

Narrator: Art Gunnell (AG)

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Summary: Local historian Art Gunnell discusses his interest in Thunder Bay’s historic grain industry, rooted in growing up in the Westfort neighbourhood surrounded by terminal grain elevators. He surveys each of the elevators in Fort William, recalling memories of each, including fishing near CPR Elevator D, riding the dangerous manlift at Ogilvie Elevator, watching the steam engine work at Empire Elevator, taking the streetcar out to Grand Trunk Pacific Elevator, and playing around the abandoned Starch Works complex. Gunnell also describes the grain industry during wartime, like militia security at the elevators and the construction of war distress grain storage warehouses. Other topics discussed include transient workers during the Great Depression, wooden railcar grain doors and their uses in Westfort construction projects, winter grain storage on ships, conducting grain dust explosion experiments for the fire department, elevator ownership and name changes, and resources for grain industry history at the Thunder Bay Museum.

Keywords: Thunder Bay history; Local history; Thunder Bay terminal grain elevators; Westfort; Fort William; Consolidated Elevator; Fort William Elevator F; Western Grain Elevator; CPR Elevator D; Ogilvie Elevator and Flour Mill; Grand Trunk Pacific Elevator; Searle Elevator; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; World War II; Wartime industry; Wartime distress grain storage; Dwyer Elevator (Gillespie Elevator); Canada Starch Works; Empire Elevator; Steam engines; Rope drive; Grain elevator demolition; The Great Depression; Northwestern Elevator; Electric Elevator (Mutual Elevator); Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Grain elevator explosions; Grain dust; United Grain Growers Elevator A; Richardson Main Elevator; Richardson Current River; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 4A; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 4B; Paterson Elevator O; Thunder Bay Museum; Historical archives; Museum archives

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: All right. I think we might be okay.
AG: All right. Go ahead.

NP: So I'll just introduce that today is November 5th. Have I got the date right?

AG: Well, it's pretty close anyway.

NP: Yeah. And I'm talking to--.

AG: A day or two anywhere, it doesn't bother me.

NP: Yeah. [Laughs] I'm talking to Mr. Art Gunnell, who is a resident of Thunder Bay, and we're doing a Facetime call and hoping that this recording actually works. So I was contacting you because I have read with interest the historical items that you do occasionally for the Thunder Bay Museum publication in the *Chronicle Journal*. And we started chatting about grain elevators, which is a topic near and dear to my heart as a group called Friends of Grain Elevators. I know that you've taken some interest in the grain elevators just as part of your general research and some particular articles that you've written for that column. So can I have you just introduce yourself? Just tell a little bit about where you grew up, your interest in history, and any connections that you might want to give us related to the grain elevators themselves if there are any.

AG: As you know, I was born in 1924. I'm now 96. I grew up in Fort William. I'm a Westfort boy or sort of almost Westfort. Did the normal thing—went to school, high school, military. When I got older, I began to take an interest in history, local history, and obviously, grain elevators and railways and shipping are all part of the Lakehead operations. So my interest got to the point where I wrote some articles for the *Journal*, and I have done a lot of local research. That's where I am right now. The idea of trying to find out where the elevators, when and where they originated and what names were put to them, has just about driven me crazy. Anyway. [Laughs] It's a challenge. And I don't think there's really any answers to my questions. Why did I take an interest in elevators? I lived in Westfort, and I think it was called the old Consolidated Elevator, was it, on the Kam River?

NP: Yes. That was one of them.

AG: Okay. There was that one, there was the Western Terminals, and they were literally right in front of where I lived. In other words, I could look out across the Kam, and I could see those elevators.

NP: So where were you living when you were small?

AG: I was living in a house on Empire Avenue, which no longer exists, and then we moved to Brock Street, and then when I got married, I lived on Amelia Street.

NP: Okay, so when you were on Amelia Street, that was when you were looking straight across at Consolidated?

AG: Yes. We also knew when a boat was in because it was a great ton of dust around the elevator. Those were the days before they put cleaners in. I know that my dad always said, "There's no use trying to grow a lawn in Westfort because if the wind blows those dust seeds and they land on your lawn, you've got a good crop of dandelions."

NP: [Laughs] What year would it have been that you moved to Amelia Street? This just sort of gives me an idea of what version of the elevators you were looking at.

AG: I moved to Amelia Street when I got married in 1952.

NP: Okay. Now, your family's history in Thunder Bay. What brought them to Fort William or Port Arthur, whichever one they originally arrived at?

[0:05:04]

AG: Well, my mother and father came to Fort William.

NP: From where and why?

AG: From London, England.

NP: Hm!

AG: Yeah. They were Britishers.

NP: And when would that have been, Art?

AG: 1924.

NP: Oh, okay. Because that's sort of the history of my family too. My grandfather and grandmother came over a little earlier than yours, but from Bath, England.

AG: Okay, up north. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. And what drew them here, do you know?

AG: What brought them here?

NP: Yes.

AG: It's a long story that you don't want to hear.

NP: Oh, can you give me the condensed version? But you know, I really do like listening to these stories.

AG: They came here because they had to leave England.

NP: Okay. That's--. [Laughing]

AG: I think my father was a bigamist.

NP: Oh, really?

AG: Yes. His second marriage was not one of pleasure. It was one of necessity.

NP: Ah.

AG: And so, they emigrated very rapidly. [Laughs]

NP: And do you know why they chose here? Although it would be a great place to go if you were trying to get lost.

AG: Yes. My mother had an aunt who lived in Fort William.

NP: Okay. What did they do when they came here? What kind of work did they take on?

AG: My father worked for Bell Telephone for quite a long time until the Depression hit. I think about 1936, they laid him off, and he was without work then until the war started in 1939, along with a lot of other people. Those were hungry days.

NP: Yes, yes. And did he enlist in the army, or was he beyond the age at that point?

AG: No, he was too old.

NP: Yeah, yeah. So where did--. You said that they started out their married life on Empire, did you say?

AG: No, they came over and they lived on Brock Street.

NP: Oh, okay.

AG: And then we did move to Empire Avenue, and then we moved back to Amelia Street when I was growing up.

NP: Okay. What's your earliest memory of the grain elevators?

AG: Oh, heavens. I don't know. Probably 90 years ago.

NP: Okay.

AG: [Laughs] As I say, they were there. That was all.

NP: So you would've been--.

AG: Oh, 6 or 7, I guess, when--.

NP: And would the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway], the old CPR wooden elevators have still been--. Well, some of them would have still been up because they were near Empire. You had the Ogilvie's, and then you had--.

AG: Elevator D was well known to me because we used to go fishing down below Elevator D.

NP: Okay.

AG: There was good pickerel to be caught there.

NP: Really?

AG: Oh, my mother would say in the summertime, “You better go fishing this morning and catch a couple of fish for dinner.” And so, I’d say, “Okay, mom.” So we walked down to above Elevator D.

NP: Okay. So that would have been near the International Harvester building then?

AG: Above the International Harvester building. You know where the old waterpipe used to come across the river there?

NP: Yes.

AG: Right there.

NP: Wasn’t that at the end of Syndicate, if I recall?

AG: Yes. Yeah.

NP: Okay.

AG: Yeah. We used to walk across the tracks with a gobble of dew worms and a stick and a length of line. You could catch a couple of pickerel three or four pounds and bring them home. That was my duty for the morning. [Laughs]

NP: What did you--. You went to school where?

AG: Isabella.

NP: Okay.

AG: We were right at the southernly limit of Isabella School. It was a 20-minute walk.

NP: Yes. Yeah, that was my father's alma mater as well.

[0:10:04]

AG: Good old Isabella.

NP: What career path did you take?

AG: The war. [Laughs] We didn't have any choice. There was something called national mobilization in effect during the war, and the government told me where to go to work.

NP: So where did you go?

AG: To Canadian Car.

NP: Oh, okay. So you may have worked with my uncle.

AG: Well, there were, what, 5,000 people working in Canada Car at one point?

NP: Yes. My uncle's name was Joe Marks. He was, I think, at one point in personnel and then eventually in the early stages of computers. They lived on Nora Street, I believe, but eventually May Street. Yes, so you would've been with the Rosie the Riveter gangs.

AG: When I graduated from high school, I had gone into mathematics, and I could do things like trigonometry and some of the more unusual parts of mathematics. So I got told I had to go to the Canada Car because that's where they needed me, and that's where I went.

NP: Was that where you spent your whole career then?

AG: Well, I worked there until 1943. Then I got to be 21. And I were 19 at the time, so then it was military service. Again, you had no choice.

NP: Where did you enlist? [Laughs]

AG: In Fort William.

NP: With which group?

AG: Well, I tried the Airforce, but they wouldn't accept me up in the air because I had some eardrum problems. So they said, "Well, the Navy might be all right for you." And the Navy wasn't too enthused about it, but I got a shore job anyway. I went into procurement.

NP: Oh, okay. Now you may not know anything about this, but I know even less. You were talking about the National Service before you enlisted. I had understood that during the war, there was some kind of security group working to provide security for the elevators. Do you know anything about that?

AG: Yes.

NP: Okay. Tell me about that.

AG: Now, let's see. There was a militia group formed, and they wanted to go overseas and fight, but all they would allow them to do was be security guards at grain elevators. And most of them hated the job.

NP: Did you know any of them, and what do you know about why they hated it?

AG: Well, they hated it because they wanted to go and fight the war. They didn't want to sit around in a dirty grain elevator doing nothing.

NP: [Laughs]

AG: As a matter of fact, at least I know one of them got shot by somebody. I don't know. I think it was by an elevator employee thought it was somebody sneaking around late at night. Anyway. But no, these people, they did not want to be working in the grain elevators as safety people or whatever.

NP: Did--. What was I going to say? So I can understand why they had the militia formed up, but who did they put in the militia as opposed to into the active fighting forces? Why was that group--. Who made up that group that they weren't considered for overseas?

AG: I really don't know the details. There were, what, there were two battalions stationed locally, the 102nd, and what was it?

NP: There was the Lake Superior.

AG: Yeah. I think they were originally called the 98th or something, then eventually they became the mobile unit. Yeah. Which is in Hillcrest Park.

NP: Yeah. My dad was in that unit. Yeah. The LSR, Lake Superior Regiment.

[0:15:07]

AG: That sounds like about right.

NP: Yeah, yeah. Is there a possibility that the militia might have been people born to immigrants, say, from Germany or Italy that were, you know, maybe first generation here, but they weren't considered a good security risk for going into an army that was going over potentially to--?

AG: I really couldn't comment on that, no. I don't know.

NP: Yeah. The elevators themselves. Let's think about Elevator D, which you said was one that you were most--.

AG: Yeah. Pretty familiar with.

NP: Most familiar with. And even though you were at Empire, you wouldn't be familiar with Ogilvie?

AG: With Ogilvie's? Oh, yes. I knew Ogilvie's well. I had a neighbour who worked there. As a matter of fact, you've heard that they had what they called man-lifts in that elevator?

NP: Tell me about those.

AG: Well, it was a vertical belt which had attached to it, like, little round seats and handholds. You were on the first floor, you wanted to go up, you waited until this thing came around. It was moving slowly. You stepped on the footstep, and you grabbed the handle, and it went up through a hole in the next floor, and a hole in the next floor. And when you got where you wanted to be, you stepped off. That's all.

NP: Sounds like a really safe way to get around.

AG: Oh, wasn't it really, eh? [Laughing] Yeah, I often think, you know, "Oh, we used to have fun. It was fun riding up and down those things." But no, it was probably dangerous.

NP: So you were saying when you started to introduce that little piece of equipment, You said that you had an acquaintance that worked at the elevator?

AG: Yes, a neighbour.

NP: A neighbour. And what was that person's name?

AG: What was--?

NP: What was their name, if you can recall?

AG: Oh, his name was Towsley.

NP: Oh, I know. He was my next-door neighbour.

AG: On Ernestine.

NP: Mr. Towsley.

AG: Yeah. Fred.

NP: Fred! I was going to say that. Yes, we lived right next-door to him.

AG: Yeah. I think he was at one time a watchman at Ogilvie's.

NP: Okay. I often wondered what he did.

AG: Yeah. But that was when I knew him. He was actually a neighbour of me when I was on Empire Avenue, and he was renting a house, and they sold the house. So his oldest son Ted, do you remember--?

NP: Yes, I do. He moved into the house.

AG: He was—What?

NP: Didn't he move into the house eventually?

AG: Yeah. He helped build them the house on Ernestine, 767, was it?

NP: Well, we were 758, so they would have been--.

AG: Well, yeah. It was on the east side.

NP: They would have been 760, I guess.

AG: Yeah. That might have been. Anyway, I think it was the first house by the lane.

NP: Yes.

AG: Do you remember there was the old community centre over on Sprague Street and Empire?

NP: Yes.

AG: Yeah.

NP: Yeah. That was right pretty much in my backyard. So when you said earlier on that you were almost in Westfort, actually, you were in Westfort.

AG: I was--. I'm sorry I lost you.

NP: You were in Westfort. I keep having a discussion with my husband that Ernestine was in Westfort. It might have been east Westfort, but it was still Westfort. [Laughs]

AG: Yeah. Do you remember the second oldest son was Bob?

NP: I didn't know him as well.

AG: He was killed very early in the war.

NP: Oh, then I wouldn't have known him because I wasn't born until '48.

AG: Okay, yeah. And then there was Ken, and Ken went on to be a minister somewhere out west. And there was one other. What was the other fellow's--? There was four boys.

NP: Yeah.

AG: Yeah. Anyway.

NP: Okay. So how did you get in the elevator if you didn't work there? Did he just sort of spirit you in?

[0:20:02]

AG: Oh, we just walked in. Those were the days when there were nothing like fences or anything. You could go anywhere. We used to go over and play in the old starch building on the island. We used to climb up the bins in the elevators. You could do anything. There was no restrictions on movement. I can remember going over into the elevators. I had a friend who worked out at the Grand Trunk Elevator on the Mission.

NP: Yes.

AG: And we used to go out and see him once in a while. You know, there was a streetcar that went out there to Chippewa, and they had a branch line that went down to the Grand Trunk and the Searle Elevator. We used to go down and visit his dad and muck around, go fishing off the dock or roam around the elevator, ride the belts, and do anything. [Laughing]

NP: Tell me about riding the belts.

AG: [Laughs] Well, when they were empty, they were going along slowly horizontally, so you just sat on, and you went for a ride down the belts. When the belts started to go down a hole, you jumped off. [Laughs]

NP: So would the belt be going right into a bin?

AG: Whatever they were doing. If they were putting grain in, when they dumped the grain, then they rode back empty, and then they picked up the grain that was coming in. Do you remember the boxcars used to be spotted over a grate in the floor between the tracks?

NP: Yes.

AG: And they'd smash in the doors, and the grain poured down into a belt, and I remember there was a great big electromagnet mounted over the belt. The idea was that they didn't want any pieces of steel getting into the grain at the elevator. It was interesting because you could sit and watch this thing, and a piece of wrench or a jackknife or something came along, there was a *thump*, and it was grabbed by the--.

NP: By the big magnet?

AG: The magnet, yeah. Electromagnets, yeah. Then they turned off the electromagnets when they were finished loading, and if there was anything on there of any interest, why, usually they would give it to anybody. I remember I got a nice jackknife off them once. That was at Grand Trunk.

NP: Hm! What was the name of your friend and his father that worked at the Grand Trunk at the time?

AG: His name was Proudfoot.

NP: Right. And when we talked before this little chat, you were telling me about an incident with the--. Well, what's the word I'm looking for? With the tram that went out to past the First Nation into the two elevators. There was an unfortunate incident when the trolley was taking you along to the elevators one day?

AG: Oh, that was--. Yeah, the streetcar.

NP: Streetcar! That's the word I was looking for.

AG: Charlie Johnson was the streetcar conductor that took the streetcar out to Chippewa and would go into the Searle and Grand Trunk if there was anybody that needed to go in there. But it was a snowstorm one morning, and Charlie was going along there lickety-split, and then there was a bump. He stopped, and apparently, he had hit a lady who had been walking on the tracks because they were plowed. The streetcar had a--. Do you remember the streetcars had that great big broom on the front? A big, massive circular broom that swept the tracks.

NP: No, that was before my time. I guess I had the other version of it, which was the--.

AG: Okay. Yeah. The streetcar lines were swept by a great big broom, and usually it ended up being very clean right down to the ties on the track, but the snow on either side was probably six or eight inches deep because they used those old horse-drawn V-plows. If a car inadvertently got himself into the streetcar tracks, he had to go to the end of the line to get out because he was trapped in the deep tracks. Anyway, Charlie Johnson, he hit this lady and killed her. And because we were in the streetcar, we had to go to the courthouse and give evidence and so on.

[0:25:50]

NP: And I think you were telling me that you even had to attend the--.

AG: The autopsy, yeah. Old Dr. Bull was the man who did--. I remember he was an old army doctor. I think I told you that when they opened her up, the smell was very bad, and he had to put the fans on in the room, but he said she had been eating rabbit meat, and that caused the bad smell.

NP: And how was that doctor's last name spelled?

AG: B-U-L-L.

NP: Okay.

AG: He was a medic in the army.

NP: Anything that you recall about that area near Ogilvie's? There was the Gillespie Elevator that was there too.

AG: The Gillespie Elevator was across the river from--. It was originally the Dwyer Elevator, D-W-Y-E-R. Gillespie bought it, I think, about, I don't know, maybe about 1919, 1920. I can't remember now. They hadn't had it very long, and it caught fire and burned, and they never did repair it. Those old set of six bins sat there for years and years and years.

NP: And what about the starch plant? The one on the island. Was it actually operating at any time that you recall?

AG: The starch plant was a disaster. They assumed that there was going to be a great need for those products out west, and they spent a lot of money building that place. I really don't know the commercial details, but it was sort of an on and off thing for a few years, and then it shut down. When I was a kid, it was empty, oh, from when I was probably, what, 10 or 12 maybe. We used to go in it and play around and run up and down to the top of the mill and back down again. It was totally empty. It started up again during the war, and I think if I remember right, they made artillery shells there, but that was it. Then after the war, it closed down and never reopened again. And it's still sitting there in a pretty pitiful looking--. What is it, Port Arthur Lumber Company who owns it now?

NP: That's the last I heard, but whether that's the same, I don't know.

AG: I think they still are, yeah. I drove in there one day last summer, and I talked to a couple of the guys in there.

NP: It was quite a spectacular structure at the time though, I would think, when it was new. It was quite beautiful.

AG: Oh, it was a great big place, yeah. They spent an awful lot of money building that place. But it was a total waste of money.

NP: So let's go down to--. If you're heading towards the mouth of the Kam River, do you recall anything at all about the old CPR elevators that were there? Because they would have--.

AG: Oh, no. They were long gone before me.

NP: I think 1948 was the last one went down.

AG: Well, they may have been there, but they weren't in use, were they? They might have been used during the war for distress storage.

NP: I think they were used because--.

AG: Yeah.

NP: Because I think companies like UGG [United Grain Growers] may have rented them before they built their own facilities.

[0:30:06]

AG: Yeah, okay.

NP: But that might have been much earlier. But I just know that, I think, Elevator B—which was at the end of Victoria Avenue—I don't think it was taken down until either 1948 or '49.

AG: Okay. Downtown Fort William we didn't have much to do with. [Laughs] We lived in Westfort.

NP: okay, okay.

AG: Yeah.

NP: That's right. You would have been by that time--.

AG: But I knew the Empire Elevator well.

NP: Okay. Well, tell me about the Empire Elevator.

AG: Well, the thing that was so interesting was that great big steam engine outside in a separate building. It was a beautiful thing. It had a big flywheel on it. Gee, it must have been over six feet in diameter, and it was all brass. The old guy who looked after it kept the brass polished. That engine is still around somewhere. The Thunder Bay Museum still has that engine stored somewhere.

NP: Well, I can give you the next chapter on that one. Do you know Mr. Puttkemery?

AG: Mr.--?

NP: Puttkemery. I'm not sure if I've got the right accents on the right syllable. Puttkemery. He was one of the fellows who was responsible for trying to salvage that steam engine.

AG: Oh, okay.

NP: The Museum stored it out somewhere, I think, on Riverdale Road, out past Mount McKay. And the fellow who was storing it there no longer wanted to keep it, and he was threatening to send it to the scrap dealers.

AG: Yes.

NP: So our group, Friends of Grain Elevators, was called into action by the Museum because they still had no place to put it. It was in really rough shape. I visited the--. It was all in pieces. I visited the yard where it was being stored, and fortunately, the manager of Richardson Elevator at the time took a real interest in it and arranged to have the pieces moved. So those pieces are now being stored in Current River at the Richardson's Current River operation. So the manager of that operation has since left, but his intention was to try to restore it and put it back together. I don't know whether that will ever happen now that he's left, but we haven't really followed up on it at all at this point. I'm waiting for him to settle into his new job out on the West Coast and then get in touch with him again and see if there's anything that can be done to put it back together. And your comments about how beautiful it was when it was in operation has sort of spurred me into thinking about taking some action. Now I sort of interrupted your story. So you were talking about seeing that steam engine.

AG: Yeah, I saw it running. After when I was on the board of directors for the Museum, I got the subject up one time about, you know, "Could we rehabilitate it and put it somewhere?" And they said, "Well, there would be a minimum cost of about \$25, 000." [Laughs] They suggested that if I could raise the money that we might be willing to do something about it, but it never happened.

NP: Yeah.

AG: So I'm glad to hear, though, that it's still somewhere.

NP: Yeah, that the pieces are. The--.

AG: It was a big, massive cast iron base that it sat on, and that would have been, oh, I don't know how much that might have weighed. Four or five tons, I guess. But I can remember the steam engine. Have you ever been in the Duluth Museum, railway museum?

NP: Yes, I think I have, but it was several years ago.

AG: Okay. They took one of the big old steam engines. You remember they hauled iron ore from up on the range?

[0:35:11]

NP: Right.

AG: And they built a special steam engine that needed a great deal of power. The Museum took one of those and mounted it on track, but then they raised the whole engine about a quarter of an inch off the track. So it doesn't start properly, but it starts electrically. But you can see that great big flywheel start to turn, and stuff gushes out of the piston. You know. And it looks very real as it starts up and looks like it's getting ready to go. Then the wheels turn on the locomotive. Very impressive. And I thought, "Boy, would that ever be nice for our steam engine," because Empire was rope-driven, right?

NP: Yeah.

AG: Yeah. That and, what, the Western was a rope-driven elevator?

NP: Well, probably the name of the elevator when it was rope-driven was the Fort William Elevator.

AG: Yes, okay. I can remember there was a time when they had to replace--. That rope was about, what, two, two and a half inches in diameter?

NP: At least, I'd say. Yeah.

AG: And they had one old guy who knew how to replace the rope. It had to be done, I think, every two or three years, did it?

NP: Yeah. It obviously would wear out. It wasn't like steel.

AG: Yeah. And that piece of rope was, what, a mile and something long?

NP: That sounds about right because it went through the whole elevator.

AG: Yes. But I can remember we were a bunch of kids over there one day—I don't know, we'd been swimming or something—and this old guy was ready to start running a new line. He obviously hooked it up to the old line, you know. And I guess it was going to take him a couple of days to feed the rope right through the whole system and then adjust the tensions on it and whatnot. It was a big deal when they had to replace the rope.

NP: Anything more that you remember about that?

AG: Not very much, no. They told us to get the hell out of the way. [Laughing] So we were--.

NP: Yes. So his speciality would have been splicing.

AG: oh, it had to be spliced, yes. Oh, I learned to splice rope. That was--. But if I remember rightly, when he spliced the new one to the old one, it would have been a splice, what, six, seven feet long? Oh, it was a long splice.

NP: And what can you tell me about what you learned about splicing rope?

AG: Well, the Navy used a lot of rope splicing. That was--. The navy used a lot of rope. If nothing else, mooring. We had to build those loops that dropped over the--. Oh, God. What do you call the thing where the ship docks?

NP: A stanchion or trunchion or something like that. [Note: Should be a bollard. NP]

AG: Yeah, yeah. There's several names for it. But when the ship moved close to the dock, they swung a man out on a bosun's chair on a boom, and he dropped down onto the dock. He carried a light rope of about a quarter inch. When he got on the dock, he started

to pull this, and the ship released its anchor rope or its docking rope. He finally pulled it ashore and dropped it over the stanchion, and the ship was moored. They still do it that way.

NP: Now when you're splicing, what would you say that the most important things that you need to know in order to do a good splice, one that won't fail?

AG: Well, remember that when they make rope, the twists go into it under a twisting system that keeps it twisted, and to be able to splice it, you have to back off the rope to loosen the various cords in the rope depending on how many there are. You had a thing called a fid, which was a pointed piece of stick rope that you pushed in between the threads of the rope to bring the splice forward. I can't describe it very much simpler. It's just a slow process, but it's amazing when you do it right and the ropes closed under the twist. They hold. They bind everything tight.

[0:40:43]

NP: Now, I have a question just going back quickly to the Empire Elevator. You said that the steam engine was outside?

AG: Yes. It was in a separate building.

NP: Oh, okay. Okay. So if I were to look at--.

AG: Because remember, they were in the process of tearing the elevator down when it burned.

NP: Well, yes. And I--.

AG: I think it was probably a welder's sparks, was it, that started it?

NP: I don't know what it was, but there were sort of two stages to the tearing it down. There was the fire that you mentioned, and we have a story from--. I don't know if you knew the Halversons that were on Empire Avenue.

AG: Halverson?

NP: Halverson, yes.

AG: Might have been familiar. The name is familiar.

NP: Yeah. Bill. It was Bill and Edie Halverson. Anyway, his grandfather or father worked at the Empire Elevator and had carved his initials into one of the pieces of wood. I imagine that would be the workhouse.

AG: Probably.

NP: He managed to salvage that piece of board, I think, it was just the day before the workhouse burnt down. So there was that, and then after that, the bins were still standing, and that they blew up.

AG: Yes.

NP: Or imploded. Were you around at all for that, either the fire or the--?

AG: No, no. The Empire Elevator was a long way from our grounds in Westfort, yeah.

NP: yeah. But the interesting thing with that is that the blowing it up, a Mr. Lebrun from Thunder Bay, he was one half of the partnership that--. I guess it was probably imploding as opposed to exploding the elevator. That was the first time that that kind of demolition had been used on grain elevators.

AG: Huh!

NP: So we have an interview with him that was really very interesting.

AG: Yeah. I remember Lebrun's, yeah.

NP: Anyway. So let's go scooting past Elevator D. You talked about fishing near there. Anything you remember about the elevator or stories about that elevator?

AG: About Elevator D?

NP: Yeah.

AG: No, not very much. You recall that downstream from Elevator D was the Plymouth--. No, not Plymouth Cordage. The International Harvester.

NP: Right.

AG: And then between there and Murphy's coal dock was an area where a guy by the name of Hogan used to bring in sand and gravel from somewhere up north toward Nipigon. He was in the sand and gravel business, but they used to unload great mounds of sand there, and it was enough to literally make a little beach along the river.

NP: Ah!

AG: It was also back in the days of the Hungry Thirties, and around back behind Elevator D, the hobos had a jungle. I can remember, well, I would have been a teenager, I guess. But some of the older kids—Alf Coombes and some of those guys from Westfort—they would go swimming down there in the evening and then build a bonfire. Then these guys would come out of the hobo jungle and see if they would bum a cigarette or two. But some of them, I remember one guy could play a Jew's harp. That was the first time I ever heard one of those things. You remember that? What a Jew's harp looked like?

[0:45:19]

NP: No, I don't.

AG: It looked like a little brass harp that you put on your mouth, and then the side of it, it had like a little brass spring. The way you put your tongue on it could change it, and so it would go *bring-brung-bring-brung*, and they could get a tune out of it.

NP: Okay.

AG: And then there was always some guy who would have a mouth organ, and I never saw guitars come out. You've got to realize, some of those hobos were highly educated people, very smart people. They weren't just bums. They were guys who needed work and were looking for jobs. There were no jobs. But no, I can remember as a kid being really interested in some of those people. They're sitting around the campfire telling us stories and whatnot.

NP: So they would be just--. [Coughs] Pardon me. They would just be moving through the city? They wouldn't be--.

AG: Yes. Yeah, they would stop over for a couple of days. They used to go out and wander around the city, usually up and down the back lanes. If they could see anybody out, they asked for food, you know? And the people knew them and used to make them a sandwich. Sometimes the guy would do a little work around the house or whatever. People would say, "Oh, would you mind washing a couple windows, and I'll give you lunch." I remember my mother was out in the back one day, and this fellow came along. He wanted "zoup," and my mother thought that he meant "soup." And so she said, "Well, it's not lunchtime yet. Come back in an hour or two or whatever, and I'll give you a bowl of soup." And, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Zoup. Zoup." It turned out he wanted soap. My mother gave him--. You know homemade soap?

NP: Mmhmm.

AG: And my mother gave him something. "Thank you, thank you, thank you." They go down to the Neebing River, down below the sanitorium, and peel off and go into the water and have a bath or a shower or a wash or whatever. But I can remember him saying, "Zoup, zoup," and my mother thought he said "soup." [Laughing]

NP: And would most of those people, from your experience, have been from the west, from the Prairies?

AG: Would they have they been from the west?

NP: Yeah.

AG: Oh, they could have been from anywhere. They were going back and forth on the railways. They were riding the rods, you know.

NP: Yeah, yeah.

AG: Those guys, they started off in the east and went west, and if there was nothing, then they come back east again. But it was just a continuous look to try and find a job when there weren't any.

NP: Yeah. As we move along from Elevator D, then, we come to the Consolidated Elevator, which you said was sort of right in your sightline when you were on Amelia. What memories do you have of that elevator?

AG: Not very much. They used that wooden bridge that went over the tracks at the end of Brown Street.

NP: Yes.

AG: We used to go up on that. That was an interesting morning to walk over that. It came out just away from the Western, right?

NP: Yeah.

AG: I remember during the war they were worried that they did not have enough storage for all of the grain coming off of the west. And so, they built what they called distress storage bins along a lot of the elevators. They poured a big pad of concrete, and they brought in timbers from out west. They built what amounted to a huge log cabin, and then it would--. I think some of them were big enough to store pretty close to half a million bushels, but this was the idea that it was distress storage. But that's where I first learned about--. What do they call it when they compress the concrete? Anyway.

[0:50:33]

NP: Oh, when they were building the--?

AG: Yeah. They put in steel cables.

NP: They put in rebar, and then they did--. Oh. Continuous pour concrete.

AG: Yeah. But they used steel cables, and the cables were twisted under a great deal of pressure.

NP: Oh, okay.

AG: And then when they poured the concrete and the concrete set, then the steel cables held their tensile strength, and that kept the floor from sagging or breaking under the load. It was something new.

NP: Yeah. Reinforced concrete.

AG: Yeah. Well, they don't reinforce concrete anymore now. The Home Depot is built on a concrete slab, but it's not reinforced concrete. There's no steel in it. I don't know how it works either.

NP: Yeah. Well, at least they don't have to worry about it rusting out.

AG: No, that's right. That was what caused all the bridges along the highway to have to be replaced.

NP: Yes, yes.

AG: They started using salt to spread through the concrete and ate the reinforcing steel.

NP: Yeah.

AG: Then they had to build them with that plastic covered steel, which ruins steel then.

NP: So did they have distress storage at Consolidated?

AG: They had one at Western, yeah.

NP: Okay. Now, Western--. There were three elevators there in a row. There was Consolidated, which had the sign that said Fort William Elevator E at one point, and then Fort William Elevator F, and then there was Western.

AG: Yes.

NP: And then Paterson.

AG: Then Paterson's. Okay, yeah.

NP: So where was the distress storage? Was that near Western Elevator then?

AG: Yes. When you went over the walk-bridge, it was almost right dead in front of you. There's still a big vacant concrete area there. It would be upstream from the elevator.

NP: Yes.

AG: I drove onto it the other day just for a look.

NP: Ah, yes. And you'd notice that that elevator has been sold.

AG: Yeah. I think maybe they might have built, oh, I don't know, a dozen or more of them. I remember the Richardson's, the heritage elevator, they had a great big one, and the concrete pad is still there.

NP: Yeah. Do you remember them dismantling the--?

AG: Yes. Right after the war they dismantled them.

NP: Do you know anything more about that?

AG: The only thing is I remember that the wood was big timbers, maybe 12 by 12s, and long, 24 feet long. When they--. They were just fresh on. But when they started to dismantle those, every construction guy in town wanted to get a hold of them because they were big valuable beams, and I know there was a real great market for them.

NP: Just to give you a second chapter to that one, the reason I ask is that both my husband and I were born in Thunder Bay, but we moved to Winnipeg for school and for our careers. We lived in a house in a place called Wildwood Park, which is a subdevelopment built by Bird Construction. And working on the history book of that little development, we came across information that the lumber that they used to build these houses which were postwar houses were from dismantled grain storage in Thunder Bay.

AG: Yes, I'm very sure that there was a great market for them, and everybody wanted to get a hold of them because they were beautiful wood. You know, 12 by 12s, 24 feet long, and not a knot in them.

NP: Yeah. Any construction in town?

AG: There was, I think—but I'm not certain—but I think there were two or three apartment buildings built on Edward Street near the CNR [Canadian National Railway] tracks, and if I'm not mistaken, some of the wood in those may have come from the distress storage bins.

[0:55:18]

NP: Okay.

AG: I'm not absolutely sure about that though. But I know he built those three apartment blocks for almost nothing. His aged mother had in her backyard the forms that built the cement blocks. They handmade the cement blocks.

NP: Yes. Now, that was an Italian family?

AG: Yes. I'm trying to think of their name.

NP: Michelli?

AG: Michelli, that's it! Yes. Michelli, yeah. Remember she got into trouble? The old lady got into trouble because she was making these blocks, and I don't know what it was, but the income tax people got an interest in it.

NP: Oh, jeez! [Laughing] Yes.

AG: I can't remember what it was, but I knew the girl that married one of the Michellis, and she told me something about it one time.

NP: So was that maybe on--. Oh, yeah. You did say Edward Street. I know exactly where you're speaking of. The Michelli Apartments there.

AG: Yeah. They're between Walsh and the tracks.

NP: Right. Right. Now, speaking of tracks and speaking of wood, one of my special interests is--. Actually, you know, I'm not going to say this because I'm going to ask you a little later. How are you doing by the way? Are you doing okay?

AG: Oh, I'm getting dry, but beyond that, I'm good.

NP: Do you want to stop and get a glass of water?

AG: No, no. We're fine. Go ahead.

NP: So I want to come back and talk about grain cars, but before I do that, I want to finish off your memories about-- Well, there was the Paterson Elevator, and then there were the two elevators close to the Canada Car. So--.

AG: There were three elevators at the end of Neebing Avenue, were there not?

NP: Well, yes. This show just how deeply ingrained your knowledge is because that particular elevator, the third one, burnt down in 1919.

AG: That was the Muirhead Black Elevator?

NP: Yeah, the Black & Muirhead. Yeah.

AG: Okay, yeah. Because I remember the Electric. We called it the Electric. Did you call it Purvis?

NP: No. My research goes back far enough that I'm familiar with it as the Electric, and then Purvis was maybe-- It may have started out as the Lakehead Elevator or had been called the Lakehead at some point, the Electric.

AG: I think, yeah, you may be right. I think Lakehead was in there. It was the Lakehead and the Northwestern side by side.

NP: Yes. And then in between them was the Black and Muirhead which burnt down.

AG: Okay. Yeah. There's still some concrete down there. I think they're trying to rehabilitate that area now. There's work there.

NP: When you were at Canada Car then, what kind of action did you see at those two elevators? Because at that time it would have been the Northwestern and the Electric.

AG: Oh, they were busy because you remember they had a turning basin there?

NP: Yeah.

AG: The ships would go up the river—the small ones, the canallers—and they would load. And then they dredged out what they called a turning basin so that they could get around and head downstream properly. Because later on when larger ships came up probably as far as the Western, didn't they have to back all the way down to the Mission?

NP: Yeah. They had to back down to Fort William Elevator. And I'm not sure--. Like, that was in my time. We came back to Thunder Bay around 2000.

AG: Okay. I remember stories about the bigger ships. What the Kam would take anything up to about 350 feet. Beyond that, they couldn't turn in the turning basin.

NP: Right.

AG: Anyway, just from the short period of time, I think, when maybe some of them come up as far as the Western then had to back down somewhere down to Ogilvie's before they could find enough room to get turned around. I can't remember too much.

NP: Actually, they would go out by the Mission. By the Mission, back in that way from Mission.

AG: Yeah.

NP: Did you ever get into those elevators, the two at the turning basin?

[1:00:11]

AG: Yeah. I went into the Northwestern when it was still there because I was involved at the time in fire protection. They had a fire pump, but it couldn't produce enough pressure to get a stream of water up to the workhouse floors. So we had some issues there. They didn't do anything about it. They tore the elevator down.

NP: Yeah. Do you remember the demolition of the elevators, those two elevators, at all?

AG: Not really, no. Not really. I don't. What year were they torn down, do you know?

NP: I would think it was probably '70s.

AG: Yeah. There was a period when I wasn't here during that, somewhere in around that.

NP: Yeah. I'm not sure if they were torn down before or after the Paterson Elevator. Do you remember anything about the Paterson Elevator?

AG: I remember the Paterson Elevator being torn down, yes.

NP: And I think that was in the '70s.

AG: I think that was right, yes.

NP: Yeah.

AG: Because I was then living on Amelia Street, so.

NP: And do you remember the wartime storage there? I think it was called the synagogue. It was a very unusual shaped building, quite an unusual roof. [The 'synagogue, Annex 4, was not wartime storage - it was a concrete annex built in 1931. Bill Reist]

AG: No, I don't think--. Nothing comes to my mind. Paterson's I never had much to do with. The only thing me and Paterson's had in common was their daughter Nancy and I were born on the same day.

NP: Oh! And how did you know that?

AG: Well, my mother and Mrs. Paterson were in McKellar Hospital at the same time.

NP: Oh! [Laughs]

AG: Oh, yeah. Nancy Paterson always used to invite me to her birthday parties.

NP: Aw, that was nice.

AG: Then she moved to Montreal and got married.

NP: Yes, yes.

AG: Had lost her humour then. Paterson was kind of--. I don't know. We didn't go very much near Paterson Elevator. I don't know why, but it was not--.

NP: Now, a lot of your neighbours would have been grain elevator workers of one sort or another.

AG: Westfort was either elevator workers or railway workers or Great Lakes Paper workers. That was it. They were all well-employed and did well. Westfort was a good, bustling community at one time. But anyway, times change.

NP: Well, I think it's still holding its own as a community.

AG: Actually, it is. It still looks like people looking after their houses. I have noticed that, boy, the trees have grown up. Yeah.

NP: Now, one of my special interests—I don't know why in particular, maybe it was because of having lived in a house in Winnipeg that was built from wood that had a connection to the grain industry—I also have an interest in grain car doors and wood from inside grain cars. So people have said that a lot of salvaging, we'll call it, was--.

AG: Oh, yes. [Laughs] Oh, yes. Every elevator, they used wood then and cardboard. When the grain cars came in in the fall, they smashed the doors open, and they threw all that wood off to the side. It was eagerly grabbed up by residents—firewood, building wood. Oh, there's a lot of garages in Westfort that were made out of grain doors.

NP: And chicken coops. I think probably my--.

AG: Yes. Chicken coops as well. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Grain doors were considered to be a valuable commodity. Yeah.

NP: Did your family ever salvage any of it?

AG: I don't ever think or recall my father ever using grain doors, no. We may have burned them, but nothing comes--. But I can remember piles of them being beside the elevators, and then they all just disappeared.

[1:05:07]

NP: Yeah. What about excess grain?

AG: How do you mean?

NP: [Laughs] Well, there's also stories about excess grain on purpose and excess grain by accident.

AG: Yeah. Well, a lot of people used to sweep the grain cars. You know, there'd be a little left in--. Everybody in Westfort had chickens, and I can remember a lot of the guys took very large lunch pails to work with them in the elevators. And they ate their lunch, and they filled their great big lunchbox with grain and brought it home. It was enough to feed a dozen chickens. [Laughs] People didn't bother about it. The railway company didn't bother. The empty cars would go on a siding, and people would go in at night and, you know, you might be able to take two or three pounds of grain out of the corner of a boxcar. Nobody bothered about it. But I remember one incident in Westfort. They had stored some full cars on the CNR siding in Westfort, and somebody went in with an auger and drilled a hole in the bottom of the boxcar. And of course, the grain poured out. Well, they filled two or three sacks and took off, but then the grain kept pouring out, and it kept pouring out. I guess the next day when they came to look, there was a few thousand pounds of grain on the tracks, and they called the RCMP. And there was hell to pay over that.

NP: Did they ever find the person who--?

AG: If they ever did, I don't know.

NP: Yeah.

AG: I knew who it was. [Laughs]

NP: Yeah. There seemed to be situations where people knew who was doing what, and--. Yeah.

AG: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We did. You're not going to rat on anybody. You might get your house burned down the next night. [Laughing]

NP: Any other stories that--. I'm sort of focusing your attention, but there might be some things that I'm missing. Any other stories that you can think of? The ships or the trains or the elevators?

AG: Nothing really comes to mind. As I say, In the old days when November came, insurance rates on the boats went up, and usually by about the middle of December, the insurance companies simply refused to insure boats or cargos. You know the gales of November?

NP: Right.

AG: And so, as I recall it, about the middle of November navigation ceased. Then the elevators did what they called their weigh over. Whatever they had left in them, they weighed and cleaned and did whatever and put it into winter storage. That usually managed to end up about Christmas Eve or maybe the day before Christmas Eve. So then the elevator employees had a party, and there were a few bottles of booze and whatnot. Then everybody went home, and the railway shut down, and the elevators shut down. Navigation closed, and everybody hibernated until they saw the smoke from the old icebreaker, the *James Whalen*. Then they got ready to go back to work again.

NP: Something that you were saying there--. Oh, winter storage. So I understood that at some point, they would actually have ships in the river throughout the winter.

AG: Yes. They were--. Yeah. It depends on how much grain they had leftover, right? But very often, they would fill a ship and just moor it, and it would stay there all winter fully loaded. It was not only ready to go out early in the spring, but it didn't cost any money to store it in a--. Well, I guess it did cost something, but it was a cheap way of storing grain.

NP: Any comments at all about the Paterson ships?

[1:10:03]

AG: The fleet?

NP: Yes.

AG: Yeah. No, they were all small ships. They were canallers, and they would do the Welland Canal. So they would be under 250 feet long. They may have some larger ones, I don't know. How many did they have? They had a big fleet.

NP: I don't recall. I do have their *How Great the Harvest*, which is their history book. I do have that sitting in my den here, but I'm not very good at keeping statistics.

AG: They had a lot of ships in that fleet. Paterson was in the boat business, probably bigger than the grain business.

NP: Yeah. You know, we just sort of briefly mentioned your escapades over out near Chippewa, Searle and Grand Trunk. Any comments or stories to offer about your visits to those elevators or that area?

AG: The wonderful thing that I can remember is that we had some really hot summer days, and if you went down in the basement of the grain elevator, it was cool. [Laughs] I can remember we were at Grand Trunk one day, and there was a ship. I think it was one of the old whalebacks. Do you remember those ships that they called whalebacks? There's one in the Duluth Museum.

NP: Yes.

AG: It was there. It was so hot that day that the cook came out and dropped eggs onto the deck and they fried. Because we had planned to go out there and go fishing, we went on the other side of the slip from the elevator, and there used to be a perch over there. I remember it started to get too hot, and Mr. Proudfoot said, "No, you can't stay outside in that sun. You've got to come in." He shepherded us down into the basement of the elevator, and we stayed there until 5:00 to catch the streetcar home. [Laughs]

NP: Did you have sort of a visceral reaction to the elevators at all? Like sort of a—other than that one, which is just the pleasant coolness of it—but how would you describe sensually your visits to the elevators?

AG: It was just something to do, that's all. It was summer vacation time. By that time, we had bicycles. We were probably 14 years old, 13. We had bicycles, and it was--. Oh, boy. We'd bicycle out to Grand Trunk Elevator. That was a long way. But beyond that, no. They were there, and we lived with them. That's all.

NP: My husband's uncle, his father was a night watchman. Well, he probably worked at Grand Trunk, but later on he was a night watchman as well. And my husband's uncle talked about the bicycle brigades that cycled out from Westfort to the grain elevators.

AG: Yeah. There was not only the grain elevators, but there was the warehouses, the big CPR warehouses, that lined the Kam River. You know Sheds 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, that I can remember? They were called stevedores that worked in the warehouses. Yeah. But they all rode bicycles, and they all lived in the East End. So when it was go home time, there was a string of bicycles all the way down Simpson Street. [laughs] Hundreds and hundreds of them.

NP: I think my husband's grandfather probably worked at one of those, but even the West End apparently—or Westfort—the elevator workers from that end of Westfort in the summertime would ride their bicycles out to Grand Trunk.

AG: Yeah. They rode bicycles, yeah. It was--. Nobody owned cars in the Depression. If they did, they sat on four blocks in the garage, that's all. [Laughs]

[1:15:09]

NP: Well, this has been just a great interview. I hope that you've enjoyed it as much as I have, or at least--.

AG: I don't know what I've contributed, but as I say, I grew up in elevators and railways and never got--.

NP: I guess one thing we should talk about, and that's the explosions, 1945 and 1952.

AG: Okay.

NP: The major ones anyway.

AG: The 1945 one was, what, September?

NP: August, I believe. Same time as when they dropped the atomic bomb.

AG: Oh, yeah. That's right. Hiroshima was the same day. Port Arthur was a long way from Westfort, but I remember we had heard about this explosion, and we bicycled over to Port Arthur, which was a long hike.

NP: Yes.

AG: By the time we got there, I guess everything had pretty much been done. They'd made the rescues, and they put the fire out, and everybody was just looking at the mess. To me, I never believed that grain dust could produce such a pressure, but I told you that we carried out a number of experiments later on in time in the '60s. We created dust explosions, and yeah, they were powerful.

NP: And where would you do these experiments?

AG: Where did we do them?

NP: Yeah.

AG: I was working with the Fire Marshal's office, and some of them we did in the old Davidson Smith Elevator, was it? Was it North Vickers Street?

NP: Yes.

AG: That was Davidson Smith?

NP: Yeah.

AG: Yeah. They were in the feed manufacturing business, weren't they?

NP: Mmhmm.

AG: I know they were interested, and we built the equipment, and we conducted it there, some of it, I remember. Because we used a little pipe about three inches in diameter, and the explosion blew the cap off the top. I remember the guys said, "Oh, that's a puny little thing." So they could have built a bigger one, and they did. They used a piece of 12-inch pipe. [Laughs] It blew the windows out of the room when it exploded.

NP: Woah!

AG: They caught hell for that.

NP: Yes. Yes. And who was it that was doing the experiments and why?

AG: Myself and another fellow. Yeah.

NP: And why were you doing it?

AG: Why were we doing it? I don't know. I think out of curiosity. It was at that period when the federal government was mandating that elevators had to have special cleaning equipment to get rid of the dust. What did they call them? Circulating things.

NP: The cyclones?

AG: Cyclones, yeah. I think we were curious from a fire protection point of view. And I know I told you, I think, that we experimented with trying to send lines up over the top of elevator bins because that was one of the things that could have saved a lot of lives in the '45 and even in the '52 explosion. If they'd have been able to provide lines that people could slide down from the top of the workhouse.

NP: I do remember now, I guess, it was the '45 explosion. There was a fellow that we interviewed by the name of Rissanen, Len Rissanen, and apparently his dad was one of the guys that shimmied over from--. And--.

[1:20:10]

AG: When they were shipping, the greatest number of people were in the top of the workhouse, and to get there in almost all the elevators, there was some kind of elevating device. There wasn't a set of stairs. There wasn't even fire escapes outside on some of the elevators. But as a result, these fellows were marooned up at the top of the workhouse, and some of them were badly injured. I think he got a medal for that, didn't he?

NP: Yes. He did. St. John's Ambulance.

AG: Two of them, I think, got medals for their heroism in shimmying up the ladders to the workhouse floor with ropes for them to be able to be evacuated.

NP: Yeah, and going across, actually, on a rope. I think there was a famous picture of that.

AG: Yeah. The local fire department one year did that rope thing from the top of the Grain Exchange Building.

NP: Oh.

AG: Yeah. They were planning rescue work and so on, and they strung a rope from the top of the Grain Exchange Building down across to Chapple's Store on the other side of Syndicate Avenue.

NP: Right.

AG: And I can remember the first guy to do it was a fellow by the name of Cooper. He was an ex-sergeant in the Army, and he worked for the fire department. He slid down that rope.

NP: So you worked for the fire department?

AG: For a while, I did, yes.

NP: I've often wondered where to find information on follow up investigations to these two explosions and to other fires that the fire department was called out to. Where would those studies be kept?

AG: Well, all fire departments keep logbooks, right, of their activities. I think they used to keep an annual, and then at the end of the year they reported. I would have to think that the City Archives might be a good start.

NP: Yeah. Good point. Okay. Well, I'll pop--.

AG: I don't think you can get into the archives, can you?

NP: Well, they may have a thing set up if you wear your mask and schedule an appointment. I know the archivist there, he's one of our friends, Friends of Grain Elevators. I think I told you about our Friends of Grain Elevators Facebook site and website?

AG: I guess, yeah. Maybe.

NP: Anyway, the Friends of Grain Elevators website—which is friendsofgrainelevators.org—we have a list of--. I think I probably told you this when we were first talking. We have about 200 interviews—now we have 201 because we have yours—and we have about 75 of them already online.

AG: Ah.

NP: If you are looking for something to help you fall off to sleep and want to listen to some of those interviews, then you can just click on the interview and listen if you go to our website and get to the Voices section. And if there's something in particular that's

of interest to you--. You know, you say, “Well, I’d like to know something about this, or I’d like to hear an interview by an engineer who worked on the elevators or somebody who was an employee of CPR,” just give me a call, and I’ll point you to an interview.

AG: What I am interested in, they say there were 36 grain elevators at the head of the lakes?

NP: Well, if they said that, they were probably referring to the little inland terminals like the Davidson & Smith that we were talking about.

AG: Maybe.

NP: But the best I’ve been able to come up with is, if you count the little elevator that was part of the starch plant that we talked about, I think you can probably get up to 30. But the problem is, as you would know Art, is that it depends what year you count too, because 1919, the fire that destroyed the Black & Muirhead, so that took one out of the count.

[1:25:17]

AG: Yeah. I think the year was 1925 when they said there was 35 grain elevators.

NP: Yeah. They were counting the ones that were on the corner of Hardisty and the ones that were on Arthur Street. Because for terminal elevators—which we call the terminal elevators—I think 1925, you wouldn’t have had Searle Elevator built, you wouldn’t have UGG. So that’s why you’re having difficulty with coming up with a count because believe me, I’m like you, it drives me nuts to try to get the names straight.

AG: Have you got what you believe to be a list of all the grain elevators?

NP: I think so. Except I haven’t paid any attention to or extremely little attention to the inland ones.

AG: Okay.

NP: So if you’re talking about the terminals, the ones that shipped out on the ships from the waterfront, yeah. I think I’ve got a pretty good understanding now.

AG: Is that in any form that you could send it to me by email?

NP: Sure.

AG: Would you do that for me please?

NP: Okay. And what should I do? Like should I do 1929, which is when the last one was built?

AG: Whenever you think is a good year, yes. I'll take your word for it.

NP: Now, on our website, if you go to our website, there's a historic map and there's a current day map.

AG: Okay. That's where I got a problem. I could open the website, but when it said, "Click here for the historic elevators," or whatever it was, I can't open it, but all I get is the little red marks. I can't read anything.

NP: So if you click on one of the marks, it doesn't come up?

AG: No.

NP: Let me check on that and see if we've got an issue, but I can certainly send you the list.

AG: Very good. That would be helpful.

NP: Well, it's the least I can do for your giving me your time.

AG: These grain elevators, they changed, as I say, they changed names and owners more often than I change my underwear.

NP: [Laughs] Well, the best source of information on that—and not the easiest to get at—the Canadian Grain Commission had to license these elevators, so every year they had a list of their licensed elevators. So that was a good way of keeping track of how many there were and what their names were, but sometimes a certain company may have owned them, but it might have been leasing out to another company to operate.

AG: Oh, yeah. Somebody else was operating it, yeah.

NP: Yeah. So I can do that for you.

AG: All right.

NP: And I should get on tape here that is it okay with you that I have this interview transcribed and we post it?

AG: I don't mind what you do.

NP: Okay, good. [Laughing] I've got that recorded.

AG: One more question.

NP: Sure.

AG: Richardson's Current River, and the next one is a little abandoned elevator, which was one of the Sask Pools. It still stands.

NP: Yes, there's actually two there. It started out as Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company. They were built, I think, between--. A and B. So Saskatchewan--.

AG: Then there's a great big, abandoned elevator, and then--.

NP: Oh, no. No, no. So what we have there, if you're asking Current River right now?

AG: Yeah.

NP: You have Richardson's Current River is what it's called. It spent most of its life as UGG.

AG: Okay. All right.

NP: And then next to it was a small elevator that, I think, started its life as United Terminal, which may have been the precursor to UGG. It became Alberta Pool 9. It was demolished—and I was just listening to this the other day—it was demolished probably in the '70s.

[1:30:09]

AG: Now the next one to it going south?

NP: The next one to it, it's a complex made up of what used to be Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator A and B. It then became Saskatchewan Pool Elevators 4 and 5. So at the time of the explosion in '45, it was Saskatchewan Wheat Pool 4 and 5. Then at some point when Saskatchewan Wheat Pool bought the elevators on the Kam River, Western Elevator—which we've talked about beside Fort William F—it became Saskatchewan Wheat Pool 5.

AG: Oh. So there wasn't a separate elevator Sask Pool 5 in--. That's what I was trying to figure out. "Where the hell was Sask Pool 5?"

NP: Yes. So Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator A and B became Saskatchewan Wheat Pool 4 and 5.

AG: Oh, okay.

NP: And then at some time it switched back to 4A and B, which it is now.

AG: But it's empty now. It's not being used?

NP: Yes, it's empty.

AG: Ah. But is there a link to it to the Richardson's heritage elevator?

NP: No.

AG: Because there's a pathway across there.

NP: There is. And they may have--. No. I don't even think they shared a rail line. I think they had a separate rail line in. I had heard some rumours that Richardson might have been trying to get some kind of connection because of the--.

AG: Use out of it, yeah.

NP: Yeah. Because there is a road that goes, well, it goes from the Fisherman's Park. It goes past the landside of UGG, Saskatchewan A and B, and terminates at the railway tracks at Richardson's original terminal, main terminal.

AG: The last one then, it was Saskatchewan A and B, is that it?

NP: Yes. Saskatchewan Wheat Pool A and B.

AG: And then it closed, never to reopen?

NP: Right.

AG: Okay. Because I talked to a guy from Richardson's, and he said, "That was Pool 6." And I said, "No, I don't think so."

NP: No. [Laughs] And we always are sort of hesitant when we disagree with someone because you think, "Well, maybe somewhere, sometime it was Pool 6." [Laughing]

AG: No, they drove me crazy, this business. One elevator, one company, what, did it start out as Alberta and ended up as Viterra? There was about five different companies amalgamated or merged.

NP: Oh, yes. You had Manitoba and--.

AG: Alberta?

NP: Well, Manitoba and Alberta, and then they got swallowed up by UGG and became Agricore. No. They became Agricore when they were, I guess, Manitoba and Alberta, then they got bought out by UGG and became Agricore United. And then they were bought out by Viterra, and they became Viterra.

AG: Saskatchewan was in there somewhere.

NP: Yes. That was Viterra. Saskatchewan became Viterra, and then Saskatchewan disappeared, and there was a whole shuffling of elevators between ownership because of worries about competition. So it was just a true mess. But I should tell you about a

resource because I was doing some work at the Museum on cataloguing a collection from Patricia Vervoort. Did you know Patricia Vervoort at all?

AG: Nope.

NP: She was an art historian at the university, but she—to my mind—she’s more famous because she has done some sort of scholarly journal articles for engineering journals on elevator construction. She was at Lakehead University, And she passed away recently, and her family donated her collection of files to the Museum. So I was cataloguing some of those, and she had started writing a book about the grain elevators in Thunder Bay. So she had a rough draft, which is available in her collection at the Museum.

[1:35:32]

AG: Huh. Because I remember the curator at the Museum, Jeff. What was his name? Jeff something.

NP: Yes. I know who you’re referring to.

AG: I remember talking to him one day years ago, and he said, “Oh, these damned elevators drive me crazy.” And he said, “I’m going to make a list.” And he said to me afterward—I asked him—and he said, “Yeah.” He said, “I’ve got a list.” He seemed to think that he had--.

NP: The definitive list?

AG: Yes. [Laughing]

NP: Well, it might be somewhere, but in a lot of cases—especially now with electronic files—finding it might not be that easy. But certainly, Patricia had a--.

AG: If I can get into the Museum, I’d know where to look. I started--. I was one of the pushers behind the research library.

NP: Yeah. Well, I made a copy of that resource, so if you have questions about a particular elevator, I can search out that chapter in her draft, and I can just make photos on my phone and attach them as an attachment and send them to you as an email.

AG: Yeah. Yeah.

NP: So, if you're looking for something specific, I can certainly do that for you.

AG: Anyway, if I get your list, if you can send me a list, an email, that would be a great start.

NP: Okay. Do you just want a list? I can probably put a building date on it.

AG: Well, whatever is reasonably simple for me.

NP: And do you want the original name or the last--?

AG: The original name, yeah.

NP: Okay. All right.

AG: Okay?

NP: I will do that. And thank you very much. It's been great to talk to you.

AG: Very good. It's also lunchtime too.

NP: Yes, [Laughs] Okay. Bye-bye.

AG: Okay. Thank you, ma'am.

NP: Thank you.

AG: All right. Bye-bye.

End of interview.