

MEMOIR OF JEWELL "BUD" SMITH



CH2M HILL

Interviewed 1982

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Jennifer Lee,
Oral Historian

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION



Jewell Smith, "Bud" to almost everyone, was born in Independence, Kansas, in 1918. From the age of 9, he was forced to be independent and self-supporting; both of his parents died within a year of each other, leaving him on his own. While living and working in Kansas at three jobs, he met a customer at the barber shop where he worked, a speech professor from Oregon State College,

who encouraged him to come west to find work in a barber shop in Corvallis, Oregon. Consequently, at the age of 12, poor and determined to make his own living, Smith headed to the Northwest by Greyhound bus. He was to remain in Corvallis for more than 50 years.

Smith joined the armed forces during World War II; and after a 4year stint of service, he returned once again to Corvallis. He earned a reputation as a dependable and competent worker; he had no difficulty obtaining jobs cleaning and caring for offices and buildings. It was in this capacity that he first encountered the fledgling business of four engineers—Cornell, Howland, Hayes, and Merryfield. According to Smith, he was instrumental in locating the first office space in 1946 for the company. He cleaned their office on a contract basis and recalled that, at that time, it only took about 1 hour to clean. This job began an association with the firm that was to last more than 30 years.

With time, CH2M prospered and moved to larger quarters on Western Avenue where Smith continued providing custodial service; his responsibility grew as the firm grew. "I could do just about anything you could think of," he noted. His work included not only jobs at the firm, but also in the homes of the founders—wiring, plumbing, building, and gardening were some of the tasks he performed.

Because he worked nights, his observations were

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from a different perspective from those of most of the employees. He noted how employees, especially the principals, would frequently stay all night working on CH2M projects. Smith would often enjoy conversations with them at this time. He expressed admiration for these four men: "I felt comfortable with the four of them, more than I would with anyone else [in CH2M]... those four guys seemed like they tried to treat everybody just like a family." One of the more significant moments for him, he noted, was when he was put on the payroll "steady." When asked what were moments of pride while working at the firm, he replied, "There ain't nothing to be necessarily proud of outside of the fact that I was able to do it."

The primary focus of the interviews (January 18, October 10, and November 17, 1982) was centered on Smith's career at CH2M. However, he had such varied experiences outside of his work that some of those experiences are recounted in his memoir as well. Smith often entertained people with his humorous and colorful stories. He was an avid sports fan who was involved with the black athletes at Oregon State University. Since the late forties, he put betting pools together for the employees during basketball and football seasons.

Gardening was another interest and favorite activity of his; many of the plantings and general landscape care at the firm were his responsibility. Produce from an abundant garden was shared at the conclusion of the interview when he generously filled a sack with vegetables for the interviewer.

When he met the interviewer in his southeast Corvallis home for the first session, he was reluctant to become involved in the project. "I'm suspicious of most everyone," he stated. He was very concerned that his thoughts would not be accurately recorded and distorted for use in some other purpose. He had seen too many "twofaced people" whom he could not trust. Being black in a white community such as Corvallis has caused him to be especially careful, he observed. After reassurance that his interview would be recorded as he wished, he talked willingly and with enthusiasm about his life and work. Mr. Smith shared his photograph albums and other memorabilia without reservation, which enhanced the interview

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exchange.

For many years, Mr. Smith had been disabled by diabetes. In 1982, he officially retired from CH2M HILL because of this illness. He had worked at the firm almost as long as the founding fathers. Bud Smith led a rich and varied life; he was always ready to help when he could. He remarked, "I never did tell nobody, 'no' when somebody asked for my help."

On March 2, 1984, while in California with his wife and three children, Jewell Smith passed away.

[The text of the entire interview is available upon request at ch2mhillaa@gmail.com]