Narrator: Jack MacMillan (JM)

Company Affiliations: Manitoba Pool Elevators (MPE)

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Summary: Former grain handler for Manitoba Pool Elevators Jack MacMillan discusses his brief career in the grain industry as well as memories of his father's career. He first describes his father's immigration from the British Isles, his work through the elevator ranks to the position of superintendent, as well as his involvement in early grain handlers' union organizing. He recounts his own work for MPE as a summer student, first in the car shed shovelling and boxcar dumping operations, and then in other departments like the tunnels, the scale floor, and as a watchman. He describes the ethnic makeup of the MPE workforce, discusses the culture of alcohol, and recalls the dusty and unsafe work conditions in the early years. MacMillan discusses some of his other tasks as a railcar brakeman, as a sampler for company inspectors, and as a tour guide for visiting farmers, and he shares memories of incidents involving the railways and ships. Other topics discussed include the grain and wood taken out of boxcars by elevator employees, the large number of elevator workers in his neighbourhood, and his involvement in the elevator hockey league.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It is May 21, 2014, and today's interview is taking place in the office of Jack MacMillan at Home Hardware on Memorial Avenue. Jack if I just have you introduce yourself and just broadly give your connection and interest in the grain industry in Thunder Bay, Ontario. JM: My name is Jack MacMillan. I am the son of Malcolm MacMillan who was a general superintendent of Manitoba Pool Elevators No. 9 and No. 2 previously was Alberta Pool. My interest in it started from a perspective of getting summer employment,

which I was fortunate to procure during my high school and university days. My perspective is what went on during the summer months and how we got there and exactly what was going on with the students at that time.

One of the first things I would like to say is that it was a period of high employment. There were a lot of students in the summer. There were no part-time people. When you were hired as a student, you were hired as a full-time employee. Your wage at 18 years of age was the same wage as a gentleman working beside you who had a family of three. There was no lack of work in those months in those years, that was from about 1964 through to about 1972. Depending on the elevator, you worked five days a week and sometimes three nights week overtime from 6:00 to 9:00 and Saturday at time and a half for eight hours. That was quite normal in the early summer and spring, and then after that it would have continued to be more for some of the gentlemen because of the students that obviously got back to school. That was my first introduction to the grain elevators where my father got me a job. As I see most of the students and a lot of them were my personal friends were hired there. Nepotism was very strong. Whether you were working for the government or you were working for the private elevators, it really was a matter of who you knew.

NP: What year was this?

JM: We are looking around 1965 through to about 1972, and there was really no shortage of jobs at that time for students.

NP: You were born in Thunder Bay?

JM: Born and raised in Thunder Bay. My father was a [inaudible] first generation from Scotland and the Isle of Lewis.

NP: You have a nice perspective of being able to have two generations in your mind. What can you recall about your dad and his involvement and, as you said, the emphasis on the students? Let’s go back and talk about your dad, and I understand that is asking you to go back a fair bit. When we first talked about doing this interview, you had mentioned something about how people found jobs in the elevators, not the students but the actual--?

JM: It was like a wave. First of all, it was a wave of immigrants from the British Isles that came over, and a lot of them came over particularly—if this is what we are mentioning—is that a lot of them came over to play in the pipe bands. Because of that, there were a lot of superintendents in Winnipeg and in Thunder Bay who were of Scottish descent, and they wanted to prop the pipe bands up, so there was quite an influx of Scottish immigrants and particularly from the Isle of Lewis that were great bagpipe players, and some are still alive today, and they helped the MacGillivray and Fort William pipe bands out.

One of the other things you mentioned my father was that in his early years, being a British immigrant, unions were very strong in his forefront and he helped, from my understanding, he helped organize the first brotherhood of grain handlers with a group of people. He eventually left the union to become the management position, but he was a very strong union person and became strong down on the waterfront.

NP: Did he ever talk about those early days of union organizing? I think there was probably a wave in the early 19th century or the 20th century the 1910s and 1920s. I think that may have fizzled out a bit, and then he would have been involved in the next round?

JM: Yes, the next round was more of his era.

NP: Did you ever sense that he had split loyalties having moved into management?

JM: No, not whatsoever because I think back then unions were perhaps a little bit different. They became stronger, and personally I think they had something to do with a little bit of the flow of grain to Thunder Bay. I can particularly remember one summer when I was in university and had to seek work out of town. The elevators were on strike. I would perhaps deliver lunch to my father because he had to be there and look after it. But the men on the line never gave any problems. He would make the coffee and bring them coffee, and they would come in and have a coffee. There was really no animosity and no split division because at that time they had all come through the elevators. You come to the ranks. You shovelled grain. You learned how to clean it and how to process it, and then you went into management. There were not a lot of people directly from university taking over as managers. You worked yourself up. There were no split loyalties that I personally could tell.

NP: Did you get a sense that he liked his job?

JM: Very much. At that time, I was just recollecting that because there was good employment and the wages, I would say, were fairly good. There was no animosity at those workplaces. They all knew each other, and they would more than occasionally have beers with each and socially, in terms of after work get togethers. It was fairly [inaudible] and there was no bullying that I knew of. People just got along. It was just a different era. He enjoyed his job.

NP: Did he ever talk about—especially when you started working you became more familiar what was actually done in the elevator—did he ever talk about the old days? You know how often times your parents say, “Oh you know, you have it so easy. Back in the old days I can remember--.”

JM: I am going to say not really. He passed on the idea that you had to work hard to get ahead. Because you got the job because of nepotism doesn't necessarily mean that you could slack off. In fact, anybody that worked for their parents knew that they had to be the hardest working person. I won't say I was there, but you usually had to toe the line pretty good. My father was in is last few years of working there when I was working because he started a family later at that time because of the war.

NP: You said that your dad was the supervisor at Pool 2 and 9 and that is where you worked mostly?

JM: I worked at Pool 9 and Pool 2 and then later on during university I worked at Manitoba Pool 1, which was more automated, and Pool 3, which was more automated. Pool 9 and Pool 2 at that time, in terms of emptying grain cars, was a matter of physically taking a wooden shovel—not like a grain shovel but a piece of plywood three feet by four foot—physically going into a grain car and shoveling it out, and that is what they called shovelling boxcars. Manitoba Pool 1 had an automatic dumper at that time, and Pool 3 was much the same. When you worked in Manitoba Pool 2 and Manitoba Pool 9 and some like Parrish & Heimbecker and some of the other elevators on the Kam River, it was very physical work. You were expected so many boxcars a day to shovel. If you were fortunate enough to shovel those—whatever your quota was nine or ten—you were also allowed to go home, too.

NP: I was commenting on which elevators that your dad worked with because I thought that maybe they were the ones you were more familiar with. You talked about there being a wave of British Isles largest Scottish Gaelic speaking?

JM: The ones from Isle of Lewis were definitely Gaelic speaking. There was a good friend of mine whose parents were from Stornoway would say that a lot of them would immigrate over with the "F" stamped on their head, which meant you went to Fort William Elevator F, which was on the Kam River. There was a great many Scots over in Westfort area, too.

The first wave I would say was British and the second wave, I thought when I was there, were Italians. Those names are familiar with us—a lot of them in construction areas of endeavours—their children and grandchildren: Arella, Scocchia, Di Gregorios, the Telaris. They all worked in the elevators. And the Madeos. That was the second wave. There were obviously other ethnic groups but those two seemed to be the Scots, the British Isles, and the Italians.

NP: That was what you were familiar with. Did it stack up by floor, by certain nationalities work on certain floors?

JM: There was, absolutely. When I think back, the Italians would start in the car sheds and the British immigrants, unfortunately, they were put on the scale floor and on the bins floors. It did obviously change because their people were passing on and those things did change. **[Audio pauses]** I was saying, I would say that first wave of Italians after the British Isles did work in the unloading cars. There was a difference. I would say that.

NP: How much of that could you put down to language barriers, the splitting?

JM: I would say that was high and probably 80 percent, at least. I think it was when one brother—I know specifically—when one brother joined the elevators, he would tell his other two or three brothers and there were many families. I just know from some of the names that I mentioned, the Scocchias, there were two or three and their relatives. There were two or three and always brothers or cousins. Once a family was entrenched there, then the rest of the family knew that they could work there as well.

NP: How do you spell that, Arellas?

JM: A-R-E-L-L-A and S-C-O-C-C-H-I-A.

NP: By the time you got the students working, they would be kids of all nationalities?

JM: No, never. Most students were, like I say students, so there were no issues there.

NP: Do you recall the first time you ever went into an elevator? Was it with your dad when you were a kid?

JM: Yes. I went down probably when he went down to check on a boat to see what was being loaded and if it was finished. I remember walking there and probably what struck me the most was that it was dusty, and it was dirty in terms of just being so much dust from the grain dust. They did have filters, but it was nothing that you would see today. That was my first impression. Just the smell of the grain, you could smell it days in the spring when shipping season opened up, living in Port Arthur. You knew when the boats were being loaded because you could actually smell it from the shores of Lake Superior up to around High Street where we were. You knew the season was beginning. That was my recollection of going there. In the basement it was dark and damp and critters. As a young boy it was a little bit scary and spooky. You had to be with an adult.

One of my other jobs, because I continued on during my university days, was being a day/night watchman. I would just go around. They had different clock positions for insurance purposes. You would check the basement and certain floor areas, and you would punch a clock, which was given to the insurance companies after to make sure things were correct. That was a different era.

Plus, there was another culture going on, too, and that was when grain cars were finished, unloaded, and pushed out onto the tracks, there were a group of people that would take the plywood out of the cars and that was used for homes. Some would sweep the cars out that was left over and bag it and sell it back to, I don't know, whoever.

NP: Sanctioned?

JM: No, it was not sanctioned. But they knew pretty much all the individuals that were doing it. Getting the excess grain that was not an issue because it was just going to go back. But taking all the plywood out of the cars was probably an issue that the transportation companies didn't like for sure.

NP: They did a lot of retrofitting?

JM: Oh, yes, it was huge, huge. I bet a lot of homes in Westfort, I don't know personally, but I know a lot were. Those grain doors were used for everything—wall sheathing and roof sheathing and floor sheathing. Actually, at that time, the plywoods used in there—it wasn't rough plywood that we knew—but it was usually like a good one-sided fir, and an expensive grade of plywood.

NP: These would actually be the walls and not the doors of the cars?

JM: Yes, the walls of the cars. The grain cars were formed or lined with plywood sheets. **[…*audio skips*]** He survived the blast of Sask Pool 6 where the Waterfront Development is right now. Not really that he would say so much, because I didn't really ask him. My own thought and recollections were when I worked there myself. One of the other things you have to remember is that the elevators were so strong and there were so many people employed that they had their own hockey leagues, and they had their own baseball leagues. Those are the things that I remember.

NP: Did you ever play in those?

JM: Both.

NP: We will come back to that, and I am actually trying to track down some photographs because a couple of people have mentioned the leagues, and it would be really interesting to see.

JM: I don't know if I have any of that, but the hockey team I might have pictures.

NP: You said mid 1960s is when you actually started working in the elevator. Can you describe your first day as much as a composite of your first few days?

JM: The first days I had to work shovelling boxcars. There was a certain method that you used to have a large steel pulley that would pull this door that you would hold onto and scoop the grain out of the car and into the hoppers. Personally, I couldn't get the hang of it. I recall what they called it "riding it", which was almost like surfing on grain. I ended up breaking the shovels all the time. They are hardwood shovels. I know the millwrights just to save on costs--. From there I would go into the basement and there were conveyors belts that brought the grain up. What you had to do was make sure that all the grain was swept and cleaned up and that was the second part. Then as you became more well versed, you would get up to the scale floor, but that was after about a year or so. My second or third year I worked on the scale floor, which was a job just measuring grain. The grain scaler from the government, we would weigh the grain that was going onto the boats. Those were the kinds of jobs we looked forward to. That was your seniority. Most times you had to start at the very bottom.

NP: The students had seniority as well?

JM: They didn't. There were no seniority rights for students. They got the same wage and everything but there were no seniority rights. After your second, third or fourth year you been there, they knew what you were capable of. There was turnover. **[…*audio skips*]** Seven, and then go to Stewart's elevator because everybody was looking for people at that time. It was labour intensive, so you should not have been without a job. There was turnover so if you knew something about the workings of the inside of the elevator you were up there. Also it did have to do with nepotism.

NP: Your first days on the job, especially the job with the shovelling, how did you feel that night and the day after?

JM: You are exhausted! They would give you a mask to help you with the dust, but quite honestly it didn't do much. You could not breathe it was so hot, and you had to take it off and your eyes would swell up, and your nostrils would be full of grain dust. You would go home and had supper that your mother prepared and probably crash. That was it. Friday and Saturday were different but Monday to Thursday--.

NP: A Charles Atlas or a kid who got the sand kicked in his eyes. Where were you on the--?

JM: In terms of--?

NP: How big were you as a kid?

JM: I was large at that time, six foot or six foot one was considered fully grown at that time. It was physical work. But just the same more than what you would have been doing.

NP: Did you ever get the hang of the shovel?

JM: No. I never did. But there were some that could. Honestly, it was unbelievable how fast they could do it. It was unbelievable.

NP: You mentioned earlier on the tape about you were given a number of cars to do in a day?

JM: Yes. One of the other things about Manitoba Pool 9 was that in the winter months, they would use coal as their source of heat for offices. One of the things that I never got to do but my good friends did was to go in and shovel the box of coal, a boxcar of coal, into the bins, and it was filthy dirty. You were given rest. It wasn't like they were taking advantage of you. You were not expected to do more cars and just keep going. It was reasonable, and you always had time for an hour lunch and always had a coffee break and water breaks.

There was no pressure of trying to get X-amount of cars done a day. There was a quota, but not really a quota. It wasn't stated that perhaps if you and your crew—and there was usually two rail lines coming in—so there was a bit of a race on, first to get to lunch. So if you finished at 11:30, you would go to lunch at 11:30 and come back at 1:00. You finished at 4:30. You'd clean up and go home at 5:00. I remember you were always pretty much finished by 4:30 because they gave you time to clean up and get ready to go home. It was a good place to work.

In the small elevator, Manitoba Pool was small, there was only perhaps two or three of us, but as I moved to Pool No. 1 and Pool 3, which were large elevators at that time, there were maybe 10 students. You were always with students. A lot of time they were your friends because that is who got hired. It was enjoyable because they were your friends. I would say that most of the people surviving, as I have been in business almost 40 years myself, and they are still customers of mine. They actually still come in today, which is 2014. That is a long time. I would say that because of the relationship we had there—everybody was there to work but have a little bit of a good time—it just carried on. There were layoffs in the winter. But when I was working there from May through to the end of August it was extremely busy.

NP: The days went fast?

JM: Yes, very fast, very fast when you are doing that type of work.

NP: Did you spend any time talking to the old timers? Did they have any words of wisdom or stories to pass on about their--?

JM: A lot were my relatives. So we had some things to talk of. I would say that the grain trade was really picking up at that time. The 1960s seemed to be a period of really gangbusters. There was lots going to Russia at that time before the credit crunch. There were a lot of shipments. There was [inaudible] and they would just say how it was hard. It was before pulleys and stuff like that, so it was hard work at that time, and it was dusty and often dangerous because of the explosions. The Pool 4 explosions and I think Pool 6 explosion. There were some in Fort William. I am not sure. But it was a dangerous place to work because of the grain dust. They would recount those stories and some who had escaped and some who you knew who were permanently scarred from it.

NP: You actually saw some of the people who had survived?

JM: Yes, who had survived it.

NP: Did they tell stories of the day?

JM: No.

NP: And why they stayed on?

JM: I think that time people wanted to make sure that their families were looked after, so it was a matter of continuing to work. Safety issues were always there, but there was no Health and Safety Coordinator. There was no real, that I am aware of, safety procedures in a lot of cases. It was just common sense, and you were reprimanded if you cross a belt. A lot of times it was never explained to you. You were just expected to learn and pick it up. No, a lot of the old grain trades' stories, I would say, their time was spent lunch hours resting and playing cards and that was about it.

NP: Drinking was a fair issue that a number of people we had interviewed had mentioned. Was that something you would see as a student or that was done?

JM: Something I would see as a student?

NP: Or take part in?

JM: You were expected to participate. You were expected to, on a Saturday night, you are expected to put in a couple of dollars for a case of beer amongst maybe eight or so. I personally couldn't be involved. But I had to give money because I just didn't want my

father to find out. So yes, alcohol was an issue at those times. I can remember literally in some elevators they had one gentleman would drink all day, all day.

NP: Did it affect the work or were they sort of fully functioning?

JM: They were pushed aside. They were all functioning, and they were pushed aside to a job that they could handle. It wasn't open by any chance. It was known, and I think most of the superintendents had worked with everybody and had worked their way through. They understood that sometimes there was relief needed. But I think there was abuse of alcohol. Drugs were not really big at that time, but alcohol was heavily involved.

NP: Can you speculate why you think that was, and I don't know that it was exclusive to the grain elevators even?

JM: No, absolutely not, absolutely not. If you were caught smoking or drinking in the elevator—caught by the superintendents or the general foreman—then you were reprimanded. It wasn't too hard in a big complex to avoid those people and to take advantage of it. It was in the spirit of if you are working Saturday night, it was like you should be out with your family enjoying it or your wife in those cases, and so they probably had one or two absolutely. They would expect to do it. If you were there, you were expected to participate and you were expected to say nothing. That was just the way it was. It was not tolerated but accepted.

NP: An unwritten code of silence in a sense?

JM: Absolutely.

NP: Did that ever affect some people staying and not staying? You said that there was a fair bit of turnover with the students. Do you think that or just the physical surroundings and the discomfort of working with grain were more issues?

JM: I think that was the issue. I don't think any young student, especially those at university, was really concerned about the drinking that was going on because they were doing most of that themselves. It was more an issue of physical labour probably. A lot would just stay on.

NP: Did you have a favorite job?

JM: I would say being on the scale floor was probably my favorite because it was relatively easy. There was an actual office upstairs where the scale floor was. Shipping and receiving how much grain was coming in and how much was going out. That was a job that took a little bit more thinking than just brawn. I enjoyed that.

I also enjoyed as a summer student working at Pool 1 with the cars because you are outside all the time. One of the jobs I had was once the car had been emptied, the next car would shunt up to it, and you push it down the line, and it would just take off, and you are expected to put the brakes on and lock the cars together. But I would say 30 percent of the time the brakes didn't work so you had to jump off of it. That was not an elevator issue, that was a rail issue. If you were a student in the summertime, and it was 70 or 75 out, it was nice to be outside, absolutely.

NP: Did that job entail you going on top of the cars or--?

JM: Climbing up a ladder in the back and then there was a big steering wheel at the top if I remember right. So you were not physically on top of it. You were on the end of it on the ladder. More than one time there was somebody sweeping grain out inside the other cars. They were in for a mild shock when that was happening. I would get heck from the guy inside who was cleaning it out. I was not bringing them up soft enough for him.

NP: This would have been one of the official cleaners, not the ones you were mentioning?

JM: No, it was unofficial cleaners. They were cleaning out the cars. One of the other things as I look back at it, and you asked me to think a bit about it, was when I would look around the block—I lived in Ruttan and Farrand Street area—and on that block within two blocks I had counted nine or ten people that were involved in the grain trade. There were millwrights, electricians, and my father was a superintendent. There was the head grain trimmer.

NP: Can you put names to those people?

JM: Yes. That was his big thing.

NP: Would you? Do you know Gene Onchulenko at all?

JM: Yes, he worked for Manitoba Pool, and I knew him from photography where he took a lot of pictures of the ships.

NP: Yes, and he grew up in Westfort, and he said the same thing. He had a paper route, and if he remembered that here and here and here and how they were connected. It is really nice to have that so go ahead.

JM: I remember on Ruttan St, a block between Wolsey & Meek Street. There was Van Horne in between. There was my father who worked on Manitoba Pool. There was a Bill Kerelchuk whose father was a millwright at Sask Pool 4—Bill Kerelchuk who finished up working at Pool 4. Ray Peirce, whose son Larry became a teacher, he worked as an electrician at Pool 7.

There was my uncle Evander who worked for UGG, and he was on Van Horne. There was Emerson Squires who was general superintendent at Manitoba Pool Elevators. There was John Macrae who was a millwright at Stewart. There was Mr. Trist. I don't remember quite where he was. There was Dennis Axent who worked for Manitoba Pool. There was Murray Smith who worked for Manitoba Pool. There was nine or ten people within a block and a half that was working in the grain elevators and further down. This was just my neighbourhood. There were a lot of people involved in that for sure.

NP: They would be walking distance, because cars were not too--.

JM: There were a lot of them who didn't even have licences. There was car-pooling, absolutely. I remember mostly Mr. Peirce being dropped, and Mr. Macrae being dropped off. My uncle never drove. He would always carpool. Obviously, you have a large population just working in the elevators. It was easy to get a ride and they would just carpool. One person would be fortunate to have a car and two or three would always get a ride home.

NP: What was the access to the waterfront at that time? Was the overpass there already?

JM: The overpass at Pool 1 and Pool 3 was there, and Manitoba Pool was down McDougall Street, but that has been closed off. Or Pool 9 excuse me, that has been closed off.

NP: They have the overpass at Current River so that would have taken you into Pool 9.

JM: You are going over about six or seven tracks at that time and there was no overpass. There is no overpass there, I think. No absolutely there was no overpass there.

NP: Right. That is the railway bridge, or the river goes under.

JM: Yes. Personally, I would even walk sometimes. Manitoba Pool 2, which is at the bottom of that street, I would walk to work.

NP: What was your interaction with the railway people, anything? Was it just a nice, the term they use today "seamless" coordination with the railways and the elevators?

JM: Yes, as a student there was no interaction at all. The only ones I would remember was the sub-contractors, like Baziuk Railway, who would hire ex usually CP and CN. That grew into a very large business.

NP: To maintain the tracks on the elevator property?

JM: Yes, on the elevator property. On the elevator property. They would just maintain it. That was Bill Baziuk Senior and Bill Baziuk Junior and Bruce.

NP: Were there ever any accidents or incidents that you recall from your student years?

JM: Grain cars going over it was a major issue.

NP: Going over?

JM: Going over the end of the trestle. They would be backed up. The night they would perhaps load 30 cars, and I don't know what the number was. If somebody lost count and one of my good friends, John Atwood, was there he would say that he would be counting 28, 29 and somebody would lose count, and there would be one over into the lake. It happened more than once, and it was almost a common occurrence.

NP: Who took responsibility for that?

JM: It was the railways responsibility. These are full cars, right over. Usually, one would go over and they would have to usually get a salvage company. I think Thunder Bay Harbour had a big crane and they might lift it up out of there. It wasn't a common occurrence. It was something that you knew it was going to happen.

Other than that, there was a tragedy definitely where one student was severely injured with railway cars. It was with cars themselves. It wasn't so much that it happened in the elevators, it was the railcars, because the machinery is so big. So sometimes you could not escape what was happening.

NP: What about the ships? Did you pay any attention to the ships coming in?

JM: Yes, especially when a saltie would come over and that was always interesting. It was like a mini business that would happen there, too. I always relate back, because when a saltie came in, there was always some sort of goods that were for sale.

NP: For example?

JM: Liquor. [Laughs] Always seem to come back to that.

NP: The theme!

JM: Cigarettes, European cigarettes. Most of the time I would like to see what type of ship it was whether the Paterson's, which Paterson ship would come in, Canada Steamship Lines. If you were working on the elevators, you would pretty much know most ship lines that were coming in. You would not necessarily know who was on them, but you would definitely know the *Senator of Canada*, that *Manitobadoc*, *Ontadoc*, the *Fort William*—that might have been Canada Steamship Lines. You could just tell by the profile outside the breakwater waiting to come in what ship it was. You could always tell that. It was interesting and is still interesting today just to go down to the harbour and see them.

NP: What about the grain inspection and the sampling, did you have any connection there?

JM: I did it for the company. The company would have their own grain inspection division. So you would take samples from each car that came into the elevator and bring it up to our own inspection department. And the same with the government employees would have their samplers and their grain inspectors and the weighmen were always on it. They usually had their own offices there. I had some interaction with most of them, but it was always pleasant. They were held in high regard when I was there. If you were in the inspection department with the government, that was considered a good job.

NP: Was there a "them" and "us" kind of attitude at all?

JM: No, I don't think so. I don't remember any issues where they had to--. Of course, I wouldn't know what they had to downgrade a grade of wheat or barley. I don't know what those issues are at all. But also, you have to remember to in the summertime that there were grain elevator tours. They always had tourism Thunder Bay or Fort William, Port Arthur always had what they called Ambassadors, and there were usually tours of the elevators, almost at least once or twice a week. That was always interesting from a perspective.

NP: Did you take the tours sometimes like--?

JM: A couple of times I was expected to take them around the elevator. I would leisurely walk around and take it easy for a while. It was always interesting that one.

NP: Any recollections where the people would have been from?

JM: Mostly the Prairies.

NP: Buses?

JM: Yes, they wanted to see where their grain was going pretty much. They used to call them "money makers." That is where they would take an off grade and sift it and sort it and make a good grade out of it. But unfortunately, I believe that the farmer was always given the short end there. They came and wanted to know how it was processed and where it was going and how it was going to get there. I would say the majority was Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

NP: One of the things about our project that I have learned starting out from afar is how highly developed the whole system is from putting the seed in the ground to having it turn up as a pita or a loaf of bread. Did you have any sense of being part of that system?

JM: Not at that time, no. I would say it didn't cross our minds at the time. It didn't cross my mind for some reason. It was just a product coming in and going out. No, it was just grain. I couldn't say that I thought it was the big picture. I wasn't involved with that part of it.

NP: Yes, very insular.

JM: Yes very. Just get it out of the car and into a boat. That was what it was about. [Laughing]

NP: What would you say would be your fondest memories?

JM: I am going to have to say as a student it was just the camaraderie. The lasting relationships. People that worked there just their living and most students went onto university and graduated. Manitoba Pool, I would say, are just a great bunch of guys!

NP: We talked a little bit about the hockey league. Tell me a little bit about that?

JM: It was quite developed in so much that there were outside sponsors all the time. I remember once a lumber sponsored the Manitoba Pool team and UGG had their team. A senior contact but there was body contact for sure. There were some good hockey players and ex professional players that came to play. I remember Eddy Kachur and Mike Kachur, and Eddy Kachur played in the NHL. They would all come back and play. The Carusos and there were good hockey players.

NP: At certain point it was almost like bringing in the pipers from Scotland. They would hire people in order to beef up their hockey teams.

JM: That could have been. I continued playing in university and after university for a while. The league had developed past and obviously could not support four or five teams just with elevator hockey personnel, so there were a lot of other people who did not work at the elevators. I would say 80 percent were for sure.

NP: Was there a team that was dominant or shifted year to year?

JM: Manitoba team I played for was a good team. We had ex-professionals. UGG had a real strong team. I can remember hearing about this Roy Lamore who is president of the Legion now that is going. We called it the Silver Fox. He was an excellent hockey player.

NP: Was he an elevator employee or a railway employee?

JM: I though he worked for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

NP: Okay.

JM: That was my understanding.

NP: Silver--?

JM: They called him Silver Fox because of his age. We were 20 and he was 50, and he was better than us! He was a good hockey player.

NP: Did they have cups?

JM: They did, but I can't remember what it was called. They had playoffs and I don't know if there was a specific cup for it, but they did have playoffs, and then they would play off against other leagues from the city sometimes.

NP: Where would they play?

JM: We played a lot out at Grandview Gardens, Port Arthur Arena, and Fort William Gardens.

NP: Did they ever play on the slips?

JM: Not that I am aware.

NP: No.

JM: No. I remember a few people driving into the slips.

NP: Driving into the slips?

JM: Yes.

NP: Just for fun?

JM: I think alcohol.

NP: Any questions I should have asked that I haven't asked you? Do you want to check your notes and see if there are some things there? What was your uncle's last name? Was it your father's brother or your mother's?

JM: My father's brother was Evander and my mother's father was Hamilton, and he was a grain inspector. Henry Hamilton. Again, it was perhaps my father, but he never told me. He might have got his job from my grandfather, but he never said. Again, there was just so many people from the British Isles it is hard to believe that somebody else [inaudible].

NP: On your mom's side then?

JM: He was transferred from Winnipeg to Thunder Bay.

NP: As an inspector?

JM: Yes, as an inspector.

NP: Did he work in the elevators or at the head office do you know?

JM: I am thinking it would have been in the elevator. It wasn't at the post office, that I am aware of.

NP: Yes.

JM: When you just mentioned that there was a lot of people from the grain inspector were also on our hockey teams, as I remember. That was a young group, a large fraternity there, too.

NP: Speaking of fraternity, did they hire any woman in your era or that was pre--?

JM: I don't remember one. I don't remember one person, no. The only ones that would go through the elevators would be the tour guides. That is probably why a lot of students wanted to make sure they were available to take them through. [Laughs]

NP: Young men so predictable!

JM: Really, eh? Alcohol and women. I don't know! [Laughing] I don't think so, Nancy. I just hope that your group gets done what they have to do. It would be interesting if we could just preserve an elevator somewhere.

NP: Yes. We will have to get your gang of compatriots from the student league together at some point.

JM: Yes, well.

NP: We will have a work party.

JM: When I worked at Manitoba Pool 2 in one of the buildings, an outbuilding, there was a working replica of an elevator, which I would say would stand and it was perhaps eight feet long and three or four feet high. Obviously, it is gone amiss, but it was a working model, and it was beautiful.

NP: Wow, I wonder where it went?

JM: I don't know. I think there was a Stewart who operated a tug service right out of there beside Manitoba Pool 2. He might have bought that building. That would have been a nice thing to pick up.

NP: Yes.

JM: Like I said before, I had Nelson Merrifield, I believe, might have worked in the elevators, too, and he took a lot of shots of the elevators. I had a shot of the first saltie that came into the Seaway, but somebody took it.

NP: Is he still around?

JM: No, he is long gone.

NP: Yes.

JM: He was a well-known photographer.

NP: Merri--?

JM: Merrifield.

NP: Field. I wonder if the collection might have gone to the museum. Maybe check that out sometimes. A lot of stuff has gone to the museum. Because they are so sparsely staffed, it has not been catalogued and it just sits there until somebody gets to it. If any of your stuff does surface, let me know.

JM: It is interesting, and it also shows who negotiated for the companies.

NP: Oh, did it? And it shows the companies that were active at that time. Do they even say? A lot of these things have everything except the year that it was--.

JM: The contract year is there.

NP: 1969. We will add that to our collection. With that I will officially end the interview. Thank you so much for sharing your stories.

JM: Thank you.

NP: And remembrances of your dad!

End of interview.