. Oh, he was a little bit peeved about it. But then they bought Wall out, so then they had to dredge back. They started up here. I know there's a place that they didn't dredge. It was a crooked winchman, trying to get rid of another winchman. Then they dredged that all out. When they went up there, just before this crook and this went out, they worked six days, they took off damn-near 16,000 dollars-worth of gold. That was richer than hell, this ground they bought from Wall.

EM: In what time?

VS: Six days.

EM: Six days, 16,000 that was—

VS: Fifteen to sixteen thousand.

EM: Okay, 15 to 16,000—

VS: That was in that Wall land. Wall didn't—

EM: And that was at 35 dollars an ounce.

VS: Yeah, they waited until it was 33. That's' about what they got was 33. See, it wasn't pure. Thirty-five was the government price, but they had to be pure then. But they did like this, see? This one guy L.M. Sheets. I liked him very well, and he was my friend until he turned against me one time. [unintelligible] and I got along good. And Howard [M.E. Howard], he was from Mountain Home. He got to be the dredge master when this guy quit dredge mastering. And Blodgett [N.T. Blodgett] didn't like Sheets. They were dredging up there, and this Blodgett, he didn't dig the whole bottom when he got down. He'd stop. Then he'd dredge over here, see? Well, then they went on down. Then when Larry Sheets come on, he took over, he stepped ahead to dredge, and what happened when he hit this shoulder? What happens to them loose buckets? You know, they're just hanging there underneath and the slack, then they come around the bucket line. He hit that, he got the bucket line off. See, it pushed some buckets over, and they crawled on that [unintelligible] and jumped off.

EM: Oh no. Oh, geez.

VS: That was all right. O.L. Gray [O.L. Gray, Jr.] was the dredge master then. So nobody knew that. See, that was all on charts. Everything was registered. The next time Blodgett came on, two or three days later, he did the same thing up in this one corner—almost took where we had dug first. And here was the power, [unintelligible]. He did it again, and Sheets got him off the

second time. But then O.L. Gray got rid of Sheets. He was in Bernard Savre's house and I never squawk when I hear something what they talked about. But O.L. Gray and Bernard Savre were good friends, fishing together, and O.L. Gray liked me, too. He told Savre, he told Bernard there, he says, "Friday I'm canning Larry." I heard that. Larry was my good friend. I didn't tell Larry what was going to happen. So when Larry got canned, when he left he went up in the Pioneer, which was quite a ways then, and when he went by where the dredge master lived, O.L. Gray, he got mad at O.L. Gray. "Well, why did you fire me?" Well, it was a scrap or something and he hit O.L. Gray with his bucket or else a rock, and O.L. Gray blamed me for it. That I told Larry. See, he knew I was a good friend of Larry's. I never said a word to Larry. I wouldn't do that. But what caused it was old Blodgett though. Wasn't long after that this Blodgett—I don't know what he had chiseled—but he got next to Cleveland, and he got O.L. Gray canned.

EM: Oh no.

[Break in audio]

EM: Now this operated from December...operated from December '33 until when?

VS: I was gone. When did they shut down? Oh, I do too know when they shut down. About '41, '40 or '41, one of those two years. Then they put in the dredge over at [unintelligible].

EM: Okay, it operated eight years?

VS: '33, yes. About eight...eight, nine years.

EM: Did you ever see them make a cleanup on this dredge?

VS: Oh hell, I was on pretty near every one of them.

EM: Were you? About how many buckets of amalgam (?) would you say that they took off on each clean up?

VS: When they had that biggest cleanup at 15,000, I cleaned out that distributor, where all them holes are, had to lay on your stomach to do that. You had to pull that little gates out, then you'd wash that down this trough this way and then this way. As I was cleaning that out, I had the holes running here, and I thought I'd take all these here lids off and I was scratching that with these scratchers so that the heavy gravel out the gold stayed down. It was amalgam. Here I seen amalgam sticking...you know what amalgam is? It's quicksilver and gold gathered. Well, I had a little gallon bucket, and I just took that little scoop and I'd pick up that, just that amalgam, and stick it in that bucket. And I washed some more down. I had that gallon bucket was that much full of amalgam, and I was laying on my stomach, when I got to that last hole, that's all I could do. I was strong.

EM: About how big would you say, about a gallon bucket?

VS: It was a fruit can gallon, which is small. Number ten can, they were smaller than the gallon bucket. There was that much gold in it. Then I finally got it up. I put some of that dredge water on it because it was muddy water. I had no gravel in there. That was plumb clean amalgam. So then they had the [unintelligible] down there, where they—

EM: Was that just one set of screens that you 'd cleaned up?

VS: No, I cleaned up all those holds underneath that distributor. But the tables had already been cleaned, and they were expecting a big cleanup. When they got to the last one, Augie [August Scharf] always run that long time, and Cleveland was standing on one side and I come this way. That was [unintelligible] where we washed that...big hopper here where you dump this in. I come over, I says to Augie, I says, "Where should I dump this?"

He said, "Dump it in there with the rest."

I said, "I don't think you want me to." I said, "This is already clean." Cleveland stood there and he looked at me like I hijacked something, I never hijacked off of that dredge. I know two of them guys that did.

EM: Yeah, I wouldn't doubt it, yeah.

VS: That was the biggest cleanup they had and there was around 15, 16,000. That was the most of the cleanup was in the can I had. When they took it out, they had these little cooking cast-iron kettle with the little legs on with a wire bail on it? Augie and this other fellow...What did I say his name was? Oh, it's down here...There's Paul Trost's name...Oh, Guy Stanich. Guy Standich and Augie, they had a pickaxe handle, and they stuck it through this wire bail on this little kettle and it was just about that far from full with amalgam—the rest of that was what I got out of that distributor. But you wasn't supposed to be there, it was supposed to be on the tables. They don't know how [unintelligible] stopped there. There was one on the end of that handle as they went down the stairs, and they were damn careful. They hung on to the rail yet. That's heavy that stuff, just a little bit of it's a pound. They went down the stairs, they took it off the gang plank. Two men carried it off.

EM: Took two men to carry—

VS: So it isn't no big bunch. See, there was quicksilver on that gold. It was all—

EM: It was dry amalgam.

VS: Yeah, it was silver-colored. You couldn't see gold color, but then they did that up at the office. They run it through the still.

EM: Recover the mercury and left the gold.

VS: Yeah. Well, see, they put that in the [unintelligible] heat, and the amalgam goes into a vapor. The pipe broke up there one time, and that was over at Norris....no, where was it? I forget. Then that comes back through a tube like you distill alcohol, then the quicksilver comes back and drips into these steel bottles they had. Then the gold is the other one.

[Break in audio]

Up alongside the hill, we didn't clean up at all when we got on there. They just went through there as fast as they could. They only dug deep enough for flotation, they got the hell out of there. We was going downhill.

EM: Would you say that you cleaned up once a week?

VS: About once a week, average. Once a week.

EM: About what was the average take on once a week? Do you have any idea about how many—

VS: When that dredge was built, I heard it was around 400,000.

EM: A week?

VS: No, that they'd cost to build that dredge. That's what was told to me now, that is...in my head, 400,000. And the one over at Emigrant, when it started to dig, they had a million dollars in that one. That was a much bigger expend...well, wages went up, too.

EM: But on this dredge, about how much do you suppose they were taking off there a week on the cleanup?

VS: Well...this was told me—I don't know for sure. I never knew their business.

EM: No, no, you weren't interested in that—

VS: But, I heard...See, the Gold Creek Mining Company was in on that deal. They wanted their money out of it.

EM: Right off the bridge, yeah.

VS: Anyway, I heard one time—it was a little over three months that that dredge paid for itself. Not the expenses to the men and stuff, but they took off that much money out of the ground

that would've paid for the dredge. Well, after a while they bought the Gold Creek Mining Company out, and then it was all Pioneer Placer.

EM: But you have no idea about what the...on each week, about what the cleanup was?

VS: They had different averages.

EM: Yeah, but I mean just on the average.

VS: I have no idea.

EM: Have no idea.

VS: I have no idea. Only about one week I know that—

EM: In about six days they took about 16,000?

VS: That one week was the biggest week they ever had. And that was all from—

EM: At that Wall claim.

VS: Well, where that guy chopped that up, I know where that area is, and that was the richest ground that we ever dug, that's when I cleaned up that—

EM: Of course, you know it's underwater.

VS: It's under the...it's down there quite a ways—

EM: It's underwater now.

VS: Oh yeah. Well, it's probably drained down some. But from the top of the level of the ground to where that gold is would be about 45 feet. I know just where that spot is, but you'd have to have a drag-line crane to get that out of there. That's a pretty good, rich spot because they didn't dig where the transport. We dug close to the transport because the road went in here.

EM: It isn't covered up with tin. It's—

VS: Well, I'd have to go see because I left that dredge when we got down. When he give Cougar Bierman [Erler Bierman?] that job—Cougar Bierman was a hell of a heavy drinker—and he finally got canned by this guy that was so damned anxious to give him the job—this Howard. Another Howard. He was hired from Mountain Home to come up and dredge. I don't know how the hell he got up there, but he got up there and took a job away from somebody else. But Claus, let's see...see, Claus was married to Cleveland's daughter, that's how come he got a little

push. Claus and I were the best friends of ever was on that dredge. Even after and before. The first man I ever met outside my uncle was Claus Wohlers. I liked him right away, and he trusted me. He'd tell me secrets. And I did too. We never passed them on. I know he never did. They never come back. Claus damn near killed that...I saved his life. Oh hell...Cougar Bierman.

EM: He nearly killed him?

VS: Oh, he would have! I just saved him, that was all there was to it. I was Claus's head oiler. Cougar Bierman was firing the boiler. That was his job. I was head oiler, and I was working under Claus. I'd go around...every hour we'd go turn the grease cups down. I come back up the winch room, there was nobody in the winch room. I just went to the door out on that deck, and there was Claus. He had Cougar in his arms over the rail and he was just going to drop him, and there was a barge down below that they hauled the water in for the boiler—clean water. If he'd have dropped him, he'd killed him because that was about, I'd say, close to 30 feet. Shit, he'd have killed him. He wanted to.

EM: Was he drunk?

VS: Yes...Claus wasn't, Berman was drunk. He always argued with Claus, he'd get up [unintelligible] he didn't always have to fire. He'd get up and he'd always argue with Claus. Well, Claus was in Deerlodge that day, and he bought himself a fancy high-priced Mackinaw and it was all "chammy"-skin [chamois?] lined." I seen it before this happened. It was a nice red checkered...god, that was a beautiful jacket. He paid around 40 bucks, and that was a month's wages. He bartered at Smith and Webber. Was that their names, Smith and Webber?

EM: Yeah, that's right.

VS: That's who he got it from. That cock-eyed Cougar, he was arguing with Claus. Well, Claus was a damn tough man for a little fellow. Cougar was big. That darn Cougar he went and took that jacket, and he threw it in the pond. He walked out the winch room and threw it out in the water—in that muddy water.

EM: No wonder he—

VS: That made Claus mad and he just picks him up—he was that darn strong—took him out there and he was going to dump him over the side [laughs], throw him in the water, too. I don't think Claus knew that barge was...Claus knew it was there, but he didn't think. It made Claus mad, and I don't blame him. If he would've, they'd have never got a peep out of me.

EM: He could have—

[End of Interview]