

**Narrator:** Sydney Halter (SH)

**Company Affiliations:** C. D. Howe Company Ltd.

**Interview Date:** 21 July 2010

**Interviewer:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

**Recorder:** Ian Dew (ID)

**Transcriber:** Jake Alfieri

**Summary:** Retired engineer for C. D. Howe Company Sydney Halter discusses his career in Thunder Bay related to the terminal grain elevators. He begins by giving an overview of his career within the company from a draftsman to senior engineer to manager of the Thunder Bay office to vice-president of the whole Canadian corporation. He explains C. D. Howe Company's worldwide reputation for elevator design, their offices in India and England, and some of his early mentors in the company. He describes his involvement in a North American grain explosion committee travelling to explosion sites to determine their cause, and he explains the strict dust control regulations in Canada. He recounts projects in England designing receiving grain elevators, as well as explains the difference between receiving and shipping elevators. Halter discusses his memories of supervising elevator demolitions, like for Paterson Elevator, and he describes where salvaged elevator materials and equipment could end up. He also describes the major changes of automation and dust control to grain elevator design. Other topics discussed include growing up near elevators in Fort William, his volunteer involvement with various engineering organizations, the company's diversification into other engineering during the grain industry's downturn, and his interactions with elevator superintendents, railways, and ships.

**Keywords:** C. D. Howe Company Ltd.; Structural engineering; Mechanical engineering; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain elevators—design and construction; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Country grain elevators; Grain dust; Dust control; Grain elevator explosions; Automation; Grain elevator demolition; Industrial salvaging; Lakers; Salties; Grain Elevator and Processing Society (GEAPS); Paterson Elevator; SWP Pool 6; England; India

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: I should introduce you for the tape's purposes. We're talking to G. Sydney Halter in his home at 1750 Isabella Street, Thunder Bay, Ontario, on July 21, 2010. We'll start out by having Mr. Halter tell us a little bit about his early history and how he eventually got involved in grain elevators.

SH: I went to the University of Manitoba, graduated in electrical engineering, and eventually I came back to Thunder Bay, and I went to work with C. D. Howe Company Ltd at the time. One of the specialties of that company was grain elevators and grain processing plants, and also port and harbour work. It was no problem getting involved in grain elevators when I was with the C. D. Howe company. Mr. Howe had started the company about 1917. Mr. Flemming, at the time, was president. Mr. Howe was in politics at that time. We had no politics involved in the company. We were apolitical.

The first thing you do when you start with a company like that is you become a draftsman to begin with. You do simple work, and eventually you work your way up. Over time I became a senior engineer, and eventually I was made assistant manager, and then finally manager of the company. I became senior vice-president of the whole corporation. We split the company into several different divisions. We also, later on, had an office in India and one in Great Britain. The one in Great Britain designed grain elevators at the port of London authority in the port of Liverpool.

During this later period, we were rated as number one in the world in grain elevators, in elevator design. But most of the grain elevators we designed were port elevators, and so we got involved in port work as well and designed docks and harbours associated with grain elevators, in certain cases. I think that's a--. Oh, I should say that we have worked in every port in Canada and a number of ports in Europe and in the Middle East, South Africa, Africa, Australia, and a number of European ports.

NP: I am so pleased that you have agreed to talk to us because I don't think this story is known very well by many people. Would you agree?

SH: Probably, yes.

NP: Amazing is all I can say. And that's the first time I've ever said this on tape. [Laughs] It's an amazing story.

SH: Well, we got involved in general engineering as well—some roads, some highways, bridges—general engineering because there weren't always grain elevators to design and not always docks to design. So you got into general engineering. Mr. Flemming was an amazing individual and wonderful engineer and a very even-tempered sort of person. I learned a lot from him.

NP: What do you remember about Mr. Flemming? Because I'm sure a lot of other people who would have known him are no longer here. So can you tell us a bit about what you remember about him?

SH: Murray Flemming worked for Mr. Howe, I guess—I wasn't here at the time—and became one of his senior people. When Mr. Howe went into politics, Mr. Flemming graduated into being the president and general manager of the corporation. Then Robert

Steadmen got involved in the company around the time I did, maybe a little before me. He never worked in the Thunder Bay office. He started in Montreal and then graduated to Ottawa, where we set up our head office of the entire corporation and set up branch offices in Thunder Bay, Toronto, Vancouver. From then, we set up an office in Great Britain. We set one up in India, Howe India Limited. We from time to time set up branch offices in places we were working in and then maybe shut it down when the job or project was completed.

NP: Where in India was the office set-up?

SH: New Delhi.

NP: New Delhi. Mr. Flemming, where was he from originally?

SH: I think he was from Winnipeg. I'm not positive, but I think he was. He was also a graduate of University of Manitoba. Eventually, I became a vice-president of the overall corporation, as well as president of the C. D. Howe Central Ltd., which encompassed Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

NP: Did you do that from here in Thunder Bay?

SH: Yes. And I did a lot of work in Vancouver as well, in British Columbia, I should say. We worked in and I personally worked in every port in Canada either at grain elevators or in port work.

NP: You mentioned Mr. Flemming was a great person and a great engineer.

SH: Yes.

NP: What makes you say that?

SH: Well, he was a natural engineer. He was, I guess, a brilliant engineer, I would say—very even tempered, wonderful guy to work for.

NP: What makes the brilliant engineer, in your mind?

SH: A person that can see a general design of a facility sort of in his head and sketch out, to his satisfaction, what the facility is going to look like in approximation, and figure out where the port should be, where the grain port should be. Most of our elevators were associated with ports, so they were called terminal elevators. That's where the grain terminated. Other elevators would be country-type elevators, which we did as well, or interior elevators. We got pretty good at it. I can't remember the authority that named us, but we were named as number one in the world in grain elevators during the time I was there.

NP: You mention that you started with C. D. Howe right out of university. What year did you graduate from university?

SH: 1946.

NP: So right after the war.

SH: Yes.

NP: I'm going to perhaps tax your memory here. When you started with the company, C. D. Howe was already in government. Actually, he'd been very famous during the war years. What did you recall about the--? Did they ever talk around the office about the founding of the company and the early days of it? Do you recall any of that?

SH: No, there was very little talk about that. I don't know. I don't remember any discussion about it. You just turn bits and pieces from time to time. I don't think people were as interested in the history as you are.

NP: No, I imagine they were concerned, especially in the early days, with the future.

SH: Yes, we were looking to the future. We were too busy in the early years to be bothered about details like that.

NP: Did you meet Mr. Howe?

SH: No, never met him. I met his two sons and his son-in-law. His son, two of his sons, worked with the company later on—John Howe who was based in Vancouver and Bill Howe was in Ottawa. Bill was the older brother, but he wasn't involved in the company until quite a bit later. John started a bit after I did, I think. He was in Thunder Bay for a while.

NP: Are either of them still alive? Do you know?

SH: Bill is not. I don't know about John. I haven't spoken to him or inquired about him for some time, so I have no idea.

NP: Just one more question I have about sort of those early guys. Were there legends about C. D. Howe, particularly related to elevators?

SH: Not really. He wasn't—I don't think anyway, because I never met him—but my assessment is he wasn't a brilliant engineer like Mr. Flemming. He was a good organizer, wonderful organizer. He could see the big picture of many things, but as a detailed person, as far as I can see, he was not. He was not a technical engineer in that sense. He was, I would gather as I said, more of an organizer and a developer.

NP: I'm just writing some notes for questions to ask a little later on.

SH: Oh, okay.

NP: When you started with the company, you had mentioned that at some point there were branches of the company in London and India and so on. Were those operations already in place when you started or did they come on--?

SH: No, none of them were in place when I started.

NP: Okay. So let me then, just step back a little bit with when you started. Well, actually, even before that. You grew up in Fort William?

SH: Yes.

NP: Were you aware of elevators in your early days?

SH: I didn't dream about them. [Laughs] I would see them on the waterfront. There were 26 elevators at the time I started with the company. There were probably more or less starting than shutting down or expanding or contracting. But it was a pretty green scene of grain work here, which kept us pretty busy. We didn't have any competition in the grain business at first, but later on there was other companies that got involved in the grain business. We made a point of specializing it, and we went into grain processing plants. For example, Canada Malting, which is still in Intercity, was one of our designs. So we did get into associated grain facilities. I think there was one in Saskatoon as well. So we got involved in—because most of our elevators were terminal elevators—we got associated with port work. We did a lot of port work, with no grain involved.

NP: Do you recall your first experience with an elevator, as an engineer?

SH: No. I don't recall. We worked on so many elevators over the years that I don't recall the first one I was involved with. I'd only be guessing.

NP: Ian, maybe you can help me out here with--.

ID: I have a question, yes. How useful was your electrical engineering degree? Did you use it throughout your career?

SH: Not really. I became involved in structural and mechanical as well, and actually, my electrical engineering sort of reduced quite a bit while I got involved in the whole elevator scene and the whole engineering scene, so that eventually I was general manager of the C. D. Howe Central and the chief engineer.

ID: When you started, the energy would be produced by coal, and that would've shifted over the years to natural gas. I'm interested in the process of grain. What did you use energy for in an elevator?

SH: Well, we didn't use much energy in an elevator other than to turn motors over. There was, later on, there was some energy used, which was electrical energy, for filters—for filtering the dust out of the air. First of all, there were more air-exchange-type things and eventually they became--. Filters were required by the ministries in order to cut the dust in the atmosphere outside the elevators as well as inside the elevator. There were cyclones to begin with. The cyclones emitted fine air, fine dust into the atmosphere. So that had to be stopped. So filters became the means of doing that, removing the dust from inside and outside the elevator.

NP: Speaking of dust, makes me think of elevator explosions and my limited knowledge of explosions here in Thunder Bay. You would have started just after the 1945 explosion at Pool 4, but you would have been working at the time of the 1952 explosion. What do you recall about--? What can you tell us about grain dust, explosions, and--?

SH: I don't recall that one you mentioned because I was probably still a junior at the time. But most of the explosions I recall were in the U.S. where their regulations weren't nearly as strict as they were in Canada. There were quite a few explosions there. I'm trying to think of one that I remember most, but I can't think of what it is. Because I had been in a hospital quite a bit over the last two years, my memory is badly affected by that, for some reason or another.

NP: You're not illustrating that here because you're giving us a lot of really good--.

SH: Well, those are things that are sort of engraved in my mind, I guess. But eventually Mr. Flemming became a--. We had a grain dust explosion committee—and I can't remember all the details—but Mr. Flemming became the chairman of that committee, and he was the expert at grain dust explosions. Eventually I guess I became the expert in grain dust explosions. I don't know what the Americans are doing. First, they didn't have too many engineering firms that specialized in grain work, but they have a lot of companies now that are quite experienced in it.

NP: This grain dust committee, was it a world-wide committee then?

SH: No, I think it was just North America, as far as I recall.

NP: So would you travel to sites of explosions?

SH: Yes, and try to determine what the cause was, and why it happened, and why it shouldn't happen again. But because our requirements were fairly precise and the restrictions were spelled out by government agencies, where you didn't have that strictness in the US, for example, so there were a lot of explosions there.

NP: Would the reports of your studies be in the archives of the company? Do you know?

SH: I couldn't say. I don't know what's happened. Mr. Pritam Lamba, whom I hired straight off the boat coming from Britain where he was educated, he was originally from India. He was a mechanical engineer. He got involved in pollution control. He was in charge of pollution control in our company. Then I took early retirement, and Bill Reist was put in charge of this office and Pritam Lamba was the second in command, and then eventually Mr. Lamba started his own company, which he still has.

NP: So C. D. Howe existed as a company under that name throughout your career?

SH: Yes, and then a fellow by the name of Steven Rossler, who spent a lot of time in India—he was Canadian, but he spent a lot of time in India—and he started the Indian office. Then he eventually became--. Mr. Stedman succeeded Mr. Flemming as the top company man, and then after he left, Steven Rossler became the president and general manager of the overall corporation. I was senior vice-president. He had more--. I don't think--. You better stop this now but--.

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: Okay, can we go back on?

SH: Yes.

NP: I don't know how much you want to say about the London operation—how it got started, the history of it, what kinds of projects it worked on.

SH: I'm just vague about the number of things, but they did not only grain work, they did other engineering, and the only two projects that I'm familiar with are the Port of London Authority and the Port of Liverpool, which is called Seaforth.

NP: What kind of projects were they?

SH: They were port terminal elevators, but they were receiving elevators, of course, rather than--. I guess they might have done some shipping but as far as I know they were receiving elevators.

NP: What's the difference between the sort of structural aspects of a shipping and receiving elevator?

SH: The elevators would be very similar, but you'd require a special type of grain receiving system that dipped into the elevator ship that delivered grain to the elevator and then the shipping system for shipping it out, either by rail or by boat or both.

NP: And the receiving elevator would--.

SH: Well, receiving elevator would receive with what is called a lofter leg, which had a conveyor belt with buckets on them that would do the grain from the ship. And then on the other side of the elevator you would have a rail or truck shipping, and you'd raise the grain up on another bucket elevator, up near the top floor, and then would spout the grain down either into trucks or rail or, in some cases, into other ships going somewhere else. Like you'd receive it by ship, but you might ship it, it might be transfer elevator that you transfer into another ship later on, which would take it to some other grain deficient country.

NP: Speaking of grain deficiencies actually makes me think of the opposite and that's grain surpluses. Were you involved at all in, I'm thinking 1946 through to 1950 there was glut of grain—am I correct?—and extra storage facilities were built at that time? Have I got that right?



SH: Yes. There were not too many new ones built but improvements galore and ways of receiving, ways of shipping, were improved considerably over the years. I'm trying to think of some examples, and I can't offhand. Like our facilities would ship grain to salties that would take the grain overseas, or some lake ships that might take them to a transfer elevator somewhere in Eastern Ontario or transfer elevator out west. In the Prairies, though, most of the elevators were what we call country elevators. A lot of them were wooden. They weren't concrete. There were a lot of fires from those elevators, but I wasn't too much involved with country elevators. So I'm not too privy to a lot of that scene.

NP: Was there a special branch in the company that dealt with the primary elevators?

SH: No. A lot of those weren't designed by engineers. They were built by contractors.

NP: How did C. D. Howe company become the world leader, do you think?

SH: By concentrating primarily on grain work—and good engineers. I guess we transferred a lot of our expertise to other countries.

NP: How did that transfer occur?

SH: Just by being there, and designing them, and people seeing the designs. It's easy enough to copy somebody.

NP: You've talked about the London operation, what about the Indian operation? What can you tell us about that?

SH: Not a lot. I was slated to go to India and spend some time, but I was busy in other things at the time, so I never did get to India. All I know is what I've heard. They designed grain elevators, but they also got involved in other engineering. I don't propret to be an expert on what India was doing. They were doing a lot of work outside of India, from India.

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: We were in India. Are we on?

SH: Inja!

NP: Yes.

SH: I confess I don't know a great deal about the Indian operation. Mr. Rossler was in charge of it, and he kept things pretty close to himself. So I don't know too much about it.

NP: Before we get too far, you had mentioned you started in 1946, and then you rocketed to the top. Do you recall generally when you moved from one position to the other?

SH: No. I couldn't tell you to the nearest 10 years.

NP: When did you take your early retirement? Most people remember their life of leisure. [Laughs]

SH: Let me see.

NP: Or even approximately how many years you worked in the industry.

SH: I worked about 40 years.

NP: Okay, so that would take you to about '86 approximately, I would say. If my mathematics is-- [Laughs] Forty years! Did it seem like a long time?

SH: No, time goes fast when you keep busy.

NP: Did you enjoy your career?

SH: Sure. I had some health problems at the time, so I decided to take early retirement. I cleared out my health problems, but I decided I didn't want to go back to work.

NP: Did you quit cold turkey then?

SH: Yes.

NP: No regrets.

SH: Pardon?

NP: No regrets about quitting cold turkey?

SH: No, no regrets at all.

NP: You must've done a lot of traveling.

SH: I did. For many years there wasn't a week went by I wasn't going somewhere. I was active in a lot of organizations. Besides, I was a professional volunteer. I was on the executive of the Consulting Engineers of Ontario, and I became president from this area—Consulting Engineers of Ontario. Then I was asked to become the president of the Consulting Engineers of Canada, and I had to refuse because my business was suffering when I was away, and I spent a lot of time away, so I refused that. I was active in a lot of different organizations. I got the Sons of Martha medal from the Professional Engineers of Ontario. I was president of McKellar Hospital, on the board there for nine years. I was on the Lakehead University Board for 15 years, became chairman of the board of Lakehead University, all the while running a pretty busy company.

There was an organization, the Grain Elevator and Processing Society [GEAPS], and I was very active in that. That was in Canada and the US at the time. It expanded to encompass other countries as well. It's actually based in the US. I was active in that organization. Then I and an engineer from one of the elevator companies ran--. Every year we have a technical conference, so he and I ran the conference that year in Winnipeg for North America. I was active on the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, was on the executive there—no time to become chair of that board. I should've written down the number of organizations I was involved in, but I didn't. I may find that piece of paper, and I'll get it to you.

NP: That would be great because we do have some paper files to go along with the tape. But stop right there because I've already got a whole bunch of questions about the different things that you've said. What is the Sons of Martha medal?

SH: Pardon?

NP: What is the Sons of Martha medal? That's an unusual name.

SH: [Laughs] Yes, it is. I'm not sure. I think there's something written down about it.

NP: So we might be able to go online and get something or contact the association.

SH: It's the Professional Engineers of Ontario set up this Sons of Martha medal for outstanding service in the engineering professions, something like that.

NP: I'm not sure if you'll know anything about this, but there was a plaque up at Hillcrest Park put out by—or I think that the engineers were responsible for having it erected—and it was in recognition of the elevators on the shoreline. Were you involved at all in that? It may have been actually after.

SH: No, I'm not familiar with that at all.

NP: I think it's still there.

SH: Yes?

NP: I think it's supposed to point to Pool 6, which is no longer there.

SH: No. Long gone.

NP: There was also a historical plaque recognizing Pool 2, which is the King/Horn elevator on the north side of the Marina.

SH: No, I don't remember a thing about that.

NP: This may seem like a silly question, but did you have a favourite elevator?

SH: [Laughs] No, I don't think so. I didn't get attached to any particular grain elevators. One that I remember a lot is a country elevator in the US in-- I can't even think of the state.

NP: What brings that elevator to mind?

SH: I don't know. It was the only country elevator I was really involved in, and I got to know the individuals and the company from the top down and spent a lot of time down there at the time. We weren't too busy on other things. Indiana! I'm trying to think of the town that it was outside of. I can't think of it anyway. But that's one that sort of pops up in my mind when I think of ones that I was interested in.

NP: Now that's interesting, don't you think, because working on all these grand elevators around the world and the one that sticks in your mind is this little Indiana--.

SH: Another one would be in Southern Ontario in--. I can't even think where it was.

NP: On the Seaway?

SH: Yes, it was a port elevator, but it was also really a country elevator. I'm sorry my mind's blank at the moment.

NP: That's fine. These details can be filled in later. What brings it to mind though? Why that elevator, do you think?

SH: I don't know. You sort of take a personal interest in the odd one for some reason. It may be because the people you were working with, clients that were very helpful, or I don't know, might've been a feature of the elevator, a little feature you might've put in there that you didn't have at other places. Not sure, to tell you the truth, of what brings it to mind, because there were a lot of grandeur elevators that knows--.

NP: What would you consider the grandest elevator?

SH: It'd be large, heavy, large capacity, large storage capacity, and fast handling.

NP: In that regard, from 1946, things were done a certain way. What kind of changes did you see in the actual physical structure, the handling capacity, what--?

SH: I think the basic design didn't change much, it was just certain things like automation was added in more recent years, more efficient dust control systems. I think those two things, automation and dust control, is the real changes in grain elevator design. The structural, physical design didn't change a great deal.

NP: You had mentioned that other companies had come in to compete with C. D. Howe over the time of your career. Were there innovations brought in by other companies or they were just competing on the same structural set-up as you were?

SH: I couldn't tell you. I never really checked, at least I'm not aware of us ever having checked their design against ours. I would say most of them are copycats.

NP: Was Canada known, then, as the place to go to for elevator design?

SH: I think so.

NP: Who were your competitors locally?

SH: I guess the one competitor was the V.B. Cook Company.

NP: Started out as V.B. Cook?

SH: Yes. But I don't recall that they ever designed a complete elevator. Their work was improvements and additions. Personalities have a lot to do with why clients go to certain people, but if you want to turn that off for a minute--.

**[Audio pauses]**

ID: Start again.

NP: Yes. You mentioned dock work as being a speciality for the company. What kind of challenges are there for engineering docks for salties?

SH: A lot has to do with the design of the dock in conjunction with the elevator or the facility. Often, we'd have to have tie rods—steel rods—that would pull the dock, and there'd be maybe large concrete base at the back that would hold the dock and keep the whole thing as one unit to keep the elevator from sliding into the water. A lot of them are quite associated with the grain work.

NP: Did you get involved in remedial work then?

SH: Pardon?

NP: Did you get involved in remedial work when elevators did slide into the--?

SH: Oh sure.

NP: So can you tell us about--?

SH: I don't want to say too much about it because other people would--. If you want to turn that off.

**[Audio pauses]**

NP: There was a recent fire at one of the elevators, the Ogilvie Elevator, probably you would have known it as originally. When a fire occurs like that, what kind of structural issues do you look for? You had mentioned the tie rods, I assume they might be--.

SH: Yes. Well fires can be caused by a lot of things. A spark will, especially if there's a lot of dust involved, I don't remember one--. Ogilvie's recently?

NP: Well not--. Maybe ten years ago?

SH: Because Ogilvie's has been shut down for some time.

NP: It was after it was shut down.

SH: Well, might've been a lot of dust lying around, and how it got into suspension I don't know. But somebody might have been playing with matches or something. I'm not aware of it.

NP: So when something like that happens, when you're called in to investigate structural damage, how do you go about it?

SH: Visually. A lot of it is done visually. With structural damage, you can see the cracks. You chop away all the concrete and check to see if all the reinforcing steel is there that should've been there, or if it wasn't there. You do a patch-up job, let's say.

NP: So is it likely that those metal--. What did you call them?

SH: Reinforcing bars.

NP: Yes, the ones that connected the dock to the cement on the other side--.

SH: Tie rods, yes.

NP: Would that be an issue?

SH: It could be.

NP: Just leaving it open to other projects that pop to mind that presented challenges for you.

SH: I think of Paterson Elevator. When we were doing some work there, we had to put some of those tie rods in and tie them back, especially when we were demolishing that elevator. That's a trick, too, in demolishing an elevator, making sure the whole thing doesn't slide into the drink. Paterson's is the one I remember the best, when we were demolishing it that we put some tie rods in to tie it because they wanted to keep the dock but demolish the elevator itself because they would tie boats up to it. So we had to put tie rods in and anchor, concrete anchors, to hold the tie rods in place.

NP: So how do you take down an elevator? What were your options? Does it depend on its original structure?

SH: We didn't do any actual work. We were strictly engineers, so companies like Lakehead Scrap Metal, for example, were doing some demolishing work for us. They had a superintendent who was a pretty efficient guy, and under our supervision they did things very methodically and took things down one at a time, in a very organized way. You see around this garage it was torn down on Arthur Street--.

NP: Yes, Selkirk, I think?

SH: They just bashed everything down or the building was demolished for the Court House.

NP: The YMCA.

SH: YMCA. And then there was another, but it was an old building. So that was simple. Cross the road from the YMCA there was another, more recent building.

NP: What we refer to as the gas building?

SH: Yes. And it was just bashed down, bricks and everything, reinforcing steel, all in one big pile. We would never allow that sort of thing. It was done in an organized way, certain things at certain times, and they were taken away, and the reinforcing steel would be taken away, the concrete would be taken away. It wasn't just one big pile that's sorted out later on.



NP: And what is the--. I could see that bashing it down at once would be the cheaper way to go, at least on the surface.

SH: I doubt it would be cheaper in the long run because you salvaged the reinforcing steel. You might salvage some of the bricks and even some of the concrete. We think it takes a little longer to do it our way, but in the long run, I think it's cheaper and more efficient.

NP: I don't know whether you followed the dismantling of Pool 6.

SH: Pool 6? No, I didn't.

NP: Where they imploded it, I guess was the method of choice there. Any comments on implosion as a--.

SH: Oh, it's all right, I guess. I didn't see it, so I can't say.

NP: You weren't part of the crowd holding up the champagne glasses toasting the--?

SH: I was sorry to see it go. It was a nice old-fashioned elevator.

NP: Say more about old fashioned.

SH: [Laughs]

NP: What do you think of when you think of old-fashioned elevator?

SH: It didn't have the automation or the dust control. Yes, it did have the dust control, but it didn't have the automation, and it was in certain cases over designed.

NP: What does over designed mean to a--?

SH: The walls would be thicker than they needed to be and probably less reinforcing steel than there should've been.

NP: I don't know if you know anything about what happened to the materials. I thought it would be a fascinating study to look at where the elevator pieces went, as far as when you would salvage bricks, for example. Did any of them go anywhere that you knew of?

SH: The concrete might be used for fill. Reinforcing steel might or might not be salvaged depending on what kind of steel it was. Some equipment could be salvaged.

NP: My stomach is gurgling.

SH: Okay. And some of the motors might be used in some other facility. Conveyor belts, if they're in good shape, might be reused, could be used in the mining industry. Pollution control, if it was fairly efficient and recent, might be used somewhere else. Lightning fixtures might be reused. There are a lot of possibilities.

NP: When the elevators were built in other countries, let's say such as India, were they all using new or would they also be a market for salvaged equipment?

SH: I would say in most cases would be new. There could have been salvaged opportunities, but I'm not aware of it.

NP: There's an interesting little story I'd like to mention, in case it is something that you recall. I lived in Winnipeg for several years, and I lived in a housing development called Wildwood Park.

SH: What? Wildwood Park?

NP: Wildwood Park. And it was constructed by Bird Construction, don't know if you've ever done any work with them.

SH: No, we didn't. They are an entirely different field than we were, but they were good contractors.

NP: Apparently, they built our houses from dismantled grain storage facilities in Thunder Bay. That would be at the end of the war, just as you were starting your career. They were shipping wood from the storage units into Winnipeg, and our houses were built. That whole development apparently was built.

SH: I don't know how that could be done to tell you the truth. Might've been wood from country elevators because a lot of those were made of timber but the concrete elevators, I don't--.

NP: It was actually the temporary storage for during the war years.

SH: Oh, yes.

NP: Supposedly. I'll have to check more into that. I thought I'd mention--.

SH: Probably were wood.

NP: Ian, do you have some questions on your list that we haven't--?

ID: Yes. Lots.

NP: Are you okay?

ID: Are you okay? Are you comfortable?

SH: Yes. I'm getting a little tired but--.

ID: Yes, well, it's very concentrated information.

SH: And things I haven't thought about for many years.

ID: Yes. Jumping back to the very beginning, can you tell us anything about your school days? Where did you go to school?

SH: I went to school in Thunder Bay, but I went to University of Manitoba.

ID: Yes. Which public school?

SH: Central. In the South Ward. It's no longer in existence.

ID: Jumping forward from that, did you design your processes specifically around men and what they could do? Did you take ergonomics into account when you made an elevator?

SH: What into account?

ID: The men who would work there. The people.

NP: Ergonomics.

SH: Very rarely, because although certain features—like a superintendent, for example, of a grain facility—if they're like Saskatchewan Pool for example, that has a number of facilities here, well, the chief superintendent would have certain ideas for certain equipment that he wanted to use, and we'd have to defer to him of course or explain why we're doing it differently. Sometimes he had good ideas and sometimes, because of his familiarity with what he knew, had to be talked into something different because it was more efficient from our experience. Generally, if we're building a facility for a firm that had a number of different facilities. We would go over in detail what we had in mind, and he would put in his two cents worth. We often deferred to him because of his operating experience. After all, we never ran an elevator, whereas he did. So it's a combination of experience and engineering.

ID: How did your company handle the sort of downturn in the grain industry?

SH: Yes, that was pretty tough. We had to diversify into different types of engineering. We seemed to manage. We got into a little pollution-control work that we hadn't been in before and general engineering, bridge work, things of that sort. Roads, highways, we got into that too. If you have to do something in order to stay in business, you do it. [Laughs] After all, engineering consulting is a business.

ID: Yes.

SH: And engineers are poor businessmen as a rule. A lot of them undercharge for their work. You don't find any other professions doing that. But they compete on price. Our argument was you can't compete on price because in engineering you might look at two or three different alternatives, see which one is the better one, and also which is the cheapest one—I shouldn't use the word cheapest—the least expensive one to do. You might look at three or four different alternatives. Well, the person that--. And I think you should turn it off again.

**[Audio pauses]**

ID: Let's start again. After 1957, C. D. Howe left politics. Did he come back into the company at all?

SH: No, no, no, he never did. I have no idea. I think he just completely retired.

ID: Yes.

SH: As far as I know. I'm not aware of him getting into business. He'd made a lot of money in the early years because he had no competition at first, or little competition. So he was quite a wealthy man. I don't think he needed to get back into business or anything. By then he'd been away from engineering for a lot of years, so he'd be well out of date.

NP: When you left the company, it was still C. D. Howe?

SH: Yes.

NP: And what happened to the company afterwards?

SH: It was sold to a—by Mr. Rossler—to a company in Saskatchewan, headquartered in Saskatchewan. Then that company was sold to a British engineering company, which finally took it over.

NP: Did they maintain an office here in Thunder Bay?

SH: They did for a number of years and then decided to shut it down.

NP: Do you recall the name of the company after C. D. Howe?

SH: Oh yes. I haven't got it on the tip of my tongue.

NP: We'll fill that in later.

SH: I should remember the British company. I wouldn't remember the intermediate company, but I should remember the British company, but I can't. It's a well-known, very large British company headquartered in Toronto or outside of Toronto. I can't think of the name of it.

NP: You mentioned the Lakehead Scrap Metal as one of the subcontractors that you worked with. They were involved with the demolition work. What other Thunder Bay companies did you work with on a regular basis to get projects done?

SH: Barnett McQueen. I can't think of any other Thunder Bay companies other than small ones that did maintenance work and things of that sort.

NP: Any of those names come to mind? The smaller ones?

SH: [Laughs] Sorry I can't think of them.

NP: Not a problem. They're probably out of business by now anyway. When you're doing a design for a new elevator, obviously you've got the tracks coming in and you've got the dock for the ships going out. Did you ever need to consult with railway companies and ship builders?

SH: Oh sure.

NP: Tell us a little bit about that interaction.

SH: I don't think there's any special interaction. I mean, the railway companies had certain standards of tracks and so on. We just followed their standards. If we deviated, we explained to them why, or they explained to us why it should be done otherwise, and we usually reached a consensus. It wasn't anything really special.

NP: And did you need to know much about ships?

SH: Oh, we had to know a lot about ships because salties were much different than lake ships. Lake ships had different types of holds than salties did.

NP: So what impact would it have when the change came in? Would that have been during your career? The switch over to lakers to salties?

SH: Well, it wasn't a switch over. It was some lakers and some salties. Lakers were still predominant, and the salties were just a little different, especially unloading salties, quite a bit different than unloaded lakers.

NP: So what kind of engineering structural changes would be required to allow for salties to--?

SH: Well for salties, you often used elevator legs that get right into the hold. Lakers, let's see, what was different of lakers? Gosh. My mind is really ticking away.

NP: [Laughs]

ID: There's so much to remember.

NP: You know we've been at this for an hour and a half, and I think that's a long time.

ID: That is a long interview

SH: Yes, I think you better call it quits for now anyways.

NP: Would you be willing to have a continuation?

**End of interview.**