

Narrator: Sidney Kasner (SK)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), Government of Canada—Weights and Measures

Interview Date: 19 April 2009

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Summary: Retired director of weighing for the Canadian Grain Commission Sidney Kasner discusses his career in the Canadian grain industry. He describes being brought in from the federal government’s Weights and Measures department to be in charge of audits and scales for the CGC. He explains the CGC’s responsibilities under the Canada Grain Act for ensuring accuracy of scales, for verifying elevator warehouse receipts, and for licensing elevators. He describes the process of calibrating scales and performing elevator audits across Canada and appointing staff to CGC offices in charge of yearly scale tests. He recalls the major changes during his career, like the switch from manual to electronic scales, the conversion to metric, and the introduction of hopper cars. Kasner describes challenges of his work, like dealing with a large staff, dealing with unions, downsizing staff, and finding bilingual employees to work in the east. He discusses some of his other work, like his attempt to introduce automation into weighing, his talks at the Canadian International Grains Institute, and his travels internationally to train weighers. Other topics discussed include his interaction with elevator managers, Canada’s global reputation for honesty and accuracy, and his memories of occasional weighing incidents. At the end of the interview, Kasner looks through photos from his career.

Keywords: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Government of Canada—Weights and Measures; Grain weighing; Grain elevator audits; Manual scales; Electronic scales; Canada Grain Act; Weights and Measures Act; Metric system; Boxcars; Hopper cars; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Terminal grain elevators—St. Lawrence Seaway; Warehouse receipts; Grain elevator licensing; Grain trade—laws and legislation; Government regulations; Bilingualism; Management; Labour relations; Labour unions; Downsizing; Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI); St. Lawrence Seaway; Vancouver; Montreal; Port Cartier; Baie Comeau; Quebec City; China

| Time, Speaker, Narrative |
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| NP: Sure, start. Today is February the 19th, 2009. |

SK: It's March, actually.

NP: Oh (laughs) I do this in the beginning of every interview, I get part of the date wrong. It is March the 19th, 2009—and I leave all my mistakes on the tape so it doesn't matter—and Nancy Perozzo, Bea Cherniack, and we are interviewing Mr. Sid Kasner. And we'll start the interview by asking you to give a brief introduction to your connection to the grain trade.

SK: Well, I came to the grain trade in 1972. I was working in Ottawa with weights and measures, and the Canadian Grain Commission were reorganizing to meet the requirements that were coming in the near future, for example, the grain industry, the elevators in Thunder Bay, and the rest of Canada. The terminal and transfer system were putting in automatic electronic scales, and not only that, the grain trade was facing changing from the imperial system of the way to measure to the metric system. So that brought about challenges which the commissioner realized with the staff they have, they weren't fully capable of meeting these challenges, and in particular for the weighing side of the Canadian Grain Commission, some key people had retired. And they brought in for the weighing side of things a person from I believe CNR. They seconded a man by the name of Jim Harris, and under Jim's leadership and Mr. Baxter's leadership, they staffed the weighing division from people from other parts of the government, such as myself and later on a Mr. John Swanson, who passed away about 20 years ago.

And when I first came to the Commission, they gave me the responsibility for audits and scales. Auditing is a big part of the function of the Canadian Grain Commission, and the idea of an audit is a requirement of the Canada Grain Act to periodically establish the amount of grain in a terminal elevator or a transfer elevator, they compare the actual quantity of the grain to the outstanding elevator receipts. Now the elevator receipts, of course, they state the type and the grade and the quantity of grain that should be in the elevator, so you make a physical-- You weigh over the grain, and that amount is compared to the actual paper stock. So that's one of the functions.

And then of course the weighing side, the weighing division as it was called, was responsible for the accuracy of the scales, and there's a fairly intense system in order to maintain the accuracy of the scales. And one important part of this whole thing which is kind of always missed by anybody who wants to describe it is the traceability of the actual scales and their weights to the international standards of weights and measures. And to further explain that, the system of weights and measures in the world is based on an international kilogram which is housed in France. Canada has a replica of that international kilogram which is maintained by the National Research Council in Ottawa. All of our weights that we use to calibrate scales in Canada are traceable to that replica of that international kilogram, and periodically our replica, Canada's replica, and all replicas for other countries in the world are compared against the international standard to determine their accuracy. And the reason that's so important for the Canadian grain trade is because Canada signs for each cargo of grain sold a certificate attesting to the weight and the grade. So if

you're not positively sure about the accuracy of your weighing system you really are signing a document which really isn't valid. So that's why the weighing part of the Canadian grain system function is very important to the industry.

BC: Can I ask how do you do that, in fact, to make sure those scales are accurate?

SK: Well, in your father's time, and in my time, each one of the elevators are equipped with standard weights. Each one of these blocks of weight has probably 1,000 pounds or 500 kilograms, and they're actually set on each corner, you can imagine the scale. These are huge, huge hoppers, and underneath the hopper--. We're talking now about when the scales have been converted from the mechanical system with leavers. We're not talking about scales that are mounted on electronic devices called load cells, and from the bottom of these load cells, you can imagine as the weight comes into the hopper, it strains the load cell, and that difference in the electronic signal is then translated into a number that you can then read on an electronic read out in order to simplify the discussion. Well, you then can hang from those load cells, you can hang a known standard of weight on each corner, because they're mounted on four corners, and that actual amount that you add, the standard weight, should be evident on the electronic readout within a certain tolerance.

And then you keep doing that, you keep adding more grain into the hopper, add on the standards to see if the difference is read accurately, and you work up to the full capacity of the scale, and that's the standard practice for all these very large scales that are used, and in other industries as well. It works--. If you have a bathroom scale that you step on—and they're now electronic—and the readout comes and there you are, that morning you decide, "I'm 20 pounds heavier," [laughs] so you know that for the next two weeks you're not going to be eating well.

BC: So it was around the 1970s that the conversion went from mechanical to electronic?

SK: Yeah, it was around 1970, and then it happened slowly, and I don't--. When I left in 1993, I believe it's accurate to say that all the scales in Thunder Bay were converted to electronic scales, save for a few elevators that weren't doing very much. For the transfer elevator system, I can't vouch for that, but I think very few of them were converted to electronic scales. And as you probably know, there aren't too many of those transfer elevators that are actually in business today. And even in Thunder Bay, I'm sure--. I don't know the actual numbers, but I'm told only four of the elevators are actually working.

BC: Nancy, you'd know more about that.

NP: I think there's still some holdover from the buyout of Sask Pool, but they're on stream for coming off stream. So I think you're pretty accurate there as I count in my head.

SK: Yeah, and the reason for that of course is our traditional markets have moved more towards Asia rather than Europe, so it's natural that the grain flow goes west to Vancouver.

NP: Actually, there would be six. There would be six still working.

SK: Six still working?

NP: Cargill, Mission, Viterra, P&H, and Richardson's.

SK: P&H is still working?

NP: And Canada Malting.

SK: Well Canada Malt was a--. It's not a terminal elevator.

NP: Okay.

SK: You know, they handle malt. So anyway, that was one of the reasons that the Commission sounds fit to change their direction. As far as staffing the weighing division, they wanted more technical expertise in order to handle this, and then a couple years later, along came metric, and I'm almost sure that we're not—even now so many years later—people still think in bushels. But the scales in the elevators all weigh in the metric system, and that's the way it is. But I know, I talked to the farming community often, and they still talk about their trucks holding so many bushels of grain, which is probably normal. [Laughs] That's the way they think, and I suppose that's the way it should be.

But also, another function of--. And I'll discuss a bit of the actual function of the weighing of the grain because due to the Canada Grain Act, the Commission is in charge with weighing all the grain that is unloaded in a terminal elevator and it comes in by covered hopper car. Now, back in the '60s and before the '60s, it was mostly boxcars. It was all boxcars. But in the '70s, it was the introduction of the covered hopper car which had an effect on the elevators and also an effect on how the staff were coping with this. It was much easier to unload a covered hopper car than a boxcar, so you know, you just pull this thing over, this hopper car over top of a pit and open the gates, and the grain ran out. Whereas with the boxcars, there was this horrendous job of opening the doors and tipping the cars and--. Oh, it was a labour-intensive thing. And also, the unloading of the boxcar, there was a certain amount of grain always spilled and left in the cars, and it was the Canadian Grain Commissions staff that tried to ensure that the

cars were completely unloaded so that there was an accurate weight registered by the transfer elevator because the guy out in the Prairies depended on that weight. I mean, he says he shipped so many bushels of wheat, and it gets to the other end, and it's not the same weight! So that was something that the weighing division had to deal with regularly, every day and we did a fairly good job at that. At least I thought we did.

We always had our—you know, with the number of railcars unloaded in a day, there was bound to be two or three—there was some reason to complain, but usually we were able to satisfy the complaint in some way or another. Grains got mixed and that sort of thing, but the system worked really well. And then on the other side, when it came to shipping out, especially in Thunder Bay, most of the grain was shipped out of Thunder Bay, and it was shipped to a transfer elevator. And those are the elevators along the lakes and up into the St Lawrence, and their function was to, as the name indicates, was to house the grain until vessels came from overseas to take the grain away. So that was their purpose and, again, weighing was important because the grain was weighed into a vessel, unloaded at that transfer elevator, say, in Montréal or Baie-Comeau or Port-Cartier, and these weights would be registered by the Grain Commission.

And at some point, this grain would be shipped out, and again, it would be weighed under the supervision of the Canadian Grain Commission, and those weights there would be a certificate issued with our signature on it attesting to the weight and the inspection division, who I assume you've already interviewed. They would've tested the grain, and that becomes a legal document, so that's why it's important that we really knew what the heck we were doing. [Laughs]

As far as-- I have to mention that I came to the Canadian Grain Commission without knowing anything about the grain trade or anything about terminal transfer elevators, and I was very fortunate in having some excellent mentors. There's a fellow by the name of Roy Wood who actually was there when Harold was there.

BC: He's a very good friend of my father's.

SK: Yeah, and we're very good friends, and he was a wonderful mentor, and without him, it would've been very difficult because I had no idea what this whole thing was all about. And there was Jack Riel, who was also an excellent mentor, Austiepal (sp?) in Thunder Bay, Angus Vass, and on the West Coast, we had also very experienced people who came from Thunder Bay. There was one, Jack Gould, and a number of others, but these people were really excellent mentors, and I enjoyed working with them. And it was really terrific the first. I was there for 21 years, and I've got to say, the first 15 years are wonderful. After that, [laughs] we won't talk about that.

BC: Well, we'll speak about those in terms of challenges later.

SK: [Laughs] Challenges, right. Challenges. Yeah. So then we also had a staff of scale inspectors, which is much different than what your father had. I think your father and a couple of others handled--tried to handle—that, and it was okay while the system was still mechanical, but when we introduce electronics, these are very sensitive beasts that I usually used to curse out every morning, but eventually we got things working while we had a number of staff. We had a scale inspector in Thunder Bay, another one for the St. Lawrence region. He was stationed in Montréal. We had another inspector in Vancouver, and we were able to provide service for the grain trade to ensure that these scales were accurate.

But the requirements of the Weights and Measures Act, which is another act that we have to be aware of, the scales needed to be tested once a year. Well, that's fine for somebody who's weighing meat in a butcher shop, but that's really not fine for weighing very large quantities of a very valuable commodity such as grain, particularly when you have somebody on the other end challenging your weight. So we had to be absolutely sure in what we were doing, and that was the reason that I saw fit to put scale inspectors at these locations so we could test these scales, as required, and on a regular basis. We were testing them at least twice a year, and at any time when we suspected that a scale may not be accurate. So we were able to provide that service to the grain trade, and I'm sure that was appreciated because nobody likes to be wrong. [Laughs]

BC: No.

SK: So that's sort of a brief outline of the challenges that we faced, and it was an interesting job.

BC: So, I'll just go back a little weeny bit to you said you came from Ottawa, and you had been--. Where were you working before you came to the board of Grain Commissioners?

SK: With Weights and Measures. Weights and Measures where they were part of Corporate and Consumer Affairs, and they also maintain a laboratory called Astana Laboratory, and I was head of the--. Well, they called it Weights and Measures. I was head of the weights division. In that section, our responsibility was to ensure the accuracy of those standards of weight, and we work closely with the National Research Council in order to do that and provide standards of weights to all of the subsidiary offices of Weights and Measures throughout Canada. There's one here in Winnipeg. There's one in every major city that maintains a full slate of weight standards, metric weights, [inaudible] weights, and--.

BC: So that would be for more than the grain industry?

SK: Oh, more than the grain industry.

BC: For everything?

SK: For everything. Not only weights, but also standards of measure. We actually provided them with standards of measures so they could test gasoline pumps and all sorts of liquid commodities throughout Canada. We even went so far as to do some special work such as calibrating pipelines that were used to offload oil coming in from offshore. I did this on the East Coast, and it's interesting. I met some very interesting people. I had an interesting career.

BC: So, taking it even further back, how did you get into that? What was your background?

SK: Oh, my. I worked. I think I worked forever. [Laughing] How did I get into that? Well, I was working here in the oil industry. In Winnipeg, we had two oil refineries, and I worked in both of them at one time or another, and I was working as a technologist, and I was also working on the operational side. I was working as a technologist after taking some university training, and before that, I was working in the elevators, climbing tanks, and measuring what was in the tanks on midnight shift, delightful, but good for a 19-year-old kid. [Laughs] I don't think I could climb one tank anymore and on midnight shift. We'd climb I don't know how many, but anyway, it was a lot of fun when you're 19. And then after all of that, I was out of work, and for one reason or another, and I went into the Post Office one day, and I was looking on the board, and there were these jobs posted for the federal government, and one of them was with the Geological Survey of Canada and another one was for--. Anyway, it was a lab in Ottawa that was testing oil products for the Armed Forces, so I applied for both of them.

The reason I applied for the Geological Survey was that I had worked with the Geological Survey as a summer student, and I had been up north doing survey work as a junior. Another University thing in order to--. [Dog barks] That dog's outside, I'm hoping to keep him outside. Anyway, so I applied for that and my wife and I just got married and lo-and-behold I'm offered this job in Calgary to work with the Geological Survey. So off we go to Calgary, and we were there from—this is 1962—we were there from April, and lo-and-behold, along comes a letter from Ottawa saying, “You know? You've also won this job with the--.” What was the department anyway? It doesn't matter. In Ottawa with this lab because I had already done all that lab work. So off we went to Ottawa, and it was with Trade and Commerce. Off we went to Ottawa and worked there for a while until 1972, and then along came this opportunity with the Canadian Grain Commission. My experience kind of just led into that, so it was fine, and so we moved, bag and baggage, and we didn't have any children, so it was an easy move. My experience kind of led me into this whole thing and it was kind of fun.

BC: Did you want to turn it off for a second? **[Audio pauses]** So we'll go back to the idea of the history of why audits came into place.

SK: Okay, yes. The reason for weighing over the grain in the grain elevator, more commonly known as an audit, the reason it's known as an audit is because you're actually comparing the physical amount of grain in the elevator to the outstanding paper stocks that are registered by the Canadian Grain Commission. For each--. What is a paper stock? Okay, a paper stock is the amount of grain that is taken in by the elevator from any shipment, whether it be by rail, or in terms of transfer elevator, by vessel, that amount is registered by the Canadian Grain Commission. Now, in the terminal elevator system, grain is taken in, amount is registered, but then during the operation of the elevator, grain can be promoted. As far as grade goes, it can go from a [No.] 2 Red to a [No.] 1 Red simply by the cleaning and drying or whatever other process it may use. So the amount of outstanding elevator receipts have to be changed. There's a chance to make mistakes there. And also grain could be demoted. In the handling system you may, in some way or another, damage the grain, and it may be degraded. So elevator receipts or whatever you want to call them, it's a paper stock that has to be changed. So at some point, and because it's required by the Canada Grain Act, it's required that the actual physical quantity of grain is measured, and those measurements are compared to the outstanding elevator receipts and that's the reason for an audit.

Now, folklore has it—and I never believed this for one minute—that there was some skulduggery going on in the elevators, and I used to hear all sorts of stories about how the elevators would do certain things. And I can't believe that anybody would go to any great lengths. I mean, how much are you going to gain? A tonne here and a tonne there? If there was a discrepancy, we could attribute it to the inaccuracy of the scales, malfunction of some other instrument, an error in the paper trail, all sorts of other things—mostly by accident—and if the audit was outside of tolerance, we usually could determine the reason for it, and it was usually some good reason.

But in years before that, long before my time, there was always this business of, “Oh, we have to oversee them because they're cheating.” Well, I never discovered that. Certainly, there were audits that weren't within tolerance, but after an examination of all of the variables, we usually came to the conclusion that the elevator was operating within the terms and conditions of the Canada Grain Act. So I had no reason to suspect our own operation or suspect the operation of the grain elevator. After all, it was the weighing division's responsibility to oversee the weighing of grain going in and grain going out, but we weren't responsible for what went on in between as grain was housed. And it's impossible to keep your eye on everything, but it was in the elevator's interest to maintain their system within the requirements and their regulations of the act, otherwise, their license was in jeopardy, and nobody wanted to face that. I know all of these. I'm aware of all these stories of things that went on in the 1940s and '50s.

BC: I don't know what you're asking, so just throw it in.

NP: This is, I think, the first time that the word license has come up. Can you expand on that a little bit?

SK: Sure. This is the first time the license has come up? I guess you haven't interviewed anybody from that department. Maybe that's something you should do. But anyway, the transfer elevators and the terminal elevators were licensed by the Canadian Grain Commission to operate within the terms and conditions of the Act and regulation. And similarly for the so-called primary elevators or country elevators, they too are licenced by the Canadian Grain Commission, and they have to operate within the terms and conditions of the Act and regulations, and that's a very large aspect of the function of the Canadian Grain Commission. There's a whole section of the Canadian Grain Commission devoted to that, so it'd be very worthwhile.

Now, I think one of the people that, I forgotten names of course, but there are excellent retired employees in Thunder Bay who actually worked for the Canadian Grain Commission, and that was part of their duty was to look after the registration of grain, and also they could speak to the licensing of the terminal and transfer elevators. So there are other people of the Commission, other employees of the Commission, which you certainly could contact. Earle Baxter for years was in charge of that sort of thing, and I'm not sure--. Dennis Kennedy is somebody you want to talk to, and he is very knowledgeable about that whole aspect because he was director of that section for a number of years.

BC: That's good.

SK: They called it statistics. Anyway, he's somebody who's really worthwhile talking to, and he's fully knowledgeable. That was his area, so he's fully knowledgeable. Should be. I know he is. He's one very bright guy.

NP: Do you know where to find him?

SK: He's probably in the phone book.

NP: Any idea what part of the city he lives in because I have tried to track him down, but there's lots of Kennedys.

SK: Oh, okay. Well, why don't you leave that for me and I'll see what I can do?

BC: Oh, that would be great. You mentioned earlier that your work involved a lot of travel.

SK: Yes.

BC: So could you speak a bit about what that looked like in your job?

SK: Yes. Well, I'm sure you're aware that the Canadian Grain Commission had offices in Thunder Bay and in Montréal and also in Vancouver. Vancouver I would go to regularly because we had a number of elevators there, and we always had one in Prince Rupert. So as being the director of the division, you really had to keep in contact with our people there in order to develop training exercises, anything new happening you should bring this to their attention and was a regular visitor to Thunder Bay. As a director or as a senior person in the Canadian Grain Commission, it's just not a good management practice that your name be on a piece of paper and that nobody knows your face. That's just not good management practice. And then with Montréal, we had elevators not only in the city of Montréal but also in Baie-Comeau and Port-Cartier, and they handled a lot of grain, and I felt that it was important to make my face known.

I became very well-known with the people in those two elevators, especially with the amount of grain handled by Port-Cartier and Baie-Comeau, the amount of work that was done there is very important that we were known. I had one person there, and he would handle both elevators, that was a difficult job, and also we had the challenge of bilingualism so that became an issue. Montréal, I had a bilingual staff in Montréal, and at that time they were fairly busy, but I would see the handwriting on the wall. Nobody else really wanted to deal with it, but it was, even in the '90s, even in the late '80s, it was time to deal with that situation that we had a number of people there, and the amount of work they were doing there, in my mind, didn't really justify maintaining the office there. But that's the way it was. I'm not sure what the situation is now, but they still maintain a presence there or not.

BC: Business in these two cities?

SK: Well, no. In the eastern division, we had our office, our main office was in Montréal, Quebec City. We also have a small staff there. Quebec City did more handling than they did in Montréal, and then we have Baie-Comeau and Port-Cartier, and between all of them, in that time period, they handled a lot of grain. So that was the reason we wanted a staff there, but Montréal seemed to be handling less and less of the throughput as each year went on, and I kept on asking the question, "Why aren't we moving to Quebec City? Why do we keep on providing a staff in Montréal when the greatest volume of grain is further downstream?" Anyway, that was my attitude towards it, and it fell--. Maybe I was right, maybe I was wrong, but anyway, we didn't do--. Up to the time I left, nothing was done about it.

BC: And the whole area of bilingualism, certainly people in the eastern division would be more likely to be bilingual people, whereas grain went all the way across the country, and I would suspect that there were not a lot of bilingual people in the other parts of the system. Was there any kind of pressure to--?

SK: Yup. I became bilingual.

BC: You did it?

SK: My staff in Montréal, every one of them was bilingual. I couldn't get a bilingual person--. I had bilingual people in Quebec, at least one, but I had no success with staffing Baie-Comeau and Port-Cartier, couldn't get anybody to become bilingual, move there. Those are two isolated places. It's fine if you're born and brought up there. I found the places interesting, but I could see that if you had a young family, it wouldn't be exactly the best situation for a young family. But bilingualism does present its issues. It was required for those of us who had staff in the eastern division to be bilingual because you have to give them the opportunity to be supervised in their language or their choice, and also if you were dealing with French-speaking people from the eastern division, you have to be able to speak to them in their language. Not that that ever occurred more than a few times in my tenure, but anyway, they demanded that I become bilingual, and I said, "If you're going to pay for it, I'm going to become bilingual." [Laughs]

So I mean only a fool would not take advantage of free education, so they locked me up for nine months with a bunch of other students, most of them were Mounties, [laughs] and I'll tell you, I was 47 years old when this happened, and it was a tough job! It was a tough job, but perseverance and their method was excellent. I just wish that the public school system would teach languages in that way. Teaching you to speak rather than hammering away at your regular verbs and irregular verbs, and they mentioned that, but you just learned to use the language. So I found it to be challenging, but I did it. Then every couple of years, you were supposed to requalify, and I requalified once and then thank god I retired. [Laughs]

BC: I guess when I said pressure, I should have said the expectation was on people to become bilingual.

SK: Yeah, and really and truly, the requirements to be bilingual in the grain trade is really a--. Any language you know is certainly a plus for you personally, but it's not really not required in the Canadian grain industry because it really operates in English. But that's the government policy that thou shalt be bilingual, and we became bilingual at a great expense. And I don't disagree with bilingualism. I think it's wonderful if the citizens of a country can speak more than one language. After all, look at Europeans.

BC: Oh, I agree.

SK: Canadians and Americans--. Well, Americans are better off where a large number of them speak Spanish and some form of English, which nobody else can understand.

BC: [Laughs] But you can see where it would be some challenges in a workplace because you were able to make that shift, go in there, learn it, and master it, where you could see people who could perhaps less confident, less education, all of a sudden are faced

with a challenge where people are feeling threatened for their jobs, feeling like I need to do this but I don't think I can. So you can see where you introduce something new like that into the system, it can cause some stresses systemically.

SK: Oh, it's definitely stressful. There's no question about it. But if you want more opportunities in the public service, being bilingual is a definite advantage. I don't think anybody would disagree with that. However, we digress.

BC: So going onto you were just speaking about travelling in Canada to the places that the Grain Commission worked, but also I have a sense that you also travelled--.

SK: Yeah, international travel, yeah. I didn't get very much involved with that, but I did make two trips to China, and I made a number of trips to the United States, mostly from a technical nature to discuss with the Americans on how they were handling grain and how they were introducing electronic scales. I met with scale manufacturers in the United States, a lot of technical things which really were kind of more to do with automation than the actual grain trade itself. Although it would have an effect on the grain trade because if the Canadian grain trade wanted to automate its function in the transfer elevator system, there would have to be an investment by the grain trade in partnership with the government, and it really never took off, and not up to the point when I left.

However, we could've automated, and it's a good thing we didn't do it because look what happened. We've only got six elevators working, so a large outlay of money--. It probably would've paid, but it turns out with the demise of the industry in the eastern part of the country, who knows? But certainly automation of the Canadian Grain Commissions weighing function in Vancouver and Prince Rupert certainly would pay off, and I don't know whether they've done anything with it or not, but there is technology available that would allow you to oversee the operation of the weighing function in the terminal elevator system at arms length.

You could have an office set up in this house and monitor what's going on in Vancouver. I wanted to do that. I had money in place in the budget, but when the reorganization thing came about and all that, and then I'd have to start all over, and in order to accomplish this, I needed a staff of engineers. I needed more expertise. And I actually started to interview people trying to hire an engineer. I needed somebody with that kind of background, and we had a number of applicants, but anybody that we interviewed couldn't seem to grasp the whole idea. And I mean these are industrial type people who had--. One of them, as I recall, now this is going back a long way, but he had some experience in automating some kind of an industry where they did put various electronic devices in some parts of the plant to ensure the actual handling of commodities, which kind of lended itself into what we were doing. But he didn't seem to grasp a grain elevator, and I said, "Well, I think if you're going to be considered for this, maybe we could take you through an elevator, and you could get an idea." And he wasn't really interested. Then that was too late because a few weeks after that, he came into my office, and I decided that I had enough. But really and truly with the technology that is

available now, you could oversee what's happening from a long distance given the right kind of desire you could really do it. You wouldn't have to worry about coffee breaks and sick leave and--.

BC: Transportation costs.

SK: Transportation costs or mood swings or anything else. You know, some guy has got all of a sudden develops sugar diabetes and the next thing you know he can't work, but you've got to pay him. Really and truly the most difficult part of a job is--. The job of a manager kind of breaks down into three major components. One is the operation, you've got to know that, but the other thing is administration, that's another one, and then personnel administration. Personnel administration is a major, major component that takes up a lot of time because when I started with the Canadian Grain Commission, there were 253 employees under my watch, and holy, that translated into a million problems each day. So anyway, I recognized that immediately, and I've never been in that position before. Before I had supervised people, but these are all very intelligent technological people who missing a day's work was almost a crime for them. But when I came to this industry, that wasn't the case. So that was something to deal with and had a very sharp learning curve.

And then of course not only did we have that in personnel administration, we had union contracts. Another strange animal for me. To me, if you have an employer paying your salary, you go to work. I found that different. Anyway, we had a number of union contracts, and each one of them had to be respected, and that's the way it should be, but I can't say that I enjoyed that. [Laughs] So that was another issue. I think in your father's time, he didn't have to deal with that because collective bargaining didn't come in until about 1966, so he had a couple of years of it. But by the time the '70s rolled around, the unions really got rolling, and that was their job, so I have no criticism of them. But the collective bargaining in government is something that the government managers were having--. We were just too green. I just didn't understand it, but now it's different.

BC: We also had such a, as you said, a large number of employees geographically spread out, so far that that would be a challenge in itself. And you mentioned making sure you showed up so they knew who you were, but there's still a challenge with that wide geographic base.

SK: Yeah, and it was very important to have a senior person on site. We had the weighman in charge, as it was known in your father's time, who was in charge, and everybody knew him, and it was the Ross Tipples and people like that who are well respected and run a pretty tight shop. And after the old guard like Ross retired, then it's a new breed, and a new breed brought along with them, with themselves, the union contracts, and they came up through the union, which in itself is an issue because they respected more the requirements of the union than they did actually of the person that was employing them. So I always found that to be sort of a conflict of interest, and of course, these are all the issues I struggled with, and it's one of the reasons that I came into my office

that day, and I thought, “I don’t care.” [Laughs] I mean everybody reaches a limit. The way I, in my work history, you were paid a salary, and you did your work. Anyway, and for the most part for 99 percent of our staff, that was their attitude, but we had the odd person who would really upset things, and of course you get one person that upsets things, and then it’s kind of like introducing the flu, so it can be stressful. Why do you reorganize? Obviously, you reorganize to save money. How do you save money? You get rid of staff, and I really wasn’t comfortable with that.

BC: And was that something that they expected you to do within your division?

SK: Well, we had already done that, and when I came, as I said, there were 253 employees, and due to attrition and changes in operation and so on and so forth, we reduced our staff by at least 30 percent. So my division had nothing to be ashamed of. We met the challenges of the times, and we were able to do that because a large number of our employees were part-time and casual, so we were able to accomplish that. As elevators gave up their licenses, we were able to adjust staff accordingly, and I’m almost sure that’s what happened in Thunder Bay because we had—oh, here’s the guy from Shaw—we had I would say 50 percent of staff in Thunder Bay were casual employees, so that’s how we were able to maintain an equilibrium. This guy shouldn’t be here--.

[Audio pauses]

NP: Okay, well maybe we’ll track him down. Okay, ready to go?

BC: Sure. The next question, it’s a very general one, but if you talk about your career at the Board of Commissioners spanning 20--.

SK: 21.

BC: 21 years, looking back, what are you most proud of that you did in that time?

SK: Oh, I think what I’m most proud of is how we handled the introduction of electronic scales and the introduction of the metric system. I think that that was a huge leap for the industry because not only did it affect the Canadian Grain Commission, but it affected the elevator operation because I think, with our input, the changeover to electronic scales was made much easier for the elevators, and I think that’s due to our staff and to cooperation between the elevators and the Canadian Grain Commission, and the way it was handled is accredited to the industry.

BC: And you feel that the people from the Board of Grain Commissioners took a leadership role in that?

SK: I believe we did, along with the suppliers of the electronic scales. They were more than generous in their time that they devoted to helping us. I think our input to them was just as valuable as their input to us, but I think that the elevator people benefited by this [inaudible] and certainly the—I was going to say the kind of training—but really the electronic scales really didn't require very much training to train somebody to use them because the things were more or less automatic. The early ones, the very early generation of them, there was electronic readout, but the paper clicked off a paper receipt which was really just an adding machine in the early years. And then it got more sophisticated, and I think that our staff, our actual weighmen in the elevators, were a great assistance to the elevator staff and vice versa. It was kind of a growing thing, so they help one another, and I think our input was very valuable.

BC: Were you involved in any way in--. Obviously they came down, "Okay, we're going to go electronic." Did you have input into who was going to be the supplier in that and how early were you on the ground floor of that?

SK: Basically, when I started, they were just coming in, so I was right there. I was right on the ground floor, and the suppliers were really very helpful. Well, they had to be! They wanted to make a sale, so there was competition, no doubt, but we had no--. The Canadian Grain Commission had to be hands-off when it came to making any recommendations about who's scale you should buy or who should get the job no that was. We kept right out of that. We didn't want to influence anything one way or another. That was strictly the elevator's decision on who they were going to buy their equipment from.

BC: Okay. There's another question here, and I think you've touched on it somewhat, but it's describing the interconnectedness of the Canadian Grain Commission with other major components of the industry like the grain companies, the carriers, the rail, water, the Wheat Board, researchers, customers, all of that.

SK: Yeah, well a lot of what you mentioned there is political. I kept right out of--. I really kept my direction in what I was doing with my particular expertise. I did have a lot of interaction with grain elevator management at the grain elevators. That's where my job was. I did participate in seminars with the International Grains Institute, CIGI, Canadian International Grain Institute, where I was one of the guest lecturers, and I maintained a relationship with my counterparts in the grain elevators, such as elevator managers and the likes of that, some people in the more senior positions in the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and Cargill and places like that but never--. I felt that in my particular position--.

[Man]: We're all done.

SK: Okay, thanks a lot.

[Man]: No problem. [Laughs]

SK: You had the proper supervision?

[Man]: What's that?

SK: He doesn't want you to take that.

[Man]: No. I can tell.

SK: Hampton supervisor, eh?

[Audio pauses]

BC: Little guilt gifts as I leave for the morning. Okay, we were talking about the interconnectedness, the relationship that the Canadian Grain Commission had with other parts of the industry and the necessity of some of those connections.

SK: Yeah. Well, I sort of remained out of that loop. I mean, I certainly had a strong connection with the managers in the elevators but as far as the grain trade in general here in Winnipeg, I mean I knew them, I knew the major players, but it wasn't an avenue that I really pursued. I wasn't interested in that. I wasn't interested in rubbing elbows with the major players here in Winnipeg. Other people--. I felt that that was a job for others in the Canadian Grain Commission. I had enough to do with my own division rather than having lunch with Dusty Titheridge or something like that. I used to have lunch with somebody, but it was not something that I pursued.

BC: Okay. The next question ties into somewhat when you talked about how you had travelled to China, but this question is your sense of the role you and the Canadian Grain Commission played in Canada's success internationally in the grain trade.

SK: Well, I think one of the--. Of course, Canada's reputation for giving honest weights and honest grades is well-respected around the world, and I think that that's certainly a credit to the Canadian Grain Commission for establishing itself in the way it had. Developing an inspection process which is second to none, a weighing process which is recognized worldwide as being accurate, and that's one of the reasons because we give the certificate final. Its one of the reasons that it's a plus for salespeople that are making a deal to sell grain to another country, so it's an excellent bargaining chip. I don't know. For example, the American's sell their grain based on fair average grade or something like that. I forgot what it is. And they also, I don't know whether they provide

a certificate final or not, I don't know what their system really is, but they sell an awful lot of grain and so does Canada. So we're competitive and, as I said, well-recognized, and I don't know what the tonnage is. I don't know what the sales are now, but in my time 30 million tonnes was not an unusual number for a country as small as Canada. That's a fair trade. That's certainly due to the reputation of the Canadian Wheat Board and the Canadian Grain Commission.

BC: The next section you really have spoken to which were some of the challenges and major changes, and you talked about actually coming in--. When you came into the industry, you were part of a change process, and that you actually left when there was another change process that had begun, and you mentioned that one of the things was downsizing near the end was one of the reorganization goals. Were there any other goals that you think they were moving towards when you left?

SK: I have no idea. I have no idea. As I said earlier, I have not had contact with the Canadian Grain Commission since the day I walked out the door. I wasn't angry with anybody. I just knew that I was finished.

BC: Yup. You had done your job. So the next section, because we have covered so much, is significant events. Is there any really significant situation, event, occurrence that happened that stands out for you and the years that you were there?

SK: Well--.

BC: Really any kind of vivid memory of something.

SK [Laughs] Nothing really. I mean I can say that every day was much like the day before. [Laughs] There wasn't any sort of event or eureka of any kind. It was just kind of the same thing every day, different challenges. There were significant events that happened that we had to deal with, for example, during the loading of a vessel, and this happened once during a loading of a vessel in Vancouver. One of the scales actually broke one of the load cells, and it came down, and they kept on weighing a quantity of grain until somebody woke up that was asleep at the switch and said, "Wait a minute, something's wrong here." So that was a significant event, but that happened once, and we were able to rectify it. Fortunately, the person that I had in charge in Vancouver was a very smart individual, and he was able to determine within reasonable accuracy, within the quantity that went onboard, and we wrote a letter covering the incident.

I mean, we didn't hide the incident, we wrote a letter covering the incident so that people were aware that this happened. Things like that--. And these were the kind of incidents that we have a supervision of weighing in the grain elevators. This is the kind of thing that will happen, and you have to be alert enough to find it and report it. So that's really another one of our functions. No system is going to go along without having some breakdown at some time, and if it does, if you find one like that, somebody's

lying. [Laughs] It's Murphy's law. And that did happen, and I don't know of any other incident that might have occurred that wasn't reported because if we did have an incident that where there was a complaint, we had a complete record of the loading of the vessel with a paper trail of each one of those weighings that went to the vessel, each one, and I could actually take this record and have somebody else review it. And I would review it, and we would say, "Oh, here's one." We know when an incident occurred, and that was the reason, that was one of the advantages of having an electronic scale was it would pump out the printed record which you could go back to. We didn't have that. Well, with the mechanical scales, you had some two guys standing there hour after hour recording these weights, and sixes became nines and so on. [Laughs] Contrary to the folklore, nobody that I know of intentionally cheated. There were long hours in the grain elevators. Long, cold dreary hours. If you've ever been in one, the damn thing never warms up. [Laughs]

BC: True.

SK: It just never warms up. It could be 90 degrees outside, and it's cold in the grain elevator. And in the winter, oh. I can speak from my limited experience in Saskatoon, we were there doing an audit and it was January. I don't think I've ever been so cold in my life. [Laughs] A lot of credit goes to these guys that did this for their whole career. Tough job, tough job. Anyway, so be it.

BC: You mentioned that you did go to China a couple of times, and what was your purpose or your role in those trips?

SK: Well, the first time I went, I went there to do some training. We were very close with the Chinese. The Canadian grain industry was very close with the Chinese, and they were often brought here to the Canadian International Grains Institute, and they invited us to come to China to do a training course there. There's my students along with us. Me, John O'Connor who passed away just a year ago, and Keith. Keith, Kieth, Kieth.

NP: Tipples?

SK: No, not Keith Tipples. He was from the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and I asked him to come along to talk about grain handling, which he did, and so here's all of my students.

NP: So which city are you in?

SK: This is in Shanghai, but we were in a number of different cities. And here's my graduating class! [Laughs] They were very proud. Each one of them got a certificate.

BC: I notice they're all male.

SK: Um, no, no. There are females. There's another one.

BC: And these would be, what would their job be then?

SK: These are actually people that were in the supervising and the unloading of grain, but what's interesting, they were also military, so they were unloading grain in places like Shanghai, Beijing, and so they really wanted to know how we did things.

BC: So would some have ended up having inspection type jobs?

SK: Inspection? No. These were strictly people who were doing weighing.

BC: That's what I meant. Weighing people.

SK: Yeah, yeah. I don't know where they ended up but they certainly appreciated our-here's another female-they certainly appreciated our input and we appreciated our time there.

BC: That's a large class.

SK: Yeah, oh yeah.

BC: And you say you went twice to do this?

SK: No, the first time I went was strictly to do this course, and the second time I went we were invited to tour some of their installations. So we did, and we went to other places in China which we hadn't been to the first time, and here we're entertaining them in Winnipeg. This is part of the Canadian International Grains Institute, and I was one of the people that was escorting them. And here's the leader of the group, Mr. Gough, and actually my wife and I entertained them right in this house, a number of them.

BC: When you were in China and you went to see their facilities, what were the differences that you saw?

SK: Well, they had begun the instillation of some electronic scales, but most of it was mechanical scales, and their unloading systems were--. They were more receiving grain than shipping grain, and so the one instillation I toured and spent a couple days, I

was in Shanghai where they were unloading a vessel, and they were unloading it using a vacuum system. They would plunge this vacuum into the grain and suck it out, and of course, that caused a loss of grain, well, made a lot of chaff, and the chaff disappears, and of course the weight disappears. So rather than the traditional way that we do here in Canada, it was with an elevation leg that stuck into the grain—it was an endless belt with buckets on it—and that’s one way. We also have vessels in Canada that are self-unloaders that actually have their own elevation system on the--. But that’s a whole other discussion.

So here we are and we’re entertaining them here in our house, and that’s right here in this living room. So here we are, and this is Tracy, that’s my youngest daughter. She was about ten. And that’s my wife, and you can see we were much younger . [Laughs] And my daughter is a great singer so she was singing for them, and Mr. Gough, he’s also a singer, so we had a piano here—you can see the piano—it was there, and that’s now gone over to my daughter’s house. And he’s singing away. Anyways, it was a wonderful evening, I’ve got to tell you.

BC: She looks like she was singing too.

SK: Yeah, and she was a translator, so we were having a good time. Here we are touring the elevators in Thunder Bay. I don’t know what elevator it is right now. That’s here in my house, yup, that’s here in the family room, and here this is on the lake somewhere, and this is inside one of the grain elevators, and you can see the mechanical system and eventually we get onto--. And here we are somebody doing electrical in one of the rooms, I forget who it is. This is on a vessel, touring a vessel, obviously in the east, and here we are in front of one of the electronic readouts. And this is in Quebec City, this is in Quebec City. You can see they’re taking notes, she’s translating, and so they had a good time.

BC: Is China still one of our biggest buyers?

SK: As far as I know. I’ve been away from it.

BC: Doesn’t want to come apart.

SK: This is--.

BC: Toronto?

SK: No. The Falls, Niagara Falls. That’s actually a hotel.

BC: [Laughs] I'm easy to confuse. You can take me to a city and tell me that's the Toronto tower and it's Niagara Falls.

SK: No, see this has got a revolving restaurant up there.

BC: So they came to Winnipeg, went to Thunder Bay with you, went down east with you, so this was a major investment of their time and yours.

SK: Major investment of our time and their time, but they feel that it's important to get around and know what other people are doing, and he was one of the leaders of the group, and you always have to make sure you get one photo of the leader of the group by himself. [Laughs]

BC: Okay, you learned the protocol.

SK: There's the other leader, my friend, still friendly with him, and there's the two of them together in front of the falls. Oh yeah, this is where now? This is an important photo from the point of view of how grain is handled. This is one of the locks, I don't know which one. Anyways, you can see the vessel coming in, and now it has to enter the locks, so the vessels have to be designed so that they can fit into the locks. That's one reason the vessels are long and narrow, so they can fit into the locks, and it was great explaining that to them. And this is carrying grain from Thunder Bay up into probably the St Lawrence.

BC: What are the names of the boats that they get transferred to to go overseas? Do they have a special--?

NP: Salties.

SK: They're salties, but any special--? Their names? That's too long ago. No.

BC: But this would be called a--.

SK: That's a lake vessel.

BC: A lake vessel, okay.

SK: We get the odd saltie coming into Thunder Bay, at least we used to, but it would have to be designed so they could get through the lock. And what amazed me—I had seen it a number of times—but what amazed me was this guy is so far out there and the

navigation has to be so precise that he could get in here. I mean there was only inches to spare, and they're just amazing. That's some of them taking advantage of the beautiful day.

BC: That's on a boat somewhere.

SK: Yeah, this is on one of the boats. Yeah, I think this is in Vancouver actually we'd--.

BC: Right, I saw a totem pole back there.

SK: Yeah, this is in Vancouver.

BC: So you took them west too?

SK: Yeah, this is in Stanley Park. That's in Stanley Park, and we were out west, and we actually went up to Prince Rupert. This is in Prince--. No this is onboard. They had chartered a vessel for us, and we went out on a little joyride on a vessel. End of story. But I have now all of my other very valuable ones are left on the job.

BC: We will--. Nancy will phone and try to find out because that would be a really good addition to what we hope would be a website almost where people can look and see some history.

SK: Right. I don't know if I can really do anything with--. No I can't.

BC: Well. you can tell us--? What are they?

SK: Some of them are family pictures, but a lot of them are pictures of on the job.

BC: You have them numbered. Did you very cleverly make a--?

SK: Yeah, somewhere. Halloween--. No, these are all family pictures. These are all family pictures. Oh, here's one. This is one of my Canadian International Grains Institute. Yeah, there's some good stuff on this one.

BC: Perhaps what we should do when we are more into our archiving segment and we've got our technical people in line, perhaps we could come back and transfer a few that you think are significant.

SK: I can actually do that for you.

BC: Oh, that's even better! That's great! If you could select the ones that you think would be of significance that would be really helpful.

SK: My hobby is photography.

BC: Oh, excellent.

SK: See those photographs there, that's me.

BC: Okay. Fabulous because we are really at the ground floor trying to gather the artifacts, and the other type of person we are looking for is we really want to get a website up so it becomes a living kind of document for people pretty soon, and this is the kind of material that we need to put on it.

SK: There's a nice picture of Thunder Bay.

BC: That's a childhood memory of mine!

SK: There you go.

BC: Wow. That's a great picture. Really good.

SK: That's Thunder Bay. That's Thunder Bay.

BC: Yup, sure is.

SK: This is the West Coast. That's a very good photograph of the kind of buildings that you find in eastern Canada up in Quebec. It's one of my favourites. This is taken here at Kildonan Park.

BC: This? Sorry.

SK: [Laughs]

BC: Oh! Really? There's a totem pole in Kildonan Park?

SK: There was. I'll show you something.

BC: Okay, this, just so we keep the tape part because I do want to keep going on this, I'm supposed to ask you at the end are there any other questions that I should've asked that I didn't think of that you can think of?

SK: Well, we covered everything pretty well. I think I spoke about my aspirations that I thought I left behind, which was full automation of the job that we were doing, and as I said, I really have no knowledge of what happened after 1993. So I can't think of anything right at the moment that we should've talked about, but if I do, I can always get a hold of you.

BC: Absolutely. And when we talk about having a grain industry centre and of course a dream would be to have one in an older elevator and have that be the centre point, can you think of what would be really important for someone to see when they went in there? And I'm thinking of general public and also school children because we want that part of history to be preserved. Can you think of some things that we could do in putting that together?

SK: I would think that it wouldn't be a tough job to set up a mini elevator, hands on, so that they could actually elevate the grain, sample the grain, do a mock-up inspection of the grain, have an electronic scale weighing the grain, and have a miniature system of actually delivering the grain to a vessel. Even if it's done on some sort of electronic flow chart. Have grain unloaded, have railcars coming into the unloading shed, a mock-up, a kind of a thing that somebody could design and actually have students, whoever wanted to participate, actually go through the various functions—unloading the car, sampling the car, weighing the car, doing the inspection of the grain, warehousing the grain, taking it out of the warehouse, getting it ready for shipping, putting it to the vessel. These things are not difficult to build, and if you had that inside of a grain elevator, let's say the old Cargill-- Well, Cargill is still working. I'm not sure a grain elevator is the place to do it.

NP: You and our consultants agree.

SK: Yeah. That's a tough thing, and it's an expensive thing, but you could certainly do it. I'm talking about-- You certainly could do that in Thunder Bay. It wouldn't be expensive, and it would be a wonderful learning tool. If you ever want to do it, if you ever want to, I'll be more than happy to talk to people about it, I'll tell you that!

BC: [Laughing] There you go! That's what we need is people with particular interest who say, "I can do this piece." And that's how Nancy and I are volunteers, we're doing the piece around the oral history. Other people have other skills, and it's just bringing together everyone who has a piece.

SK: If anyone ever wants to talk about designing such a thing, I'd be more than happy to participate in the design team to get a miniature elevator set up. If you wanted to teach children about--. It's a valuable history! Canada grew up with the grain industry, and so you know, once you build one, you can build many. And electronic components are cheap.

BC: I can't even visualize it, but obviously you can visualize what that would be.

SK: You know, these people that build model trains and they have them running on tracks? They put grain elevators on the little things on the tracks, and I mean, you just expand on that. You make it ten times larger or whatever and you put a proper grain elevator mock-up and you have it running!

BC: That would be wonderful.

SK: I can see that.

NP: We've done a feasibility study for having a centre, and as I mentioned, you agreed with our consultants that we would feature an elevator as opposed to be located in it just because of the reasons you mentioned, and they also said that we should focus—because we were thinking of Thunder Bay—focus on the science aspect because there's a missing piece in what's available to young people in Thunder Bay. There is no institution that focuses on science, so they said if you can get the accommodation of the history of the grain industry as long with the science aspects of it, and your comments about the weights and measures is sort of a science and technology piece.

SK: It is.

NP: So we might actually contact you even beforehand because I think if we go out to the industry with the idea and try to raise some of the funds that we would need even just a verbal mock-up of what is possible because that's what really stimulates and excites people is to say, "Yes! That can be done, and that can be done." And your little comment beforehand was inspiring.

SK: With the technology that's available, boy, I just wish it was available in the '80s, you know? With the technology that's available today--.,

BC: So did you bring a science background to this job? You talk like a scientist.

SK: Yeah. Well, I never really did what I should've done. This is not on tape.

NP: Yes, it is but it won't be.

BC: Thank you for your interview. No, formally I do want to thank you because it is really important information you've given us, and it really adds to what we're doing.

SK: Well, thank you very much for coming and interviewing.

End of interview.