

Oral History Interviews

North Union Canal – Lindon, Utah

Interviewer: Sheri Murray Ellis/Certus Environmental Solutions **Date:** August 22, 2019

Interviewee: Don Peterson **Location:** Lindon City, Utah

Topic: North Union Canal History: Lindon City, Utah

NOTE: Portions of the interview that were unrelated to the topic at hand, such as side conversation, were not included in the transcription below.

Transcript

Sheri: This is Sheri Ellis in Lindon, Utah, on August 22, 2019 talking with Don Peterson about the North Union Canal.

Sheri: This is pretty basic, just trying to learn a little bit of the unique day to day history of the North Union Canal. The city recommended that you would be somebody that I should talk to. Let's start out with a few questions and then you can take it wherever you want to go with it or if there is something specific about the history that you would like to tell me that would be great.

Sheri: What is your association with the North Union Canal?

Don Peterson: Well, when I started knowing anything about it was 1977 and I had just moved to Lindon and that's how I got my water. I had an acre and a half of ground and had water shares to cover that. So, I got my water through previous users as it came down the ditch, but I wasn't satisfied with that, so I traced it back up to the canal to see where it did come from. Everybody said you get your water out of the Murdock, and I said no, I get it from the North Union Canal, and they didn't know what that was. Anyway, I was interested in things like that, so I did that and I found out who was running it, not that I had any concerns about it or anything, I just wanted to know. And what it was, was just some users, and there was one man that was, I guess, the president of that organization. They (Ron Whiteley and Alex Lott) probably told you about the Board that controlled it.

Sheri: No, not really, we didn't talk about that, so if you want to tell me about that.

Don Peterson: The North Union Board is comprised of I think, about seven shareholders, and one was elected as the president and this and that. We had a secretary that was paid, everyone else was volunteer. And we would meet, oh, I don't know how often, not regularly, but when the president would call we would meet. Alex (Lott) is the current president. I wasn't associated with the Board for quite some time until 1984 when I hired on at the city. I was hired as the Public Works Director, and so, by that title I was assigned to be a Board member at the North Union Canal because Lindon City was the largest shareholder in the organization.

Sheri: Ron and Alex had told me that the city had started acquiring the shares.

Don Peterson: Well, they did and that was in 1993 when we put in the secondary irrigation system. And when we did that then what was needed was, we had to put water in the pipe, we couldn't put money in it, so when development happened, we had people either turn in their water shares to satisfy how much on each piece of property it was or pay in lieu of.

Sheri: Okay.

Don Peterson: Well, mostly we required shares or they had to go out somewhere else and buy it and turn in shares. So that's how we started acquiring shares because of development, so that's continued today. Because you have to keep growing and keep that going. So that's how that happened and Lindon City became the largest shareholder. So,

we needed a voice on the Board. Well, I don't think there was any planning probably just by default, the president kept leaning to me for every decision that needed to be made because...I don't know why, he just did. So, I was very actively involved in it, probably more than any other member of the Board, and that was okay because it was my job and my concern to keep it flowing and keep Lindon City and any other shareholders satisfied. Anyway, it was a good responsibility and good men to work with but there were a few difficulties.

Sheri: Like what kind of difficulties or challenges?

Don Peterson: Well, like when Ron (Whiteley) was the water master he called me one night about 1:00 in the morning and he said I need some help and I said where are ya, and he said I'm up on 1600 North and he said I got a couch under the bridge and it's backing up (water) and I said okay I'll grab the backhoe and a few cables and I'll be up. So, I did and I took my waders up and got there and the waders weren't going to do any good cause the water was too deep, so we went in and there was room under the bridge enough for your head but not your body, so we kind of went under there to put a cable around that thing; it's kind of stupid now to even think of doing something like that without a whole rescue team behind you.

Sheri: This was back in the "get 'er done days."

Don Peterson: It was, you just did what had to be done. So, we did that and we pulled that couch out. With that being in there it blocked the water to where it rose so high. So anyway, we got that out of there. That wasn't the only experience I had; it was just the way it was. The North Union goes through and backs up to private homes and they think of it as a travelling garbage dump, so anything like their limbs or cuttings or anything like that, grass clippings, dog waste from their kennels, it all went into the canal and it was gone away from them so it was no worry. But it was a real worry and troublesome for us because we had these grates at different places, and that was the water master's responsibility to clean those grates and keep them flowing so it didn't back up and flood people. So, that was a lot of the issues I got called out on a lot of places that we had a backup and flooded and went through people's homes and that. I was involved in that when everybody is up in arms and all upset about it. So, you have to go in and try to settle them down without admitting liability and work through it and make them as comfortable as you could with the situation as it was.

Sheri: That sounds like an incredible challenge to have to balance because you aren't responsible for people throwing things in there but it's your canal that is flooding somebody's yard.

Don Peterson: It's kind of hard to defend, you just have to act sympathetic without saying it's totally our fault; we'll take care of everything. But I had a lot of experience with that because anything that happened to the City, I was the first one that responded to people; so, I did that a lot and I think I got pretty good at it really.

Sheri: It sounds like you were a problem solver.

Don Peterson: Yeah, I was sympathetic to them because I know that's not fun and a stressful time for them, but on the other hand we got a company to protect, so you have to kind of balance that and do what you can. So, I did a lot of that. Other things were just sitting down with the Board and determining how much to charge each user per share for maintenance on the canal and expenses that we had you know.

Sheri: How did you calculate that and how did you decide; what was the process?

Don Peterson: We took all of our costs, we paid our secretary and paid an attorney to be on standby, we paid for insurance and things like that. We divided that and we'd see what our income was because of our shareholders. I think when I first got started in 1977 my amount was, I think like \$1.34 a share per year. It calculated to be about \$11.00; you can't buy water like that anywhere anymore but at the time that's what it was. So, each year we'd look at that and go through these expenses and our costs and our income just like you would your own personal checking account. That's how we'd determine that. And we'd also put some aside for savings to do maintenance on the canal because every year there was a huge amount of maintenance. The canal is very, very old like those guys told you and needed a lot of maintenance. We put money aside to help out with that. A lot of times it wasn't enough with the price of the repairs and things like that so we would borrow money and we'd have to pay that back with the shares.

Sheri: Would you increase retroactively to recoup the costs?

Don Peterson: No, we would increase it at the first of the year and it never went up a huge amount, but it went up enough to cover our costs and that is what we were interested in doing.

Sheri: Do you remember about how many shareholders you had?

Don Peterson: Heck, I don't remember.

Sheri: I'm sure I can look that up.

Don Peterson: Yeah, there is records of that. Norma Brown was the secretary. She was a real stalwart lady in doing that. And every time we would talk about finances, we would talk about the need to increase her pay and she'd object to it and fight it, but she'd say just cover the postage so I don't have to pay it. We'd say of course we'll pay the postage!

Sheri: You don't do a job for as long as she did it without actually loving it.

Don Peterson: Oh yeah, she didn't want to let it go. I think since I retired, she has given it up.

Sheri: She did it for so long I'm sure it was hard to walk away from that.

Don Peterson: But we had an awful lot of work that needed to be done and a lot of midnight runs and things.

Sheri: Let's talk a little bit about the maintenance. You said it was an old canal that required a lot of maintenance. What did most of the maintenance involve?

Don Peterson: We'd clean it every spring and that was a pretty large undertaking because there again, people used that all through the winter for their pruning's and whatever. Plus, a certain amount of sediment comes out of the river that gets in there and accumulates so that has to be cleaned out. Most of it settles under the bridges where the roads go because they drop down a little bit so that's a settling area, so that needs to be cleaned out, that's a difficult thing to do because you can't get equipment down into there. A lot of it is done with a lot of handwork like with a sled or something you can pull back out and then dump it and things like that; that's a lot of man power and time consuming, so we did that every spring. And then there was always cracks and we'd try to keep track of those cracks that were leaking you know, and we'd hear that from the property owners below and if we could we'd say if it's not flooding or hurting you just move the water around and let it run on your property and we'll get to that when the water goes out cause you couldn't fix it when the water was in. We'd keep track of all those places and then we'd go back in and a lot of times we'd just cement the crack again and seal it up the best we could, and that was only a Band-Aid because it wasn't a fix. That's about all it amounted to was a Band-Aid because it stayed a period of time and then it'd wash off. We didn't have any funds to do anything different. Then we decided we got to bite the bullet and borrow some money and do it right. So, then we'd do a process called sliplining. There was companies that would come in and have forms that were shaped and built to the size of your canal and would dump cement in and it would go all along it and put a layer of concrete in it, both on the bottom and up the sides, so basically it would be a whole new canal. That worked really well, it was good to do. It was expensive because the canal when it was first put in, they didn't get right of way along side of it so we could get equipment along side of it. So, it was really intense trying to get cement from one street to the other street and all that in between. But you can't just keep doing that cause what you do is decrease the capacity of the canal and at some point you're going to have a real problem; any kind of a hiccup in the canal you're going to have an overflow, so that had to be kept in mind. Sometimes we just had to take out the old and put new in place.

Sheri: So just take out an entire section of the canal and re-pour it to maintain that cross-section with the same dimension?

Don Peterson: Yes. That was done quite often. And we always kept wanting to pipe the whole thing because that would have made life so much simpler for us. It would have done away with the garbage from the neighbors, it would have done away with backups and overflows, not entirely on backups but it would limit it. What it would do

is contain it in a pipe so it wouldn't overflow and hurt people. So, we always wanted to do that, but we could never get enough money to do it. Right about the time I was retiring in 2016 we were getting some grants in place to help do that so a couple of them came through and we were able to replace a few sections with piping and I imagine Ron and Alex told you about that. I don't know exactly where they all went.

Sheri: Yeah, that is actually why I'm doing these interviews is because of the piping project; that is the impetus for my doing the interviews.

Don Peterson: I wish I knew more about that but I don't because I retired at the time and I just wasn't involved and I just bowed out.

Sheri: As far as I know they are doing one segment with one of the grants and one more segment in another area. I may have missed on segment (at the beginning or end) and another segment that the city would still like to pipe (showed on map). They don't have the grant money yet but they will keep applying for grants to do more. Do you know when the reservoir went in?

Don Peterson: Yes, in 1993. A lot of the trouble sections were found in this area (pointed on map). This segment was done early on because of a development (that had property on both sides) that went in and they paid to have a lot of this done so that worked out well (showed on map). So, it was a benefit to them and also the city. So that was done. This section was open (showed on map) and it was really in bad shape, but it wasn't a problem because it was pretty level through here so it didn't flood people below it. It would sit there and it pretty well contained itself. It looked like a bomb shelter or like a whole bomb coming off through the process because it was old and lifted in places and this and that but it still flowed water and it didn't flood people so that was a low priority. And that went in to the reservoir; this was the main reservoir, called reservoir # 3 and it's a 6.5 million-gallon reservoir. It was filled through the North Union, that was their primary source of water. Then it was taken from there and filled the zone here and then the lower zone and then we installed pumps in it to pump it up to higher zones. So, we had reservoirs (showed them on the figure map).

Sheri: So, this is your secondary water system that the city provides.

Don Peterson: Yes. That was pumped first from the main reservoir #3 then up to reservoir #2 and that was an open reservoir like the bottom one was. And then it was pumped up to the tank that served that upper zone. Because there were no homes up there when we put that tank up there, it was just nothing we dug through sagebrush to put the lines in then installed that tank. That was all done in 1993 and shortly after that that development started so they got the benefits of being on secondary water right away. Another thing I did that was my responsibility was when we first started it in 1993 I went to every property owner in the city after hours, after my work day, and I had a bag of stakes and a hammer and people's names, and I'd go to their home and say "would you like secondary water" because at the time it was an optional thing, you could get on it or you didn't have to. Because we allowed the primary North Union irrigation system to still exist to use as needed to be. So, anyway, they had a choice. But most people said yes, they wanted it because there was a lot of public hearings and that before we ended up putting it in and voting on it.

Sheri: So, there would have been the people that were still shareholders in the North Union and then the city was the largest shareholder. So, by setting up the pressurized system you went to people who weren't shareholders and offered them to essentially use your shares that the city owned to give them secondary water if they bought into the system.

Don Peterson: If they didn't have water shares, we charged them for it. I didn't have quite enough for the property I had so I ended up paying \$300 additional to turning in my shares which was a steal. Anyway, I went to every home and asked if they want secondary service, and they said yes and I'd say okay and ask how much ground do you have, and they would tell me and then I would see how much it was and I then determine what size pipe they got (1 inch, 1 ½ inch or a 2 inch). A two-inch was the maximum we would supply, because any more than that they could drain the system in a hurry. And everybody wanted more because they couldn't even imagine getting water out of a one-inch pipe, but the thing they didn't know about was water under pressure in a pipe and how much water that could deliver. But anyway, there was quite a lot of time spent with each homeowner in educating them and then I'd ask where did they want their service put. So, I'd drive a stake and write on the stake the size of pipe. Then the

contractors would be coming down the street behind me would install the pipe and put the service in at the same time and they'd read that stake and they'd know how big of pipe to run into them and where to put the box. So, I did that for...I don't know how long that took me, but it took a while.

Sheri: I can imagine, that's a lot of people.

Don Peterson: These subdivisions above weren't there at the time and as that happened that was a mandatory thing that they had to be on secondary and so that had to be happening. They had to pay development rates or turn in shares.

Sheri: So, as the new developments or plats were approved by the city, connecting to the secondary water was all part of the requirement and that's how you got everyone on the pressurized system.

Don Peterson: Yes. And so, there was still a lot of the farmers that were hold outs and they didn't want to do it they couldn't even imagine how they could water their property with a 2-inch pipe compared to what they had done it with; it was weed infested but it looked like more water than what they'd get. As time went on, they would come to me and say you know, it's getting harder for me to do this so I think I better go to the irrigation system. And I would say okay great we're happy to help you. And they'd say okay, I have 20 or 30 acres or whatever, and I want to service here, here, and here. And I'd say okay, you're going to get one service and we'll put it wherever you want and you put your sprinkling system or your main lines anywhere you want it. Then the other requirement was that they couldn't flood anymore, they had to sprinkle because flooding would take too much water, so they had to sprinkle. They balked at that a little bit, but they eventually went on and the first summer they went through a lot of them would come back to me and they'd say that's the best thing they ever did and couldn't believe how hard headed they were about it and held out so long. Because for me it was really a godsend because my property is high on the top and low on the bottom from where the house was, so I would go and turn my head gates open from when I was flooding before we got secondary, and before I could get to the bottom and back up again to shut the head gate it was around my house and running through the garage. I couldn't water my pasture good because it didn't give it a chance to soak because it would just run right by because of the elevation difference. So, when we got on the secondary it was really a great thing. I got an 1½ inch service because of my acre and a half of ground, so I piped it accordingly and immediately after the 1½ inch service I went to a 2 inch pipe so I could get more volume out of it and then I took it to the top of my field and branched off of that with one inch lines. I got 134 pounds of pressure at my home which is unheard of on water systems. But because of the elevation change from the reservoir to my home is what gives you that pressure. So, it was great for me because I would turn on one valve and I'd water a little more than one acre of ground at one time so it really worked out well and it's been a blessing to me. I grow way more pasture than I ever could before.

Sheri: I was going to ask if productivity went up for farmers and others because you're getting more even distribution across it.

Don Peterson: Yes. It really did.

Sheri: So, the numbers of farms is decreasing but the productivity improves a little bit because of the system.

Don Peterson: When you take out these large acres that were being flooded previously and they went into a pressurized system because of the subdivision, you saved water there. And we as a city put restrictions on the water that we couldn't use it from 10 in the morning to 6 in the evening because of the conservation ability of the water. Because when it's 90 to 100 degrees and you got sprinklers going on, you're losing a big share of that with evaporation and also, it's not doing your lawns any good. So, we put those restrictions on and people balked at that and thought they ought to have it anytime. Well, we stuck with it and it's pretty well the consensus and I have noticed since I retired, and I was a stickler on that, and would remind people when they were abusing it, we'd use door hangers to remind them (friendly reminder) of the rules. Now it seems to be pretty common that people water anytime they want, and I guess that's just the city relaxing on that or not thinking that's a priority, and it really is a priority.

Sheri: I would guess that certainly some of it, you know, when it's inexpensive water that's a challenge as people tend to not take it as seriously. But also, if you have a pasture or crops you take care of, you're really conscientious of the water, but if it's truly just your lawn, you know, I think you're not as aware of the importance of every drop.

Don Peterson: Absolutely. A farmer is making his livelihood off of it and for the rest of us a green lawn is convenient but it's not a do or die situation...well, it is for some people you know.

Sheri: The user base (let's call it) for that water has really changed from the farmers who were super conscientious about it.

Don Peterson: When the system was put in 1993, we had a hard time getting the water we needed up above, but since then we've done some other things that have made it easier to do. The biggest thing we did was tie on to the Salt Lake Aqueduct (up on the bench) that went through. It runs just above the reservoir and for years they would call me (Central Utah Water Conservancy District) and ask if we wanted to buy water from them. And I would ask if it was raw water or treated water. They said it's treated water and we couldn't afford treated water to put in our system and so we just didn't take it for an awful long time. But they called and said we are putting in a 4-foot pipe to supply water at the Point of the Mountain and asked if we wanted to buy water from them. And I said definitely we do. So, we worked out an arrangement with them and they gave us a credit for a lot of the things that we had in place because of the conservation efforts and that. So, we did that and it was a huge bonus to us because we could have that water flowing into us anytime and keep that reservoir full so we didn't need to pump so much from the lower reservoir to keep it full so that satisfied that lower two biggest zones. So, that was a real boost to us and since then every year I would call them and say we would like to get our water down and they would say okay we'll be there on such and such day and open the valve and give you your water. So, it would come to us and we'd just let that flow into that reservoir and we'd monitor it. I would always try to judge that and not abuse the aqueduct people to say okay we have to much shut it off or we need more. It would go for months and they would never hear from me, and they would call me and say are you okay? And I would say yeah, we are great and they would say, yeah, you're different than any of our other users because they use us as a reservoir; they would want it turned on and off and on and off. And I would say, well, it's my goal not to bother you, just to be a good user and be responsible and be aware of my system so I knew what was flowing. So that is what we did and it worked out great and I hope it's still going that way now, but I don't know cause when I left, I just left. You know, when you graduate from high school (especially the jocks) after they graduate, they'd have to go back to school because they were number one and now out in the real world they're not, so they couldn't accept that so they'd go back. And I never wanted to be a "super senior" and come back and get involved in stuff; I just wanted to leave it to those who had it and run with it. The new Director called me a short time after I retired and asked some questions because they were having some trouble with one area and couldn't get the water shut off and this and that and different things, so I helped him out with where the valves were and how to do that and he said do you think we could get together and you could go over the system with me. And I said I would be happy to. Well, it went on for a period of time and he called me a third time to ask something else, and I said do you want to get together? And he said no...I think I have it figured out enough... I don't need ya. And I said okay and that was good enough for me and I didn't get involved and thought if you think you know it all you're in a world of hurt cause it took me a long dang time to figure it out and you think you have it down it six months! But I have just kind of walked away.

Sheri: So, was pressurizing the system the biggest change that you saw in the use or distribution of water in the time you were associated with it?

Don Peterson: Yes. Pleasant Grove wasn't on it so they were still flood irrigating so we had to let a certain amount of water flow past the reservoir and into Pleasant Grove which was the agreement so we'd give them their amount. And then their Public Works Director at the time said we can't put irrigation in Pleasant Grove because we are too big. And I said how are you too big...that's when you ought to need it? He said no...we are just too big to do it. For a number of years after that they decided they needed it so they put it in but they didn't put reservoirs in like we did. So, they were using the pipeline that the district operated to act as their reservoir. That was probably the biggest thing I saw with the North Union Canal is installing the system and managing it and making sure it operated the way we wanted it to be. And it didn't hurt the canal any at all. In fact, what it did was ensure that we got our fair share of the water because there was always a rule with water shares and water flowing through the canal. I'm not sure quite how to say this but the people that stole water on the top end were better off than the people that had shares on the bottom end because the owners in Big Bench (which the canal came first) a lot of those guys had keys to the head

gates which they shouldn't of had, and they would open up their own things and flood their ground so that left the water short in the canal so we didn't get our share.

Sheri: So, you guys had a little bit of competition or tension with the folks on the Big Bench taking more (water) and compromising your shares.

Don Peterson: Yes. And we always approached it with a workable thing at first and if it did get to that and ya start banging heads (and I wasn't afraid to do that at all) but I didn't want to. But they got to know that I wasn't going to put up with anything short of what we deserved so it worked out better that way. But for the first while it was really difficult because they were shorting us all the time and I used to not have enough to satisfy our people.

Sheri: So, the water that flows now and through your tenure is still flowing in the open canal. Is that mostly going to fill the reservoirs and moving from reservoir to reservoir? I can't imagine there are too many people left that actually flood out of that.

Don Peterson: That is correct. There's not a whole lot and I don't know what the percentage is now. I think when I retired it was probably about 98% were on pressurized irrigation; so just a small amount because the farms have gone away; it's sad but true. So, that's my history of it.

Sheri: Yeah, that is the reality. Thank you. This is fabulous and this is great information and part of the history that I didn't have a lot of information about. So, this is perfect to supplement what I have. Thank you so much for your time.

Don Peterson: You're sure welcome and thank you.