

Narrator: Harvey Jones (HJ)

Company Affiliations: Manitoba Pool Elevators

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Summary: Manager of Manitoba Pool Elevators' farm supplies division Harvey Jones discusses his career in agriculture with both the farming cooperative and the Manitoba government. He describes his work as a Department of Agriculture representative after the Second World War establishing clubs and programs for Manitoba farmers. He tells the story of being approached by Manitoba Pool to be a field representative for their crop improvement and seed testing programs, and of his move to Winnipeg to establish the organization's farm supplies division. Jones describes the focus on agriculture supplies education in his division, and the instant success of the supplies business. Other topics discussed include the amicable relationship between the various Prairie Pools, the growing sizes of farms and farm equipment, and stories of his family's life moving around Manitoba.

Keywords: Manitoba Pool Elevators; Government of Manitoba; Field representatives; Agriculture representatives; Seed growing; Farming—Supplies and equipment; Crop improvement; Grain farmers/producers; Farmer meetings; Farming cooperatives; Fertilizers; Country grain elevators; Grain elevator agents; World War II veterans

Time, Speaker, Narrative
BC: Today is December the 16 th , 2008, and I am interviewing Mr. Harvey Jones. Good morning.
HJ: Morning.
BC: Could you start off by telling me who you worked for in the grain industry?
HJ: Well, I only worked for one company, that was Manitoba Pool Elevators. Originally, I was what they called a field man. I had been working with the Manitoba government at Hamiota. The vice president of Manitoba Pool came to see me, and he said, "We're looking for a field man, and it was suggested that I come and see you." Well. [Laughs] That was a big surprise, certainly, not

expected. We talked for a while, and he said, “Would you be interested?” And I said, “Yes. I think I better get a little more information.” He said, “Well, I would suggest that you go in and see our president, who is Mr. Parker, then make your decision.” So I did that. The whole atmosphere impressed me, and I wasn’t planning to work for the government for too long, and I thought, “Well, this should be all right.”

So he said, “Don’t make up your mind right away. You go home, think it over, talk to your wife, and let us know when you reach a decision.” So I did that. We decided I would go for it, and I let their local representative know, and he said, “Well, you go in, see Bill Parker our president, and decide some of the details.” I went in, and I didn’t want to start something until--. He said, “Well, there’s no rush. You go home and let me know.”

BC: What year would this have been?

HJ: Oh, year? Well, what year would it be? Certainly, I have a difficulty there. I’ve got to go through what led up to this. I was in the Air Force through the war for three years.

BC: Now that was World War--.

HJ: Airforce.

BC: And which World War was that?

HJ: The one that--. The big war.

BC: World War II?

[0:05:06]

HJ: Yeah. It was ’42 that I went in.

BC: Okay.

HJ: Into the service. It was three years before I got out. I knew I didn’t want to stay with the Air Force, and--.

[... *audio skips*]

BC: After the World War?

HJ: Yes. Yes. That's right. Yes. The war was over, I knew I better make plans for a job, and I went and saw the--. You know, I'm going back instead of forwards! [Laughing] Anyway.

BC: That's okay.

HJ: I think I better pursue this. The war ended, and I knew I'd have to look for a job. I went and saw the director of the extension service, Manitoba government, and he never hesitated. He said, "We give a preference to veterans coming out of the war." He says, "We'll have a job for you." He says, "You go--." [... *audio skips*] "And we'll make a direct offer." So I did that, and they were prepared to take me into the extension service. They said they had a station open which was Hamiota, and I could start right away if I wanted. Well, I took a month to think this over, and went back, saw Mr. Parker, and said, "Okay. I'll go with you."

BC: Now, I'm curious. When you said that you worked for the extension department of the government in Hamiota, what kind of work did you do?

HJ: Well, I worked with farmers, and it was a case of providing information to farmers, and also, we had some definite programs that were already established. The biggest was the 4 H Clubs with the young people. This Hamiota hadn't had an Ag-rep, and so the whole thing was open for me to--. They don't tell you what to do. They just tell you, go up there and get acquainted and decide what you should do. [Laughs] Well, I liked Hamiota very much. It appealed to me, and it was ready for a lot of activity. The war had shut everything down. They hadn't had an Ag-rep, and so it was an open field for me.

[0:10:03]

BC: And you did that for three years, you said?

HJ: Beg your pardon?

BC: You said you did that for three years and then you were approached by Manitoba Pool?

HJ: Yes, yes.

BC: And that's when you met Mr. Parker, and that's when you decided to take the job at Manitoba Pool?

HJ: That's right.

BC: Okay. And you said that they were hiring you as a field man. What would a field man do?

HJ: With the Pool?

BC: Yes.

HJ: Yes. Well, for one thing, we had clubs. We called them Crop Improvement Clubs. What we did with them is had them testing new varieties. They would grow them, and we would inspect the crops at certain seasons. If anything had showed up well, then we made plans to introduce them. We would put the seed out through what we called Crop Improvement Clubs. We had quite a number of those. I don't remember now. There were close to 200 of them. It did very well. I keep going back a long way here to try to remember everything. Initially, as I said, I was at Hamiota. One of the things that happened while I was there is I had a small medical problem, and I had to go to a hospital and have a small operation. Oh, yes. Well, the hospital I went to was Deer Lodge, and I met somebody at Deer Lodge, a nurse, and her name was Alba Adams. I liked her. [Laughs] Very much. I pursued my acquaintance with Alba. Eventually asked her to marry me, and she said, "Yes." If we were upstairs, I would show you the picture of her. Well, one of the pictures, of course, is of Alba.

BC: What year did you get married in?

HJ: Yeah, I was thinking. This is going back. I wasn't too long before I proposed to her, and she said, "Yes," and we were married on the 28th day of December. Now the year of marriage, I'm not sure of that.

[0:15:17]

BC: It was after the war? Was it after the war?

HJ: Oh, yeah. It was after the war.

BC: So it would be late 1940s probably.

HJ: Yes, yes. I would say it was. Let's see.

BC: And she moved out to Hamiota with you?

HJ: Yes, yes. We got married, and I was stationed at Hamiota, and we got a house out on a farm close to town to start with because the people who lived in the house spent the winters in Victoria, BC. So we got married on the 28th day of December, and the house was available and that's where we moved. [Laughs] I don't know what she thought when I took her out to Hamiota to start our married life. I carried her across the threshold, and the first thing she noticed that the stove was a coal and wood stove. She'd been used to electricity. [Laughs] And the heat [inaudible] was a coal-fired, hand-fired furnace in the basement. But Alba came from a little farm in Newdale, and she was used to that kind of life and adjusted to it very quickly. While at Hamiota, a house came up for sale. The owner came along to see me. He hadn't seen anybody else. He said he was going to sell the house, and he made me a good offer on it, I thought. We decided we would buy the house.

Things at Hamiota went very well. I liked the people. I liked the job. Everything was fine. While we were there, Alba had a baby—a baby girl—and we named her Margaret Anne. She was Margaret Anne Jones. We had four years in Hamiota. It just seemed to mushroom. I organized more clubs and more programs. It all went so well. You have to remember, we had been at war, and things were kind of at a standstill. So it wasn't because I was good, it was because of the condition of the time. [Laughs] Our daughter Margaret was born. And now we're getting to a part where it's a little bit difficult for us. We were at Hamiota. Oh, yes. Mind you, this is the government job. I was the Ag-rep at Hamiota working for Manitoba government.

[0:20:35]

BC: Okay.

HJ: Well, things went well. The Pool got interested, and the vice president, Mr. McConnell, of the Pool came to Hamiota and spoke to me, made an offer to work for them as a field man. But he says, "You should go in and see Bill Parker, our president, and get more information before you make a decision." Well, I went in, had an interview with him, and I told him right on the spot. I said, "Okay. I'll go with you, but not until spring. Because this is in the wintertime. [Laughs] Don't like moving in winter." He says, "That's all right. All right. We'll say spring, 1st of June." So I switched to Manitoba Pool. Alba--. Wait a minute. Oh, yes. There's a period there that I can't remember. Alba is a nurse. We must have moved from Hamiota to Winnipeg because she went nursing at Deer Lodge.

BC: Well, when you were hired by Manitoba Pool--.

HJ: Yes, I was.

BC: Did they hire you to work in Winnipeg? Was your job in--?

HJ: No, no.

BC: So when you started in June and you were living in Hamiota, did you have to move away from Hamiota to take the Manitoba Pool job?

HJ: I can't remember just what happened. Where did I end up? We were still in Hamiota.

BC: You were in Hamiota, and Manitoba Pool offered you a job.

HJ: Yes.

BC: And you said yes, and you would start in June. So in June you changed jobs over to Manitoba Pool to work as a--. Your job for Manitoba Pool was--.

[0:24:39]

HJ: Oh, yes, Now I've got it. I told Manitoba Pool I'd just sooner wait until spring to take a job. Mr. Parker said, "That's okay. We have two stations open: Carman and Souris." I told him right away, "Well, we would take Carman," and the reason for that was that Alba's, my wife's mother, wasn't well, and the closer we could be to her, the better. She was in Winnipeg. Carman is close to Winnipeg, and we said, "We'll take Carman." And that's where we moved to, and we certainly never regretted it. We liked Carman very well. Everything seemed to go well for us. We had another daughter born. Donna was her name. That carried on for some time. The Carman job involved an awful lot of travelling and night meetings. [Laughs] We lived in Carman, and I always remember I was in the post office about 7:00. I was just on my way out to go to a meeting way off somewhere. I just had time to make a--. That was the life it was. It was late meetings.

BC: And that was with farmers that you would meet?

HJ: Beg your pardon?

BC: Your night meetings, you would be meeting with the farmers?

HJ: Yes.

BC: And what would you be talking to them about?

HJ: Well, we said crop improvement, we called it, is new varieties of crops. It was information on growing new crops.

BC: But was that with your government job or with your Manitoba Pool job?

HJ: Manitoba Pool.

BC: With your Manitoba Pool job.

HJ: Yes. I had left the government in Hamiota.

BC: So when you were in Carman, was there a Manitoba Pool grain elevator in Carman? Was there an elevator there?

HJ: Carman? No. That was my choice of a place to live.

BC: Right.

HJ: It was pretty central for the district. I went as far west as Cartwright. We liked Carman. Now, where are we?

BC: Well, you've moved to Carman, and you're working for Manitoba Pool, and you're meeting with farmers to talk about crops.

HJ: Yeah.

BC: How long did you do that?

HJ: Well, gosh. That's a good question. I should know that right off. It was a lot of years. I can't be definite to how many years it was. A new development occurred in Manitoba Pool. They decided they would go into farm supplies. They had not had been doing

that at all, but the other grain companies were doing it, and we were starting to feel the results. We were losing some of the grain business. Well, they needed somebody to organize it and head it up, and they called on me. That involved moving into Winnipeg eventually. You see, it didn't have to be right away. This all happened in the wintertime. So okay, I said, "That's fine. I'll take the job." I drove from Carman to Winnipeg every day into the office in Winnipeg.

[0:30:58]

BC: Oh my.

HJ: Did that all winter. [Laughs] No problems. It went all right. I had a brand-new car because I hadn't had to need a car before. It all went well. Then when spring came, we had a chance to buy a house in Winnipeg, and we moved.

BC: Can you tell me a bit about when you were heading up the Manitoba Pool's farm supply and equipment division? What was that like? What did you have to do?

HJ: Well, what we had to do, the first thing is know farm supplies, know the chemicals and fertilizers and everything. We had the job of training the elevator agents to know the products that were available for crop production. So it was a big job of education with all of these elevator agents. That all went well. Our membership were very supportive, and the farm supply business just mushroomed in no time. The biggest item, of course, is fertilizer. We had a part ownership in a fertilizer factory in Calgary, and another one out--. Out of Calgary it was--. Oh, I can't remember. It doesn't matter. And the farm supply business grew very fast.

BC: So you would have to train the elevator managers at the Manitoba Pools across Manitoba?

HJ: Yes.

BC: Did you have a certain area, or did you have to cover—with the farm supply equipment—did you have to cover a lot of the elevators?

HJ: Oh, yes. Most of our elevators were involved in it. Close to 200 of them. Yeah. Well, I don't know what more I can say. It grew like--. What grows fast? [Laughing]

BC: Mushrooms!

HJ: Mushrooms. That's right. [Laughs] In very short order, after one year, I hit \$100 million in sales of farm supplies. That was what I was hoping I could do, and it turned out. Now, I wonder where we're at here.

[0:35:18]

BC: Well, you now are heading up the farm supplies.

HJ: Yeah.

BC: And is that the job that you kept with Manitoba Pool the rest of your career?

HJ: Beg your pardon?

BC: Is that the job that you kept for the rest of your career with Manitoba Pool? Being in charge of the farm supplies?

HJ: I think I did. Well, the job grew. I was promoted from manager of farm supplies to manager of--. What did we call that? I forget what we called the department, but it took in more than farm supplies. It also included some productions of--. I'm kind of hazy now. Well, anyway, besides farm supplies, I had--.

BC: You said something about distribution.

HJ: I forget. We had some specialized departments that were--.

BC: We can come back to that after. You'll think of it while we're talking. I'll ask you another question.

HJ: Yeah.

BC: You worked for Manitoba Pool. What was your relationship to your competitors, the other grain co-ops or companies? Did you have anything to do with your competitors?

HJ: With some of the other co-ops, is that what you're saying?

BC: Yes, or the private grain companies, or--.

HJ: Well, we were supportive of each other all right. Mostly, anyway. [Laughing] There was a bit of friction, you know, at the front, not so much in my capacity in head office. But in the country, there was. The co-ops were selling the same thing, and we were. In fact, it was the same brand, same company supplying them, and--.

BC: So how did the farmer decide who to go with then?

HJ: Pardon?

BC: How did the farmer decide whether to go with Manitoba co-op or another co-op or a private company?

HJ: Well, that's a good question. Our business in the farm supplies mushroomed. It grew fast. There must have been a reason for that that's not quite clear to me. For one thing, we had a lot of elevator agents, and we trained them, made sure they knew what they were selling and everything. They gained the confidence of the farmers, and the business grew very quickly. Did I mention we were up to \$100 million sales?

[0:40:54]

BC: Yes. Wonderful.

HJ: In a very short time. It only took a couple of years.

BC: So you look over your career, which was a number of years. We're not quite sure how long you were at Manitoba Pool, your career, whether it was--.

HJ: How long?

BC: Yeah, how long?

HJ: Well, I was with them for the rest of my career. I was so close to having 30 years with them. I often wondered afterwards, "What the heck? Why was I in such a rush?" But I, for some reason, I decided I had enough. I had two more years, and I would have been retired anyway because the Pool didn't keep staff over retirement age, which I think it was 62. No, 65. Yeah,

BC: 65.

HJ: So, when I reached the age of 62, I told them I was going to retire. There was no problem with that. I'm glad I did. I missed the family life, you know? It was so busy, and so much country travel, night meetings. My God! I remember one of the guys in Carman saw me getting ready to leave town about 6:00 in the evening. [Laughs] He says, "You're like the owls. You work at night!" That's the kind of life it was. So I retired early. I was 62 when I retired. Retirement age was normally 65. I'm glad I did. Had more time with my dear wife Alba, who had been nursing at Deer Lodge. But she had a baby, Margaret. We named Margaret Anne. There's a picture of her upstairs there.

BC: So you were able to spend time together when you retired.

HJ: Beg your pardon?

BC: You were able to spend time together when you retired.

HJ: Yes. That's right.

BC: Now you said your career was almost 30 years long. What was the biggest change that you saw in your job in those years? If you had to pick one thing that was the biggest change.

[0:45:16]

HJ: Oh. Well, the farms, of course, were getting bigger all the time. After I got out of the job, it just seemed to start and mushroom—big machines, big acreages. Quite a big change taking place. So I think likely it was just as well that I was out of it, had some time to enjoy life. We had a second daughter, Donna, and she was a lovely little girl. Their pictures are on my desk upstairs. She did so well in school, but she had a heart defect. The doctors here in Winnipeg said they wouldn't attempt anything to correct it. They suggested we should go to Rochester and see what they could do. So we did that. We went to Rochester, and there were worried. But they said—-. They pointed out what was ahead for Donna if we didn't do anything. She could live for another ten years—she was 10 years old—but they would be very poor years. She would have a lot of suffering. They went ahead with the surgery. There was a 50/50 percent chance that she could survive this surgery and have some good years for at least ten years or more. Well, we went ahead with the surgery, but she died in surgery.

BC: Oh, that's very, very sad. But you did the best you could.

HJ: Her picture--.

BC: Upstairs?

HJ: When we go upstairs--.

BC: That would be really nice. I'd like to see it.

HJ: She was a lovely child. She was so bright and busy and active and full of fun. A real tease. I always remember my wife had a sister named Winona. Winona was a teacher, and she hadn't married. Out of the blue one day, Donna said to her, "Nona--." She called her Nona. [Laughs] She said, "Nonie, are you ever going to get married?" Oh.

BC: That's very cute.

HJ: Winona just burst out laughing. That was Donna. She was full of fun. She did like to tease.

[0:50:16]

BC: Well, when we go upstairs, I'd like to look at the picture when we go upstairs.

HJ: Beg your pardon?

BC: When we go upstairs to your room, I'd like to look at that picture.

HJ: Yes.

BC: Because the only one that I saw, of course, was the grain elevator in--. What town was that that you said? The picture of the grain elevator in your bedroom was--?

HJ: Yes. In Barnsley.

BC: Barnsley, yeah. So we can look at the others.

HJ: That's six miles north of Carman.

BC: Okay. Well, we'll look at that.

HJ: So, does that about do it?

BC: I think that you've been a very, very good person to interview, and I appreciate you sharing all those things in your life too.

HJ: Yeah. Thanks very much.

BC: And I'll turn the machine off now, okay?

HJ: Yeah. [Laughs]

BC: There.

End of interview.