

## Conversations with Retirees

### *Introducing the People Behind the Stories*

*From January through April 2008, I had the pleasure of interviewing several retirees whose careers date back to the late 1940's. During individual interviews, they shared their memories of working for the Bureau of Public Roads and Federal Highway Administration out of our Vancouver office. In honor of the Federal Lands Highway Program 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, I am preparing a series of stories and vignettes in which I will be sharing some of their memories with you. This chronological overview of each of their careers is offered as an introduction to those stories.*

*– Marili Green Reilly*

**Willis Grafe** got his first survey experience in the Yukon in 1942-43 working on the Alaskan Highway. After a stint in the Navy and a few terms at Oregon State, he joined the BPR's engineer training program in 1948. In the 1950's, he spent some time in Glacier National Park, as well as on some projects in Washington and Oregon, including North Santiam Highway, White Pass Road, and Smith River. From 1957 to 1969, he was Area Engineer in the Oregon Division. Then he went to headquarters, taking an early retirement in 1976. After ten years as Linn County (Oregon) County Engineer, he finally took full retirement, settling down to write a book about his experiences in the Yukon.



*Willis Grafe paused to document his work in the Yukon, circa 1942. Photo courtesy Willis Grafe.*

**Ray Westby** came to work in the Vancouver office in 1950 and spent the next nine years in the field on Federal lands projects. Many of the early projects he worked on were in Washington, including Loup Loup Highway, White Pass, and Heart O' the Hills. He also spent several seasons in Oregon, working on the Smith River project and Canyonville-Azalea. He moved to Olympia and worked as an Area Engineer in the Washington Division from 1959 through 1969. He came back to Direct Federal as Construction Engineer in 1969 and was almost immediately put in charge of Design instead of Construction when the remaining aspects of Direct Federal work were moved from the Region Office in Portland to Vancouver. Ray retired as Chief of the Project Development Division in 1982.



*A bridge on the White Pass Highway, circa 1952. Photo courtesy Ray Westby.*

**Vern Ford** was hired by the Vancouver office in 1954 and spent his first five years working in survey. Many of his early survey assignments were on Oregon projects, including Rogue River, Cascade Head, and Gumboot Road in the Wallowa Mountains. In the early 1960's he spent a couple of seasons in Glacier National Park. Then he moved into construction, working again on Oregon projects: Cascade Lakes Highway, Mount Hood Highway, and others. After 22 years in the field, he came into the office in 1976. By 1980, he had moved into PS&E, writing many of the special contract provisions for construction on roads around Mt. St. Helens. Then he moved into Programming, taking on financing responsibilities for projects around the volcano. He retired from that position in 1991.

**Fred Rogers** joined the BPR training program in 1957. He was first assigned to the Headquarters bituminous lab on the National Airport property, followed by a year in the Georgia Division, then six months on a Baltimore Transportation Study before being assigned to direct federal work. Arriving in Vancouver in September 1961, he spent his first couple of years here working on survey teams. When he came into the office, he worked on BLM projects, mostly in western Oregon. Later in his career, he moved into technology transfer work, served as Construction Engineer for 1-2 years, and finished out his career January 2, 1999, as head of Right-of-Way.

*At right, a BPR truck on North Santiam Highway, five miles west of the summit, June 1950. WFLHD Archives.*



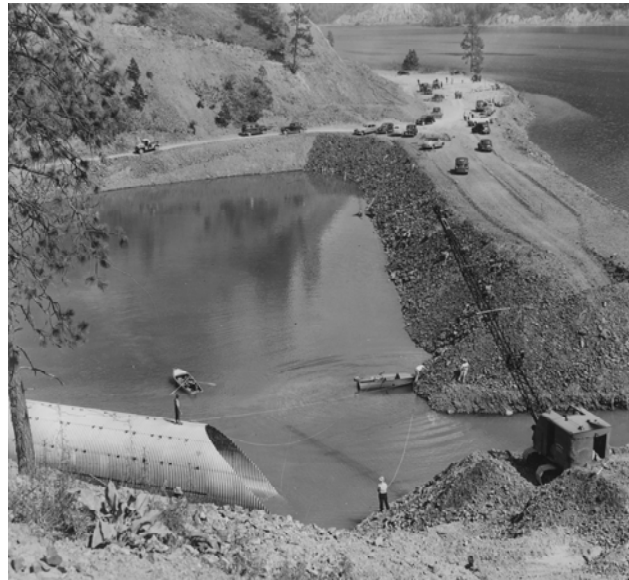


*The south side of Building A along East Fifth Street, 1965. This building was later removed for the freeway. WFLHD Archives.*

**John Bucholtz** applied for a job at BPR after hearing about it from a neighbor. He had just completed the drafting program at Clark College in 1958, and was hired here as a draftsman. He had a few summer assignments to get some experience on surveying and construction projects, but his work was mainly in the office, moving from drafting to design to Chief of the Drafting Department over the course of his tenure. When CADD was introduced in this office, he was heavily involved in its

implementation, and teaching engineers how to use the new system. He eventually headed up the CADD office. Having spent his entire career in the Vancouver office, John made particular note of the physical changes that were made to the building up until his retirement in 1993.

**Lyle Renz** joined the training program in 1962 in Boise and spent some time in survey and construction inspection work on direct federal projects in Idaho, including Cascade Warm Lake Highway, the old Warren Wagon Road, Lolo Pass, and projects around the south fork of the Clearwater. After the training program, he was assigned to the Oregon Division in Salem and spent two years as assistant engineering coordinator for direct federal projects. At the time, construction management for direct federal projects was handled by the Divisions, and Lyle worked his way up to construction engineer and construction management positions until 1971 when he left direct federal work. He had several assignments in Federal-Aid offices, retiring from the position of Division Administrator in the Illinois Division in 1994.



*A culvert is moved into place on US Hwy 10 in Idaho in the 1960's. WFLHD Archives.*

**Jim Hall** entered the training program in 1964, and spent some time in the Region Office in Portland. It was during a hydraulics review of direct federal projects during that time that he got some of his earliest exposure to the direct federal program. After graduating, he was assigned to the D.C. Division. He then went into headquarters to work in Demonstration Projects. Jim became Chief of the Federal Lands Division in headquarters in 1974, about the time FHWA decided to reassign responsibility for forest highway design and construction to the States. The program was moved back to direct Federal offices around 1978, the year he came to Vancouver to become our Division Engineer.



*By 2006 "Building A" was long since gone, but the tree remained. It, too, has since been removed. WFLHD Archives.*

*If you have comments about this document or the interviews, please email me at [marili.reilly@fhwa.dot.gov](mailto:marili.reilly@fhwa.dot.gov).*

*-- Marili Green Reilly*