

Narrator: John Mallon (JM)

Company Affiliations: Manitoba Pool Elevators (MPE)

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Interviewer: Ernie Epp (EE)

Recorder: Owen Marks (OM)

Other speakers: Brian Mallon (BM)

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Summary: Retired general manager of Thunder Bay terminals for Manitoba Pool Elevators John Mallon discusses his lifelong career in the grain industry. He first describes joining the Pool in 1935 as a boxcar shoveller, working his way up through other levels of the elevator, and briefly pausing his career to join the Navy during WWII. He explains the flow of grain through an elevator and lists the terminals the Pool owned. He then discusses moving into management at Pool 6 as an assistant foreman of shipping, then becoming assistant superintendent and superintendent of Pool 1, and finally general manager of all terminals. He describes a typical day as general manager in the terminals and in the office, his good relationships with head office in Winnipeg, and his occasional travels to Winnipeg for board and annual meetings. Mallon also discusses his interactions with the union as a grain handler and as management, and he emphasizes the importance of the union for protecting employees. He lists some major changes in the industry over his career, like the introduction of grain pooling, automation, staff downsizing, improved dust control, and shifting grain movement to the west. He shares vivid memories of disasters at Pool 2, Pool 4B, and Pool 6, and shares stories of interesting work occurrences. Other topics discussed include the expansion of Pool 1, varieties of grain handled by the Pool, wartime grain storage, winter grain transport by rail, and his sons following in his footsteps.

Keywords: Manitoba Pool Elevators; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain handlers; Grain elevators—Equipment and supplies; Management; Boxcar shovelling; Railcar unloading; Car shed; Grain cleaning; Labour union; Brotherhood of Railway, Airline, and Steamship Clerks (BRAC); WWII veterans; Grain transportation—ships; Grain transportation—rail; Grain varieties; Wartime grain storage; Grain pooling; Railcar allocation; Grain Transportation Agency (GTA); Automation; Dust control; Grain elevator disasters; Grain elevator explosions; Pool 4B explosion; Pool 6 explosion; Grain elevators—construction and design; MPE Pool 1; MPE Pool 2; MPE Pool 3; MPE Pool 6; SWP Pool 4B (Pool 5); AWP Pool 9

Time, Speaker, Narrative

EE: Well let's start by you giving your name and then we can start working into the subject. We are here on the 21st of November, and Mr. Mallon, do you want to give me your name and tell me where we are perhaps?

JM: John Joseph Mallon in Thunder Bay, Parsons Avenue, my home. I am a retired grain elevator manager.

EE: And we want to talk about your experience and how you came to work in the grain industry. When did you start?

JM: If I were to tell you that, it would flip you.

EE: Flip me.

JM: I wouldn't go back to school. My old man wanted me to go back to school, and I wouldn't go back because he made me go through entrance class twice. I passed the first time. He wanted me to go. The teacher told him I should pick another course. So I got mad at him and I went to the elevator and got a job and I stayed there.

EE: And your dad was in the grain trade as well?

JM: My dad was a government grain inspector, and he was at the Manitoba Pool at the time that I started.

EE: Was his being a grain inspector there a factor in the door being open to employment?

JM: I think so, yeah. I'll say yes.

EE: You began work on what day?

JM: July the 1st, 1935, at noon.

EE: In the midst of the Great Depression. What job were you given at the time?

JM: Sweat board. Shovelling boxcars. Shovelling the grain out of boxcars. My partner was Danny Cox, a very well-know hockey player here.

EE: Did the Pool Elevators, did Manitoba Pool have a hockey team?

JM: No, he was just there for training because he would go away to play professional in the wintertime. That kept him in shape because that was a pretty rough job that shovelling.

EE: So the car would come into the elevator, and it had to be shovelled out by hand. Was there any equipment inside?

JM: They would shove a string of cars in, and the train would leave, and they would use a winch to winch them up and belt them.

EE: And the cars weren't dumped mechanically, or were they?

JM: On the sweat board, they were an automatic shovel that you used to go back into the corner and come out like a plough, same as used for snow.

EE: An automatic shovel suggests that it was powered.

JM: Yes, it was powered, but you had to guide it.

EE: I guess this could be a dangerous job?

JM: Yeah, I weighed 117 pounds. I got thrown over the top of that shovel quite a few times in my life.

EE: But never got caught on the cable or anything of that sort?

JM: No, but that's what it was, controlled by a cable.

EE: This would be pretty hard work. Pretty sweaty stuff?

JM: It's the lowest job you can have in an elevator.

EE: Absolutely essential, but really menial. How long did you do that?

JM: Off and on, used to get laid off about every twenty minutes. But off and on, I guess, I would say a total of eight years. You'd end up on the shovel at some time or another. It took a long time to progress in the elevator as far as advancing is concerned.

EE: In terms of rising in the organization.

JM: And when it would get pretty busy, I'd be put on a machine, a cleaning machine, or transfer or something else. That's the way it worked.

EE: Eight years, 1943. I keep doing the arithmetic on this.

JM: I say eight years, but I didn't do it continuously.

EE: What other things did you do?

JM: Well, I did cleaning on cleaners, transferring in the basement on belts.

EE: Cleaning, this is cleaning the grain in the terminal elevator?

JM: That's right. That's what these terminals are all about, is the clean grain. It comes in dirty and goes out clean.

EE: It's done by machinery, of course, the cleaning. So you would be watching the machine to be sure it was working properly.

JM: Yes, Moniters and Superior disk machines.

EE: And what was the second thing you said after the cleaning?

JM: You would do transferring in the basement on the belts.

EE: Gravity, and then it has to be run back up to the bins.

JM: And up the legs.

EE: I won't ask you to provide a description of the structure of the elevator, unless it would be useful. Would it be useful to have a kind of description?

JM: It's pretty hard to tell you anything about elevator business unless I do give you [inaudible] of structure.

EE: Well, why don't you walk us through one of these elevators. On the ground floor is where the cars come in, the track is laid and so on.

JM: That's right. And it's unloaded into a hopper which contains about a car. It goes up a leg that's pockets on a belt. Goes up a leg over the top into the scale and is weighed and is distributed into a Mayo spout underneath the scale and set it here and there on belts, et cetera, and so on, and that's the way it goes.

EE: And is the scaling done in terms of the car itself? All the grain is dumped into a bin and then it goes up and it's weighed there.

JM: Individually and recorded.

EE: At that point it will be used in various connections as far as what is in that car--.

JM: It goes to the government office for grain weight. It also goes into, goes against your audit and so on. The amount of grain you handle in a year has all got to be recorded.

EE: Everyone is concerned at that point that once that's been done, then the grain can go wherever in the elevator. Was there a logic to the arrangement of the bins in which the grain was stored? Quality, I guess, would be one of the factors?

JM: Yeah, quality. That's why they're built in cycliners. Different grades of grain. His dad would be doing that.

EE: Yes, his dad being Mr. Marks. [Note: EE referring to George Marks, father of Owen Marks who was recording the interview. George worked for the Canadian Grain Commission as an inspector 1945-1975]

JM: He was the government inspector. So, they'd put a grade on it, and you'd separate it grade to grade. Put it in whatever bin. [No.] 3 Northern you'd put it to [No.] 3 Northern. If it was [No.] 2 Northern, you'd put it to [No.] 2 Northern bin for storage.

EE: And at that point the grade has been determined as to which of the silos it goes into, which of the bins in the elevator.

JM: Yeah. And where it's brought from to clean and put back out to another one.

EE: And then of course from those bins it will eventually go to a ship, with the machinery required to do that.

JM: That's where [inaudible] I'm talk to be about the loading of the belts in the basement at shipping time up to the scales, weighed again by [inaudible] and dropped into a shipping bin onto a vessel.

EE: Was there a certain size to the bin up there where the grain was weighed?

JM: No, it is a scale. Definitely a scale that's--.

EE: So, you'd get to a certain quantity. The scale [inaudible]--.

JM: It is a government approved scale, and it is tested a couple of times yearly.

EE: And it is the same one that is used for moving the grain from the railway cars and is used to ship--.

JM: And weigh in, weigh out. The same thing.

EE: Is there anything else in the elevator that we should be conscious of as we are talking about you working there? Any other parts of the structure? Of course, offices and whatnot, the grading space, the grading inspectors would have a room and so on and so forth.

JM: Not necessarily a room. They had a bench. They were kept pretty busy. They didn't have any time for lolly gagging around.

EE: [Inaudible] waste from the grain?

JM: By-products, very important part of the system.

EE: What did Manitoba Pool do with the screenings? I'm a farmer's son. We are talking about screenings?

JM: Yeah, by-products. They put it up for sale, and people would buy it down east and it all go back to the Pool system. The farmers get the--. It's deducted from them when it comes in. They are charged by the percentage of dirt we take out, and when they ship it as a product that's for sale, they get their money back.

EE: I see. This is all handled through the Canadian Wheat Board?

JM: It's all handled through the Canadian Wheat Board, exactly, and very, very severely.

EE: They're very tough on all that?

JM: Yes, and you better be sure when they're in you're your audit [inaudible]. You are accountable for everything you did all year.

EE: Did you work at the elevators through the war?

JM: I went to Navy for three years. Then I came back and got my job back.

EE: What, '42 to '45? Something like that?

JM: Yes, that's exactly right, '42 to '45.

EE: So the eight years is roughly up to going to the Navy.

JM: I was in the navy when these two were born. I was stationed in Winnipeg. Told me that I had a set of twins.

EE: HMCS Chippawa. I grew up in Winnipeg.

JM: Yes, Chippawa.

EE: One drives by it coming across--.

JM: Smith Street.

EE: Yes, the Smith Street bridge. And so, you came back from Navy service to more or less the same kind of thing you'd done. But then fairly soon a promotion came along.

JM: That's when unions started to get quite popular, and I was a real hell-raiser in the union, too. So I was a good friend of Mazur's. So anyway.

EE: We might just pin that down. This would be Lodge 650, I presume, of the grain handlers?

JM: Lodge 650. I was there when they cut their charter.

EE: At the end of the war roughly.

JM: And if you didn't go to the union meeting, the rest of the guys you worked with in the elevator wouldn't even talk to you the next day when they went to work.

EE: So there was a great sense of solidarity?

JM: Solidarity was, yeah.

EE: Was it already part of the Brotherhood of Railway, Airlines and Steamship--? BRAC?

JM: BRAC, yeah.

EE: When you say you were a hell-raiser, you didn't make life difficult for the chair, you were pushing for the union to do more?

JM: That's right, because they were the ones that were going to make my job half decent. Seniority was going to be a governing factor. I needed that real bad because there was a lot of guys with a lot of pull locally. And the government would go and take a job and then a lot of relations would kind of move in on you. They know all about that, right? I got quite a few relations in there myself.

EE: I think the word in the dictionary is nepotism. There was a certain amount of nepotism. There was a good deal of bringing in relatives, members of the family into Pool elevators.

JM: I was a firm believer in it, although I didn't like it.

EE: It depends on whose ox is being gored is the expression. Do you know how old that elevator was, the one in which you worked?

JM: I got the picture of it somewhere. [Inaudible] 1880 something.

EE: We won't worry about it if the date isn't immediately--.

JM: With a sailing ship. 1880 something.

EE: So this is one of the original elevators that Manitoba Pool bought?

JM: They loaded ships by wheelbarrow at the dock at the foot of Arthur Street.

EE: Now Red River Road.

JM: They took the grain out of the elevator. It was unloaded. It was wheelbarrowed over to--. The only place they could dock a ship was at the--.

EE: The Pool organization developed in the '20s when you were growing up. So, MPE must have bought this particular terminal elevator as part of their system.

JM: About the time that I went in there is when Manitoba Pool bought [inaudible].

EE: This elevator, and so they were acquiring a management as well, a work force and so on

JM: Pretty well, yeah. The only elevator that they had at that time was Pool 1, and it was a different--. So then when they started to expand. They expand they bought out Pool 2.

EE: So that in that sense when MP came in there about the time that you began working.

JM: So we ended up with four elevators, solid. But we run five at one time. We ran Pool 6 also. The one they tore, they blew, down. We ran that for nine years. I was a foreman there.

EE: Well, we are getting into the next phases of your life. So, when the union comes in the conditions are going to improve, negotiations and all that.

JM: Very.

EE: I don't suppose we need to say much more about that although you probably could.

JM: No, that's about as far as you can go. I thought the union was a great asset to the business.

EE: And you continued to feel that all the way through your entire [inaudible] as manager.

JM: Yeah, somebody behind you, eh? You weren't going to get done roughly by--.

EE: Yeah, my union experience says shop stewards and a grievance procedure, absolutely central. I mean the contract and negotiations and pay and so on is important but--.

JM: Talking about Frank Mazur, that was later on. I was kind of in management at the time Frank took position there.

EE: Why don't we get to that a little later? You can tell us--.

JM: Yeah, Frank and I got along pretty good, very good.

EE: You can tell us about the next stages then. As you began to do other things and begin to move up in the organization after the war.

JM: Yeah, when you take charge of cleaning. You are in charge of the cleaning. You make [inaudible] the cleaning. Then you're maybe on the scales for awhile doing some of the weighing and you're in the annex sometimes setting up the bins for the product coming up.

EE: So it wasn't any specific task?

JM: Not any specific task. To be an elevator man, you had to do it all, and you'd be on the cleaners with the cleaning machine. And be able to take the dockage out of the grain by adjusting the machine. So you learn--.

EE: And you were enjoying learning all these different tasks.

JM: Absolutely! My whole life.

EE: You had some ambitions.

JM: You had to be knowledgeable. You couldn't be stupid, and you had to kind of be there to--. I enjoyed working in all the different places and they did, too. I told them, "That's the way you have to go. When you come in, you have to go through the whole system."

EE: You're pointing at your son Brian, who would someday succeed you as general manager.

JM: Which they did. Him and Billy went through every phase. The same as I did, the basement, the scales, the annex, the cleaners. They did the same thing, and I told them, "That's the way you have to do it," when they came to get a job. "You've got to go through and learn it all."

EE: The old man's done it this way. You're going to have to do it, too.

JM: I ended up on top [inaudible] and they did, too.

EE: When did you move from doing these various tasks into management, if that's the next step?

JM: When we took over Pool 6—we leased Pool 6 for nine years—in 1948, and I was binning cars at Pool 3 at the time when Johnny Belanger came over to me and says, "We leased Pool 6, and we don't know who the superintendent is going to be." I says, "I don't know, but I know who it should be." It was Bobby Bollier. He says, "And he wants you to go over there." So I went over there. I spent my whole nine years. That was an operation!

EE: In what ways?

JM: That was the best nine years of my life in an elevator. You had the equipment to do the job properly.

EE: So it was a better elevator?

JM: It was a big elevator.

EE: More recently built of course.

JM: Oh man, it was big! So you, it was very, very interesting. I liked it a lot.

EE: Were you in a sense, then, assistant to the superintendent at that elevator?

JM: Yeah. He, Bob, was superintendent and Bob Neil was the general foreman and I was assistant to Bob. So I did all the shipping there.

EE: So this is paperwork now, much more.

JM: Yes, starting the machines up. In charge of laying out the plans, what bins we are going to pull, what legs we are going to use, how much we're going to drop to the ship. That was my business. Shipping there for nine years.

EE: And this was still in the '50s or into the '60s?

JM: 1940s.

EE: So you were still dealing with ships that were sailing down as far as Port Colborne, I guess, mostly, and then transshipping down there, into canallers.

JM: Yeah, and we had a lot of big ships. A lot of big ones.

EE: Was the Seaway open by the time--?

JM: No, no. Later it came in.

EE: So this was into the '50s.

JM: I don't know when the Seaway opened.

EE: '59, I think.

JM: We got out of Pool 6 in 1957.

EE: And so, you were doing this through that period of time. And what was the next step after that then?

JM: Next step after that is they decided to give up the lease. I think Saskatchewan wanted it back. They had kind of a crop failure while we were there. So we handled a lot of grain. But anyway, they decided to build an extension to Pool 1, which was the most stupid thing I ever heard in my life! But anyways, they did.

EE: Your company?

JM: Yeah. So they put an extension on to Pool 1. Well, it was only a little, tiny elevator. Especially after being in Pool 6, it was tiny! So I went over there as assistant super and watched the construction from the ground up, and so that's where I ended up. And I ended up eventually as the superintendent at that elevator, at Pool 1, and then I went to general manager.

EE: And general manager was all the elevators I take it?

JM: That was the whole ball of wax, payroll and all. You signed the whole ticket. I wish I had the money I signed.

EE: I can well imagine. So during the years that you were general manager, you were still responsible for five elevators?

JM: No, we were down to--. Well we handled Alberta Pool 9 too down in Current River next to Grain Growers. So we handled that one too. We only had the four terminals, eh? We only had the four terminals. And I was--. So the only thing was, like I said, I liked my job so much in the terminal that when they made me the manager, and they're calling the office in the morning, I said, "Don't ever call the office in the morning for me. There's six guys sitting there on their butt up there. I'll be in the terminal to see what's going on."

EE: Getting things well started.

JM: Well, no, just see what's going on at the different terminals. That's what I did. I had good people. Good people followed me. I can tell you that.

EE: Well good people are invaluable.

JM: And they did a really, really good job. Really good job!

EE: Did the company give you a car to run around from elevator to elevator?

JM: No, I used my own, but I got the gas allowance. They were fair with that.

EE: Could you describe, you're beginning to describe a day as general manager. Would there be any kind of structure, a typical day?

JM: A day for me as general manager, they opened the offices at 9:00 and closed at 5:00, uptown, eh?

EE: Where was your office?

JM: On St. Paul Street, and then we moved over to Bella.

EE: Is the building still there?

JM: Yes, they're both still there. And Lakehead Motors on St. Paul, and what's the name of that electrical shop or something there? But anyways, a day for me would start very early in the morning. I'm an early bird.

EE: Way before 9:00?

JM: Yes, way before 9:00. So I would be in the terminal around 7:30 or 8:00, around to see what was going on, and what do we have on store for the day, et cetera, and so on. How many cars did we get? Did we get enough? S we could raise hell with the railroads. But anyways, these were all a part of the job. So the only way to do it was to be in the terminal in the morning to find out what was going to happen during the day.

EE: This means each of them, each of the terminal elevators? You would be visiting each of them?

JM: Well, not necessarily. I maybe just take one that may have a problem somewhere along the line, not enough cars on the track, et cetera, and so on. Anyways, I visited a couple of them in the morning, but then I'd go up to the office around 11:00. So I told the old man in Winnipeg, one time he asked me where I was. At 9:00 in the morning he was trying to get me. I says, "If you want me in the morning, I still got my overalls on. I'm having a hell of a job to take them off. I'm in a terminal." So he said, "That's fine."

EE: That passed muster with him, I'm sure.

JM: Yeah, I told him that I was having a little difficulty taking my overalls off. So it worked out pretty good.

EE: Was the president a farmer?

JM: Yeah,

EE: In which case the overalls would be perfectly fine. He spent a lot of time in his own overalls or whatever he wore as a farmer.

JM: Oh yeah. Airplanes heading both ways. But anyways, yeah, they were more than fair to me, and I never ever forgot that, and I told them every time we had a convention in Winnipeg or here, I would tell them that. I says, "I've got a lot to be thankful to the farmers of Manitoba for." And I still believe that!

EE: And they were grateful for the management that you--.

JM: Oh yeah, they were. We had lots of--. We did all right.

EE: Would you be in Winnipeg for an annual meeting?

JM: Yes, definitely. You'd be up there to find out if you made any money, or if you didn't! When they phoned me to come up to Winnipeg for the annual meeting, it was always on Armistice Day or close to it, and I'd say, "Did we make any money?" He'd say, "Yes." Then I'd be up. Because those farmers are pretty rough.

EE: Oh, they can be. There's some fine stories.

JM: You bet your boots, boy! I'll tell you something. The costs, they couldn't believe a guy would be sweeping grain at the price that we were paying them down here, you know. It was a little hard to connect with the labour here and the wages to what they were getting on the farm.

EE: Of course. And to appreciate Lodge 650 would be a difficult thing to do.

JM: Yeah, I sure as hell did. It come in handy.

EE: When did you move out of the lodge yourself? When did you become management? With which of the promotions?

JM: Well, I was at Pool 6 when I had to get out of it. When you start going into management, you got no right in there. They don't want you attending meetings.

EE: It could be a bit of a heart-tugger, that.

JM: No, I thought that I operated that pretty good because the boss would come down from Winnipeg, and I'd say, "Let's go and see Frank," and I'm not even a member. "Let's go and see Frank, and let's see if he will buy us a cup of coffee." We'd walk into Frank's office, and the girl would tell him that we were there. And he'd say, "What's your problem?" And I'd say, "I got no problem. We just come for a cup of coffee." And he say, "Well," he said, "that's good." So we'd go have a cup of coffee. But Frank was a good man, and I'll never forget him. He did his job well, and he wasn't too well educated but he was--.

EE: He understood things, and led well, I think.

JM: Just enough, he'd just enough size to be impressive.

EE: Yes, he had the size.

JM: And he could talk.

EE: I got to know Frank, of course, in the community and the political context--.

JM: That's right, but he had good size and--.

EE: He moved my nomination. In fact, I remember--.

JM: Yeah, he could hold his own as far as talking to these big lawyers that we would have representing us from the west. Stewards and all those guys getting \$3 or \$300 an hour or something.

EE: He had a set time to move my nomination at the meeting in 1984, and I think he said something afterwards. But he couldn't actually see his notes, so he just sort of did it off the cuff and did a perfectly good job.

JM: That's right. He was very good at it, very good at that.

EE: Well, we were in your typical day—and then management, the company and Pool and Manitoba—came into our discussion quite naturally because that was part of your day, wasn't it? What else would you do in the typical day through the middle of the day and the afternoon?

JM: Well, when the boss would come in from Winnipeg, we would definitely take a trip up to see Assef.

EE: The mayor.

JM: Yeah, the mayor. Our taxes were way too high. You guys didn't play that too sharp. But anyways, we argued quite a bit. We visited a lot of people that didn't expect us. I had quite a boss. He was, "Let's go take a check of the mayor. Taxes are way out of line."

EE: He was president? What was his name? What was the name of the President?

JM: Fraser.

EE: Was he president for a long time?

JM: No, they'd change about every three or four years. Parker was in there, Sneath was there. He was a good man. What was big--. Devison was there when you were there. McCormack, yeah, he was kind of managing with a whip.

EE: And so, Mr. Fraser would visit people in town with you starting with the mayor?

JM: Yeah. Well, no, the guy that I'm talking about would be the terminal manager stationed in Winnipeg, Fred Baudet. He called this his castle theory. He never let them know what was going on, but he'd come down when problem would get a little rough, and he'd raise hell about taxes, et cetera, and so on.

EE: So by the time you were general manager, he was your opposite number in Winnipeg?

JM: Him and I were appointed the same day.

EE: Did they have a team in mind when they appointed both of you?

JM: Well, apparently, they did. We were at Mike Sales coffee shop over there, and we both got nominated the same--. I just finished loading a boat, so I was a little late getting there. So they had to wait for a while. Anyway, I replaced Harry Stanfield. So Baudet and I both went on the job, and he says, "One thing about it, I know that when I call you in the morning, you will be sober." I said "That's for sure. No drinking there." So I didn't drink anyways.

EE: We may talk about that matter later in this narration that you are providing us with. What other things did you have to do through the afternoon a general manager? You were there until 5:00.

JM: Well, there was a lot of cheque signing, and we'd go over the billings, the invoices that would come in from the different merchants, and I'd have to check them over and verify them as being okay and marking okay on them. They had enough work for me to do there through the afternoon. I had to kind of spend my time there. I couldn't spend too much time in the terminal.

EE: Did you have accounts in banks here in the Lakehead? Or would the payments come out of Winnipeg, the ones that you were approving or authorizing?

JM: Bank of Montreal. I'm still there.

EE: Here in the city?

JM: Yeah.

EE: So you really had charge of the business then? Was there accounts--?

JM: That was our payroll.

EE: No counter signature required out of Winnipeg, then?

JM: No.

EE: You were in charge of the operation.

JM: No, just me.

EE: So that would be a typical day, and you began doing that the day that you mentioned earlier. When you began doing this was what day? When you were appointed?

JM: I forget when I was appointed.

EE: The year will be sufficient for our purposes, I think.

JM: I was up there, what, 14 years? And I retired in 1982, so go back.

EE: So that's '68 through '82.

JM: '82 I retired. He said he was going to get me an extension, and I says, "That's what happened to me in my life." The old timers ahead there wouldn't get retired until they were 75. They didn't have no pension or nothing but I says, "I'm not going to stay here. That's it."

EE: A union should try to establish a pension plan. Was it not possible to do that or when did a pension plan come in?

JM: We had a pretty good pension. It was established by an electrician at Pool 2, George Ives. A gentleman that was gassed in the First World War. A very, very clever electrician. Drew it up for the union, got the union to back it up. So he started all that pension stuff or we wouldn't have had nothing today. We didn't have nothing at that time.

EE: Now this would have been the late '40s?

JM: That's got to go back quite awhile.

EE: Soon after the union came in, I suppose.

JM: Being on by the hour you didn't get a chance to get into it. You had to be a monthly man and staff.

EE: So the guys unloading boxcars--.

JM: Now they are all in it, which is thanks again to Frank and the gang.

EE: So it was as late as that?

JM: We didn't have pensions. I was allowed to pay back 25 years.

EE: To pay it up.

JM: Yeah, to go back and establish it from the day I started. So that kind of helped my pension out pretty good. So when I got out of there, I got a fairly good pension.

EE: Back to '35 when you first began employment?

JM: Yeah,

EE: So that would be about 1960, was it?

JM: They let me go back. It wasn't quite to '35. The thing was about '38 or '40. They allowed me to pay back. So I did that so that established my pension from 1940 when it wasn't even in existence.

EE: Well, pension plans sometimes do that, but that was because you were into the management area by that time, I guess, the management level that you were given that particular privilege to do that.

JM: You have a few meetings in Winnipeg and kind of straighten the world up.

EE: Persuade the farmers whose only pension is that farm they've got to sell someday and turn it into a pension.

JM: They were great people. I used to get a chance to go up to their board meetings.

EE: You were there for board meetings as well.

JM: Oh, yeah. Periodically they would have something to discuss like putting a pellet plant into one of the plants here, which is a very expensive, or dryers or whatever. But anyway, they would want your opinion on it, the board. So they were all very good. They would ask you questions quite bluntly. There was a lady there was on the board of directors, her name was Elsie. That's all I know about her. She used to hammer the hell out of me. "John, what are you doing with all our by-products? Why aren't we getting paid for our by--?"

EE: Was she a farmer herself?

JM: She was a farmer, and she was representative of her area. She was a very, very sensible girl, I thought anyways. And I told her, "Elsie, we don't own a nail in it. It's your company, and you get everything that happens, comes back to you." "Thank you, John." "That's okay."

EE: There is a certain amount of good sense, organizational, political sense involved in handling those kinds of questions as well.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Because you couldn't be too smart, either. I did get a--. I was one day late. They told me to come on a Tuesday, and I should have been there, the meeting started on the Monday one time. And when I got into the meeting on the Tuesday, they gave me a standing ovation because they had gone through my file the day before, and the figures were pretty good, so we got a standing ovation. I never forgot that. That was kind of a nice thing. I just walked in, "And now is Mr. Mallon from the Lakehead." And they gave me a real standing ovation, and I thought it was very nice. I never forgot that.

EE: Those are moments one savours. Of course, the grain from Manitoba would go primarily east to the eastern Canada to the eastern market, wouldn't it?

JM: Yeah.

EE: So what you were managing here in the Lakehead was absolutely essential for those Manitoba farmers.

JM: Yeah, it was. Yeah, it was their elevators. They built them all, and they leased them all.

EE: They might--. Have you paused this? So their appreciation would be something to savour.

JM: Yeah, we had good relations within the company, that's why I say I enjoyed my job from day one in every position that I went into. You were recognized, and you had to recognize people and return it to them. I was always kind of nice to give them a little shot in the arm. They've raised all my kids. They bought my house. And I had lots of kids.

EE: I believe quite proudly that the tone of the company is set from the top down, in this case the board of directors, the farmers in Manitoba. They determine basically what the nature of the company or organization is going to be, don't they?

JM: We didn't always have good relations with Winnipeg with our immediate connection in Winnipeg. Mr. Balens was a very, very rough one. He expected miracles. So I gave him a hard hat and a coat one day, and I told him to come and show me. But that's the way you got to do it, you know. You got to kind of stick up for it. He said, "Oh, you don't need to get mad." They go to a lot of problems. He says, "You are supposed to be getting so many--." That's a flax machine set up, put in the old house at Pool 1. He wanted a capacity out of it, and he didn't get it, not even near it. He says, "I have figures here from C.D. Howe." I said, "There isn't a guy working for C.D. Howe been here. If he's there, bring him up. You show me how to increase it, because the guys who were working on it, table on it was too short." It was only a four-foot table on the machine. It would just flood over the top, eh? So but that's just one of those things.

EE: C. D. Howe had designed it, I suppose? Of course, design of a plant is very, very important, or a terminal elevator and if there is a flaw somewhere, it's going to have ramifications as long as it exists.

JM: We had a lot of meetings with C.D. Howe and their planning, especially in the building of the addition on Pool 1 there. We had quite a few meetings and changed plans here and there.

EE: You mentioned earlier watching the terminal being built, the extension to it. You had no responsibility for or involvement with the building. You were watching a contractor and the engineering firm, C. D. Howe, would be in charge of all of that. You just watched it go up.

JM: That's right, yeah.

EE: Did the Canadian Wheat Board manage the business in the large, or were you involved in any of the decisions that would involve say the ultimate markets for the grain or the decisions on movement and so on? Did those reach you or was it operational below that kind of level that you were in charge of?

JM: Yeah, we to get in--. The sale of grain, no. We had nothing to do with that at all. We just hoped to hell they got it out here and we could get moving.

EE: But they found the markets?

JM: They found the markets, and they gave us the orders and away we went.

EE: Did grain move through the Manitoba Pool Elevators during the winter, after the lake froze up?

JM: No.

EE: It was just navigation season.

JM: Well, you'd have the odd car orders. You know. Anything that was moving would move east by car. But it was all clean grain, et cetera, and so on. So we moved it all through the winter.

EE: So there's a bit of that kind of business.

JM: There was a bit of action.

EE: I suppose millers in southern Ontario would be wanting some wheat or whatever.

JM: Yeah, that's right. Different little places you would send to.

EE: How varied was the business? Most of it was wheat, I suppose, or was it all wheat? You mentioned flax.

JM: No, barley, flax and oats and what else? Rapeseed--. We were into everything.

EE: And so, you would have one of those bins, one of those silos might have whatever in it?

JM: When you see the big, the three steel tanks at Pool 3 down there.

EE: And they were used for the other products?

JM: Yeah, they hold 633,000 bushels of wheat. It's a big order, that one.

EE: 633,000 bushels, wow! That's a lot of grain.

JM: Do you realize that Pool 2 through the war, they built three of those wartime silos for storage bins at the back? And Pool 2, it was an elevator that held itself 1,450,000 bushels. When they gave us the storage, I told them in Winnipeg, "Did you know that Pool 2 at one time was 7 million storage?" "What the hell are you talking with?" So when we had the three-bin storage, they held 2 million a piece. That was 6 million and our 1,450,000. So I says, "That was the capacity."

EE: You said dollars. Bushels?

JM: Bushels, yeah. I'm talking bushels.

EE: 7.5 million bushels.

JM: Yeah, 7.5 million bushels. They never thought of that.

EE: I'm sure they hadn't. Because they were used to their granaries on the farm. There's storage outside. What were relations like with the other elevator companies in the city? Did you have much dealings with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool? You mentioned an Alberta Pool elevator that you were managing.

JM: Yeah, we had the Alberta Pool 9. As far as the other companies were concerned, I got along very good with them all because they were all young like me, eh? So it, especially Saskatchewan Pool. Like if he, Squire, would find anything new out in the cleaning area, any new products, he'd give me a call, "What are you doing for dinner? Come on over." And he'd show you. So they were very, very cooperative. But he as an individual was--. I mean we didn't get that from all. Some of the top dogs were not too fussy when they'd see me sitting there. But anyhow it's--. Yeah, we got along fairly good and with the railroads. We raised a little hell here and there.

EE: Of course, you weren't really in competition with them I suppose as far as--.

JM: Until we went into the pooling system.

EE: Do you want to say a little bit more about that?

JM: Well Manitoba grain would be spread--. Manitoba used to handle all the grain that was loaded in Manitoba came through the Manitoba Pool. But we always had more than we could handle, so we had lots on the siding, and the elevators, the other ones, weren't getting enough, sufficient cars, and they'd be raising hell about it. And here we are with everything over in Westfort. But then they went into a pooling system, and that's when they brought Graham Menzies up here.

EE: And so, it was an attempt to manage the flow of the grain into the elevators?

JM: That's exactly right. And so, they would give some of the Manitoba cars to Sask Pool, to Grain Growers, et cetera, and so on.

EE: And the "they" was who in that case? Was there an organization created here to do that?

JM: Yeah, they were--. Menzies run it here.

EE: Do you remember what it was called? I knew Tony Kaplanis working in a Grain Transportation Agency, is that--?

JM: Yeah, Kaplanis ended up in charge.

EE: It's the GTA locally, then, was it? The Grain Transportation Agency, created by the federal government.

JM: Yeah, it was definitely federal government. But they were the ones, they were doling out the cars. Otherwise, we were sitting there with our hands more than--. We were kind of hogging it.

EE: So Manitoba Pool had to be brought to accept a lesser place in the grain movement.

JM: Yes, it kind a hurt for a while. That's when I was the boss that all this took place. I raised more hell at them goddamn meetings than you could shake a stick at, but that was all right.

EE: But that was part of your day as a general manager, tussling with the GTA and so on.

JM: Called a spade a spade and that was it.

EE: What would you like people to know about the work that you did over the years? We're thinking now about having some of what you're saying possibly available to people in a grain trade centre, maybe on the internet at some point, and in that context, you probably have some word pictures to give us of things you did. Things that were important

JM: Well, I think when I retired, the night I retired at the Airline, and the bosses were down from Winnipeg, and I got up, and I gave a speech that I felt I really enjoyed my job, right from day one. When I was on the sweat board, Johnny Belanger was the manager. They called them the general superintendent at that time. He come driving in in his big new Dodge car. I says, "Who's that guy?" They says, "That's the boss." "I'm going to get his job someday." And I did, and I told them that at my meeting, and I also thanked them for hiring me and for making my life worthwhile. Raising all my kids. I thought that they were very, very more than fair. I enjoyed working for them, and I told them that. But you ain't going to give me no extension. I'm out of here.

EE: There's a time to quit--.

JM: My kids were all coming up, and I didn't want to, I certainly didn't want to stay in their road.

EE: Your sons began working in the elevator at what time?

JM: How old were you when you started, Brian?

BM: Twenty-one.

JM: They were twenty-one.

EE: That meant you were starting in 1963?

BM: I started--.

EE: And Bill started--.

BM: Started about three months before me.

EE: You're twins.

JM: He has seniority on him. They turned out to be great, great guys, and I was pretty proud of them, and I got a lot of comments after retiring from the people in the grain trade that were still there, that the twins had done a good job.

EE: So this was 19 years then that you worked under your dad's direction?

JM: They didn't get much hell from me.

BM: He said he had no sons in the elevator. You were just an employee.

EE: Of course, that's a good standard to maintain.

JM: The guys that were bosses of the different sections of the elevator, the head weighmens, they got into any trouble, which they didn't, I told them you make sure to send them down to me. I never got them down. It worked out pretty good. Yeah, we were a pretty proud grain family.

EE: I suppose there were other proud grain families in there as well?

JM: Oh yes. I had a lot of good people, Humenicks and Kazers. Ukrainians a lot of them.

EE: Were a lot of them Ukrainian?

JM: Yeah, the Kazers, Humenicks—all good people.

EE: Of course, a number of the Manitoba farmers were Ukrainian as well.

JM: I had good staff.

EE: Were there other ethnic groups? Did you have many Italians in the--.?

JM: Lots of Italians. I married one.

EE: Frank Mazur did too.

JM: Yeah, he had an Italian wife. Yeah, but we had a good gang. Like I said, I enjoyed my life. I enjoyed going in and talking to them. I talked to them, not as a big shot. That was the first thing that came into my mind on my appointment. I am still going to be the same guy, and I'll have a hell of a job taking my overalls off. So, when I go to visit them, they would ask me something, which made it very important to me that maybe I could solve the problem.

EE: Sure, that you understood what they were doing--.

JM: Most of them were very clever.

EE: What might interest or surprise people about the work that you did? Any--. I suppose that one of the things that impresses me is the fact that you endeavoured to maintain certain equality. You were the general manager, but you were still wearing overalls part of the day and so on and so forth.

JM: I respected my job and everybody that worked in--. I never got to be a big shot. Let's put it that way, eh? Never, ever got to be. I figured I'd been there long enough I should be where the hell I am!

EE: You earned the position.

JM: Yeah! So that was the--. He was the same way. It just came, and you did the job because you could do it, eh?

EE: What are you most proud of in the work that you did? Those qualities?

JM: Yeah, that would be first and foremost, that I never, ever changed. I sang at the curling club, and I curled and everything like that. I never changed my way of life.

EE: You would be part of a team at the curling club with other men from the elevator?

JM: Yeah, not too many from the elevator. We belonged to the Legions and all the general--. I never missed a turn of the wheel, let me put it that way.

EE: Your work was obviously important to Canada's--.

JM: Very, very important.

EE: Carrying on its place in the international grain trade.

JM: And I placed it on the top priority list, too. It was very good.

EE: What were the major changes that you saw?

JM: Automation. Automation knocked the can right out of me. Kind of confirmed my early retirement, although it wasn't early. I went on the day I should have.

EE: Can you describe the automation in the elevators? The various things that changed over the years?

JM: Maybe you can do that better than me.

BM: When it's my turn, I will.

EE: It's your turn today. We'll get Brian in another interview.

JM: Oh, I see.

BM: Equipment was the biggest thing.

JM: I wasn't too much in automation. I was there for the first installation of it and the layoffs of all my good people were going to hell.

EE: Was that beginning to happen by 1982? Would that mean that much of the automation was, or a good deal of it was, beginning in the 1970s?

JM: I don't know what time it started.

BM: It was starting then, yes.

JM: I went out in 1982 anyway, and it was just kind of fitting in pretty good. They just got a few small units in that they had automated, but they were going to go full--.

BM: New equipment at that time was a big thing.

EE: So we are going to be able to hear quite a bit of that in another interview, but dust control equipment would have come in the '70s.

JM: We did quite a bit of work with the Day Company and C.D. Howe, again, all engineering.

EE: How was that done? How was the release of dust into the air--?

JM: It was the same as a vacuum cleaner. They'd pick the dust up with--. They increased the volume of suction throughout the elevator and then deposited it into great bins above the car shed that was available to trucks for trucking it out to the dump. In most cases, it wasn't available for sale, but then in order to replace that and be a little smarter with it, we went to the trouble to put in pelletizing machines in both Pool 1 and Pool 3. And instead of depositing it in that bin, we deposited it in the pelletizer, and we'd mix it all up and made the small pellet and sold it, which was very, very profitable, but rather expensive to do. We had to push it through these dyes were quite big, and they just had little holes like this, and it would squeeze it in in order to form the little pellets.

EE: I don't suppose we could really assess, analyze, those little pellets, but a certain amount of the dust that was floating around was of course grain material that had worn off, I suppose from friction or whatever.

JM: The ambient dust was what we nailed out of it because--.

EE: Would there be dirt in it or was it primarily fibre material from the plant, the seeds?

JM: It was fibre. It was used as fodder for the cattle overseas.

EE: These pellets?

JM: Yeah, you mix it with molasses as a binder. Yeah, it was good business. Pellet business was good business. Installing a new pellet plant was quite expensive, so it had to be a good business. That is when you'd have to go to Winnipeg and kind of sit on the board and kind of--.

EE: Convince them.

JM: Well, either that or shut up and listen.

EE: Well, yes.

JM: Which was very good at times. It was better sometimes.

EE: Listening to them talk their way through it.

JM: And they'd just kind of confirm it with you. "Are we on the right track, John?" or "You can't get it this year. Maybe we will get it on the agenda next year." Okay.

EE: So that was one of the major changes, then this matter of automation beginning with the dust control.

JM: Well, the dust control was necessary after the blowout. Incidentally, the elevator that blew out, Pool 5, we ran that.

EE: Were you managing it at the time?

JM: We ran that elevator for a couple of years. Saskatchewan Pool were leasing it or owned it. But they didn't have enough capacity to keep it going. You see, they had a lot of crop failures, Saskatchewan. And they moved an awful lot of grain west so it kind of--. But we burned down--. The first year I was in the elevator, Pool 2, we burned it down.

EE: That's a good way to get new construction going.

JM: Yeah, we burned it down. It just flew in the air. It was all made of tin and two-by-six walls. It was an old elevator. So we burnt that down and we leased Pool 5 for a couple of years, and we all moved. The gang from Pool 2 moved to Pool 5. I was on the sweat board at that time, so I didn't know too much about the operation.

EE: Well, Pool 2 was being rebuilt as a more modern elevator.

JM: Yeah, C.D. Howe built it new and then we moved in there. Moved back in.

EE: Well, that's obviously a pretty significant change in Pool 2.

JM: Oh yes. It sure was. Well, that's what it is all about, there. It was the most modern elevator, although quite small. But it was the most modern. It had the most modern equipment in it when they, C.D. Howe, put it up.

EE: And that of course makes the big difference when you've got modern equipment with the best systems and so on. The coming of the union would be another significant change.

JM: I would say that was a very important change.

EE: The way in which the elevator operated.

JM: Like I said, if you didn't go to the union meeting, my friend, you go on the job in the morning and big Malcolm Macmillan and the rest of them wouldn't even talk to you. "What happened?" What the hell, I was only a kid, eh? "What the hell did I do wrong?" "You forgot to go to the union meeting last night."

EE: Did that continue, this sort of sense of solidarity that was being demanded? All the way through your years in the union?

JM: Yeah, you kind of behaved yourself after that. You got one shot like that and that was it.

EE: How often did the union meet, on a monthly basis?

JM: I don't think it was on a monthly basis, although it was quite steady at the top. Finley McCleod was the head of the union at that time. A real Scotsman, very [inaudible] in his ways. But that's a long time ago, holy Christ, we're going, way, way back.

EE: Well about 60 years back, I guess.

JM: Well, we are going way back here.

EE: And the impact these changes had on your job and industry, I think--. I mean I'm looking at the questions in this basic questionnaire. The impact these changes had we've been exploring.

JM: Well, the best thing that ever happened to me in my career was the union, I'll put it that way. I think there was too many relations in the higher up position that were moving in on us, and if we didn't have the union protecting us with our seniority. I had a big fight hanging onto my--. It was only a difference of eight hours that I had seniority on this guy, but we still used it.

EE: So despite the fact that family connections could be quite important, the union helped to regularize the--.

JM: Family connections weren't even mentioned when you come down to hanging onto your job. Family connections weren't even connected. They weren't even related even though the son-in-law was in there, Johnny Belanger, moved his son-in-law from the Board of Grain from the job that George did, but they got let out when the gang come back from the war, eh? Him and Roy Lamore, so we hired them.

EE: From the grain inspectors' organization, you're talking about.

JM: Yeah, so we hired them, and Johnny Belanger put them on the bench, and he moved them up ahead of me especially. And so, I thought that's not the right way to go, but anyhow.

EE: That would make it easy to organize the workforce, I bet. Lodge 650.

JM: Yeah, so I went to the exams over there with old Jim Munroe and kind of got a ticket myself and they did the same. You got to protect your rights. Don't let anybody walk in with a ticket and take over, you know, because you're an elevator man, that's it. But anyhow, that's the way it worked, so there's was a lot of drag, people had a lot of drag, and my dad was the hell and gone out of there by that time. He was retired.

EE: Well, the union can organize things properly, ensure that they are organized properly in such a variety of ways--.

JM: I had good teachers. Kenny McKay, Bobby Boyer. The bosses I had were fabulous. They'd give you hell when you needed it, and they'd kind of straighten you out when you didn't. If you wanted to find out anything about the business, you go to them. They would draw it out on paper and then take you right to the machine and show you what it was all about. It very--. I kept that policy myself, all through my life.

EE: I was thinking earlier, the company, the organization, really sets the tone in there and when you have good managers and good foremen, it is going to be a good place to work.

JM: So when, yeah, when you get the guy that is in charge of the terminal or the manager, recommending you for manager, you've got to be pretty good. That's what happened to me Bobby Boyer recommended me, and I went up there. I never even thought that would ever, ever, happen, but it did.

EE: Even though this was your ambition--.

JM: Even though it was kind of, yeah. I wasn't too worried about it. I was doing pretty good where I was. I was a super at Pool 1. So that wasn't too bad.

EE: In addition to these changes that took place, what other challenges would you say that you faced on the job? Are there any other challenges that come to mind?

JM: Well, I don't know. [inaudible] You tried daily to be the top dog in the grain business. I did anyway. We had to unload a lot of cars, and if they didn't unload them, I'd be down there the next morning finding out why they didn't unload. That was a very, very important thing. We put in a couple of link belt dumpers at the new Pool 1, fabulous machines. The only thing was you had to get the right operator operating. When I see on one track, I'd go down there in the morning early, and they'd be starting to unload, and about 9:00, I'd look out on the track and see how many empties this guy had and how many empties that guy had. If anybody was ahead of anybody and off he'd go, be out of the dumper. But anyway ,that was it. The shipping always a challenge! Fastest you could get a ship out and get the next one in was unreal. That was my area.

EE: Moving the grain out of the silos, through the [inaudible], and through the legs into the boat.

JM: Yeah, I got along real good with the Lake Shippers Clearance Association. I had good people shipping. Yeah, I think if I did get anything out of it, I think was the grain that passed through here. You see all these ships that sitting out there in the nighttime with their lights on and see them the next night kind of disappear was kind of a nice thing.

EE: A satisfying feeling that the grain was on its way.

JM: Yeah. The other thing you get quite a satisfaction having \$1 million worth of grain starting at 8:00 in the morning and at 6:00, he's going out through breakwall. That was quite a responsibility. It had to be weighed right to the pound. It had to have a certain

tolerance in dockage, a third of one percent. It was clean. It was well-weighed. It was worth a lot of money. I got a lot of satisfaction watching them go through the wall.

EE: Clean grain on those ships bound for markets around the Atlantic.

JM: Yeah, but we were selling grain, and I don't know what happened to our business.

EE: After your time. You were probably grateful that it was after your time because you did the business while it was a big one.

JM: But I didn't want to see it happen ever, ever! I wanted it to continue on. It was a good industry.

EE: It's been very sad what's happened over the past 25 years.

JM: Very, very, very sad. I felt pretty bad about that. I don't like to see them all dead down there.

EE: What major challenges did the grain industry overall face over the years you were working in it?

JM: I don't know if there was a challenge. I thought we were at the top of the world here. We were the grain port. The biggest grain port in the cotton-picking world. I don't think we had too much challenge. We always felt that way that we were the wheel anyways, so--.

EE: You were the top dogs.

JM: Yeah, we were the top dog

EE: And the grain was moving.

JM: As long as they were growing it.

EE: The farmers had the crop, and you were there to do the job.

JM: And I thought they kind of went along with our ideas, too.

EE: There is a section on significant events. What are your most vivid memories about the various jobs you had?

JM: Well, I can start out by telling you when I started shovelling with Danny Cox. I'm a real hockey nut, eh? Danny was playing in Vancouver, playing professional hockey, and he scored the winning goal for our first Allan Cup. The same Dan. He's on one end of the boxcar, and I'm on the other, and he's there for conditioning purposes. That's why he took what they call the sweat board, eh?

EE: So you wanted that job?

JM: No, he wanted that job. He wanted that job. Barry Robillard was defence for Fort William Beavers, and so that was the first thing that I always had a great memory of. Incidentally, I went to the day that Dan was put into the Hall of Fame over at the Slovak Legion. I went to the supper, and I walked over to see him, and he says, the first thing he says to me, "How are you doing Mike? And I guess if I want a job in the Pool, I've got to come and see you." He always called me Mike after my dad, always. Always called me Mike.

EE: Was he a big fellow?

JM: Yeah, he was a big man.

EE: He was twice your size, was he?

JM: No, no. He'd be pretty close.

EE: I was just thinking of the two of you on opposite ends of the car, this big fellow and you're so much smaller.

JM: I had a lot of that because I wasn't really all that big, eh?

EE: I can understand those being vivid memories. Other vivid memories from your years working there?

JM: A lot of respect for Ukrainians, Italians, different nationalities. I figure the world is made up of a lot of people, and I thought they worked very well for us. We owe them a lot of thanks and they were good workers, every cotton-picking one of them. That was the other part that was kind of satisfying. I was very, very happy with my gang. I never had to discipline anybody at any time, so it made it kind of good. But outside of that, I guess the appointment to--. After loading a vessel, they were having a Manitoba Pool banquet here at Mike Sales place this night, and all the big wheels were down. Mr. Parker was our big wheel up in Winnipeg,

and he was a pretty sticky old man [inaudible]. Pressed, immaculate, drove a Cadillac, you know. Mr. Parker was Mr. Parker. But anyways, they were down here, and I was loading a boat at Pool 6, and I didn't finish until about 9:00. The banquet was all over, and they were just partying then. So when I come up and they told me I got the job. I says, "It's goddamn near time I didn't have to work all this overtime." That's the first thing I said. I don't like working overtime. But I did a lot of it. Lot of overtime.

EE: During the navigation season, the grain had to move, and the men had to work, eh?

JM: Yeah, you had to work. There's no such a thing as a Sunday or a Monday or Saturday. You went.

EE: So it was seven days a week when the grain was moving?

JM: Yeah, the union kind of put a curb on it, but not too much, still allowed it in the end.

EE: What was the work, the basic work week was what, 40 hours?

JM: Forty hours a week, yeah.

EE: And overtime would earn time and a half?

JM: Oh, yeah.

EE: How much, do you remember what your longest week--.

JM: Over the 40 hours was time and a half. Saturdays were double time, and Sundays double time. I didn't get in on that.

EE: Do you remember what the biggest week would have been, the longest work time you did in a week in your life, 60 hours, 70 hours?

JM: I worked through the whole--.

EE: In any individual week, you don't remember what the longest period you ever worked--?

JM: No, no.

EE: Or the most overtime you ever got in during those years?

JM: Well, we, yeah--.

BM: You were limited by the union.

EE: Was there a limit on overtime?

BM: [inaudible] You were limited three nights a week and--.

JM: Yeah, that was another sharing that Mazur had put into the agreement which was [inaudible] because the big shots like myself would hog it all.

EE: Well, there could be favouritism, sure.

J.M: That's right. You could hog it all because you had the seniority. You'd say, "I'll be out."

EE: In your mind, what were the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career with Manitoba Pool Elevators?

JM: The most important?

EE: Yes.

JM: Well, the burning of the elevator when I started, that was one. And I guess my walk up the ladder was very important to me. I wanted to move, and I was recognized and never asked for nothing but got it. Every appointment to me was a big surprise. The foreman's job was a big surprise, superintendent at Pool 1 was a big surprise! And I achieved--. When I got into the manager's job, I happened to be looking over some notes that had come down from Winnipeg where they were arguing back and forth who should be there and who shouldn't be, and I was there in the middle. And I was picked, so I thought, those were big things. But as far as--. Going to work everyday was good, grain business was good, lots of ships in the water. I don't know. I feel very sad about the way things have happened here and who has let them happen. I don't know. But it's--.

EE: We won't assess the villains this afternoon, but I think there is a place for studying what happened to it, what went wrong? If there's a wrong to be found--.

JM: I hope you get to the bottom of it, to know what the hell it is.

EE: It would be satisfying to do that.

JM: Yeah, but I think that Russia kind of run out of money and couldn't pay for the stuff that was already delivered there. I think Russia was a big cause for it going to the West Coast.

EE: Sure, yes. The Chinese I suppose, perhaps, some Japanese buying, and the Pacific Rim market became more important than the Atlantic.

JM: I took a trip to the West Coast with some kind of a meeting we had, and I knew quite a few people in the terminal out there in Saskatchewan [sic] because they had worked here—Jerry Richards and all that gang. The boats that they had there compared to ours, I nearly flipped! Big oil tankers they'd fill with grain, you know. Man, it was--! So I could feel it was going there. If you want my opinion, I'd a feeling it was going to go west. But I, the Manitoba Pool, I guess, would be about the last one to hang out. They only took about a five percent operation out in the West Coast and their big operation was always here.

EE: They're closest to Northwestern Ontario.

JM: Yeah. They're right next to us.

EE: When you mentioned the size of the ships, one of the changes would have been the St. Lawrence Seaway, the coming in of the salties. Smaller ships, I take it, than they were using in Vancouver, but still the size of the ships increased by that time, or were you aware of any great change when the Seaway went into operation?

JM: Not really. The grain ships we had here, the *Lamoyné* and all those, Miseners and McKellars and all, they were big ships! You know like, you'd go out of here with a million bushels of grain, eh? That's a lot of grain.

EE: These are the ones that did the Lakehead to Port Colborne or Buffalo business.

JM: Mostly to the coast, right down to Montreal, Quebec, and--.

EE: Once the Seaway's in, I think, though, because the Seaway had to be in order to allow them to sail further.

JM: Instantly after when I retired, I took a trip on the *Silver Isle*, the Irish boat. Well, they kept after me all my life, "Come on down for a ride, John. You've been loading us all these years." So I got an invite with Stan McKay. He was the whip at United Grain Growers, eh? And he retired at about the same time as me. So him and I both got a trip down. First year they went on me. I got the trip. Then we went down the next year on him. Grain Growers got him a trip. But that was the nicest, that was a really, really important thing in my life, too. I never thought of that. God it was--. We'd sit there right up in front with our little short pants on and these guys standing around the dock would say, "How the hell did you ever get the drag, going through--." Like driving through the middle of the city going through the goddamn street in a channel, you know. Gee, it was unreal! Them big fellas and the water going in and the water going out--.

EE: In the locks at Welland--.

JM: I noticed how they were deteriorating, too. They should have got at them years ago. They let them go all to hell. They kept spalding and--.

EE: This was the Lakehead, Thunder Bay to Montreal, was it? Did you get off at Montreal?

JM: Baie Comeau, the first one.

EE: All the way to Baie Comeau!

JM: And then we went to Montreal the second trip.

EE: Well, I envy you that. I'd love to take that kind of a trip myself sometime.

JM: Where did we end up when we got in Baie Comeau? In the goddamn elevator!

EE: Well, that's where they were going. You've got a terminal elevator illustration on your chest, a sweatshirt--.

JM: That's Pool 2.

EE: And it's got some initials, GEAPS. Can you tell us what that stands for?

JM: Grain Elevator and Processing Society. That was a--.

EE: It is still in existence, I suppose, is it?

JM: Oh, yeah. That was a getting together of all of the people in the grain business.

EE: Here at the Lakehead?

JM: Yeah, here at the Lakehead and all the people that, like C.D. Howe, had reps in there, CPR, CNR, your dad's gang, inspectors, and elevator guys. So it still exists today. But at one time it was just the boys who run the elevators here.

EE: What did it do? Was it just social or did it have other functions?

JM: It was social once a year, but then they'd bring in good speakers talking about the grain trade and talking about hockey. They would bring in a good speaker.

EE: So there was an executive--.

JM: It was a dinner

EE: Each time you would have a dinner and an afternoon speaker?

JM: Yeah. It was a good assembly. I always got something out of it anyways. Then if you had a few things that you wanted to talk over with the other guy from the other company, then you could have a chat with him, too. They would kind of give you a little shot but--.

EE: Adam Smith said, more than 200 years ago, and I'm going to provoke you with this observation, he said "Never is there a meeting of people in the same trade, even for social purposes, but it ends up in a conspiracy against the public." Was Adam Smith right?

JM: Well, not too much. I thought that we were kind of aloof in our association.

EE: Aloof from what? The business?

JM: Yeah, from everyone on the outside that weren't in the goddamn business, so you don't belong here. I'd see a lot of people there that I didn't think belonged there. But they kept building it up and building it up and then the youngsters came in and took over. They did a good job of it, and I got a few invites back on retirement. I guess I could still go as far as that goes.

EE: You could be a lifetime member of the society.

JM: My lifetime is getting pretty cotton-picking short, too. So I ain't going out to many meetings.

EE: Well, it's been a good life. 91, that's a good life.

JM: I'm kind of pushing it. You start pushing this 90, you're lucky you haven't got your head busted in.

EE: Do you think it is important to preserve, to share, Thunder's Bay grain trade history?

JM: I think you guys are doing a good job, yes. I was kind of pleased when you said you would come up, but I didn't know what the hell you were going to do with me.

EE: Now you know.

JM: But I think this has been--. I never talked this way before since I retired, never talked grain elevators since I retired.

EE: Right. So 26 years later here we are asking you to plumb your memory.

JM: Yes, but if you do it properly, I can remember very, very well. I can remember the things that were good for me and the things that were kind of bad. The rough things that happened.

EE: You haven't said much--. Your memories are actually very happy ones. Were there rough things?

JM: Well, I told you about the bosses' sons and all the in-laws and me trying to hold my own when I was on by the hour was a pretty rough. It was pretty, pretty rough.

EE: You survived all that.

JM: Yeah, I went over and did the exam myself. That was kind of rough going.

EE: I don't suppose everyone in the elevator wrote the test by any means.

JM: I went through it just for my own protection. And when they come to the verbal examination after your exam, they asked me after you'd written again, he says to me, "Would you be willing to go with the government anywhere in Canada?" And I says, "No." "What do you mean, no?" And I says, "No, I picked up my ticket for my protection as an employee of Manitoba Pool because there's people with tickets that you're letting go are coming over taking my job, and I don't want it. So I am protecting my seniority and my ability to do the job, and that's why I got it." So they thought it was a pretty good answer. Percy Graham was representing us in the Legion. They had a rep there so the guys couldn't bully you, eh, in the questions.

EE: Oh, in the oral part of the--.

JM: Yeah, that's what I'm talking about, in the oral part. Percy was there. He wasn't there--. But anyways he says, "Jeez." He said. "I nearly flipped when you said you wouldn't go. These guys are all up, and you know there from Winnipeg, and they're from the Grain Exchange." And I says, "Well I told them exactly I wasn't going to quit the Manitoba Pool. I had lots of seniority there and all I wanted was a ticket to cover my butt." So--.

EE: You weren't interested in a job with the Grain Commission.

JM: No, I wasn't going to go from the Pool at all, for nobody. So then I sent the kids to do the same thing. And they went over and passed it too to protect themselves. They went up topside in the Pool, with all these credentials. They're very important.

EE: Do you think the management in Winnipeg had a sense that, or they would know who was getting this ticket? Did they look to see who was getting it, to have a measure of people who were capable of moving up?

JM: They weren't really concerned in my life through the Pool. When I got up to be management, they did make an appointment of a guy that would, that was kind of finding out how the guys were doing and making out reports. Did it continue on?

BM: No, the union sort of stepped in, and they had to post these positions, [inaudible] just giving appointments and then certain criteria you had to have to apply for the job.

EE: So the ticket would become important as part of your qualifications.

BM: It would become important, yeah.

JM: That's right, very important. And I thought it was the way it should be. I didn't want nobody to pass me. Even if they blew the horn. It worked out good. Like I'm telling you, I really enjoyed my life's work. It was satisfying, gratifying and yeah. It was, that's why I'm up to 91.

EE: Obviously the work didn't kill you.

JM: I'm still golfing, believe it or not, twice a week.

EE: Splendid, splendid, that's great to hear! What aspects of the history of the grain trade here do you think we should be maintaining? Brian just put in my hands the plaque: "The Board of Directors and Management of Manitoba Pool Elevators awards this plaque of honour to John J. Mallon in grateful appreciation of 47 years devoted service." And I guess that's an artistic representation of--. Is that supposed to be a laurel wreath or something? That's not grain at the top, I don't think. Well, it's a beautiful thing to have.

BM: Longest working employee for the Manitoba Pool.

EE: Was it really!

JM: Yes, I'm the longest employee.

EE: And still alive at 91. Do they know about you in Winnipeg? Who handled the pension plan? Is it within Manitoba Pool management?

BM: Yeah.

EE: So they're aware of you still receiving the pension?

JM: Yeah.

EE: Splendid! What aspects of the history of the trade do you think we should concentrate on preserving? Making available to people who might visit the city, or children from the schools or whatever?

JM: If you got any pull at all, I'd like to see you start it up again.

EE: Well, I'd love to have that kind of pull.

JM: I would like to see that happen.

EE: As a farmer's son from Manitoba, I'd love to see the grain moving through here in quantity.

JM: We had, what was our count? [Inaudible] About 15 or 16 hundred people on the payroll here? There was a lot of jobs lost.

BM: When I was there, it was 1,600.

JM: Yeah, 1,600. And then we lost a lot of them to very early retirement, including them. Gee, I had to go right to 65. So they had to watch me in my last year because I was getting pretty nasty. No, it worked out very good. I ended up with a fairly good pension and retained my own house, and I got these guys helping me. I lost my wife three years ago, which was sad, very, very rough. She was a great lady for grain, too. She was a hell of--. She was a real supporter of the grain business.

EE: Were members of her family in the grain business?

JM: For a while, but they didn't last on jobs too long.

BM: Her brother was an inspector, Henry.

JM: Yeah, her brother was a government inspector, Henry Caruso. He worked with George.

EE: One of the thoughts we've had, Friends of Grain Elevators organization if you will, is trying to get a national grain trade centre here in the city next to one of the elevators so that people could actually visit an elevator almost in operation.

JM: I thought that was going to happen in my time. I really did. I really thought that was going to happen in my time, but it didn't. But all we got done was we named a street down by the elevator after a guy that was in charge of inspection, Hammon. That's as far as we got. We named a street after him going into the elevators.

EE: One of the other questions I'd like to ask is about the Pool 5 explosion. What would your memories be of that?

JM: My memories was I was away. I was on the East Coast.

EE: Damn!

JM: But we got it on radio, and I was quite concerned, but I was into barracks routine for discharge at that time. And I was just about complete. I think it was about a week after I got discharged and I came home. And I went down there, and it was--. I knew a lot of people that got blown up there.

EE: Killed?

JM: Yeah,

EE: The better part of 20 people were killed in that?

JM: Twenty-three I think it was.

EE: Twenty-three.

JM: But anyhow, I keep thinking, we ran it for about two years, that Pool 5, and it was the dustiest place I ever seen in my life!

EE: Really dirty, eh?

JM: Really dirty! And they never ever put much effort into it as far as repairs or concerns, [inaudible] Saskatchewan Pool had run it for quite a few years. So we used it because they were building Pool 2 again. And I wasn't the least bit surprised to hear that it had blown up. The only thing I was surprised at was that it didn't blow when we were there because it got the dirtiest--. I almost had to quit the business. I got the itch so bad that my skin was just coming off when I was in that elevator.

EE: Would this have been because of poor management earlier that it got so dirty?

JM: No, I think it was a kind of a--. It was used as an annex type of thing, as overflow, and at that time the unions didn't put up a fight for cleanliness, et cetera, and so on. There was no strict law. There were inspectors, but they could be bought, I guess.

EE: But this does suggest, in a sense, poor management. There wasn't any push on management, so they just let the place get dirty.

JM: Management didn't do nothing. They just started her up in the morning and let her go.

EE: And sadly enough, Manitoba Pool Elevators didn't really change that, during the two years of use of it.

JM: No, it's a good thing we got out of there, though, when she blew. We were involved in an explosion ourselves in Pool 6. That turned the scales. The scales are built of big sheets of iron with a hopper that hold a boxcar.

EE: Each scale could hold a boxcar's load of wheat.

JM: It blew on the scale floor and turned that upside down, I guess.

EE: Wow!

JM: Blew it right in. So I got a lot of guys that were pretty badly hurt. They're all retired now but they all say, "Hello, John".

EE: It didn't kill anyone?

JM: No, we got away with it, but the fire went in one door and out the other. The guys on the scale floor took a licking.

EE: These explosions involved the grain dust actually catching fire or exploding, in the right conditions.

JM: As they talked to it in terms of all the guys that are in the grain, in the dust business, ambient air. I heard ambient air right through my whole career. Over there with Day Company, ambient air. "We've got to take the ambient air from here." But they made a good job of controlling it once they got started, but they had to lay the law down. The government had to lay the law down. They were getting away with murder in all the terminals. They were all filthy!

EE: Was it the federal government that imposed these standards on the elevator company?

JM: I don't really know which phase of the government--.

EE: But one or other level of the government said you have to do it.

JM: Yeah, that's right. They sent inspectors down here. They were coming out of our ears. But they really put a blitz on. We all better keep it pretty clean.

EE: Did you have any feeling about what the elevators were doing to the air of Thunder Bay, for that matter?

JM: I didn't worry too much about the air of Thunder Bay. But yeah, we were blowing it over. We were blowing it over. Had an old saying down in the coal docks in Port Arthur where all those elevators are--.

EE: The Intercity area

JM: Yeah. If you want to have your breakfast in the morning, just go out on the back stoop and breathe in. There's all the dust flying through the air was really potent.

OM: Mini pellets.

EE: Yeah, a lot of pellets going by.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Are there any questions about the grain trade that I might have asked you which you would answer, could answer this afternoon? Are there any aspects I haven't asked about? I think there must be, actually.

JM: No, I think you've covered everything pretty well. Of course, the old memory is starting to slip, too. You know.

EE: At 91, you're allowed a bit of slippage.

JM: Yeah, I don't--. I think you've pretty well covered it as far as I'm concerned, anyways.

EE: Your experience.

JM: I give you my experience and my feelings about the trade, and I think we've done it pretty good here. In fact, I'm quite pleased with your method. It's very good, a very good method.

EE: The team in Winnipeg put it together. We'll pass the compliments on to your sister, Owen.

JM: Because we had her here one day, that lady from Winnipeg. We had her here one day and I was, I don't know. There's no questionnaire. What are you going to ask me? I was in the grain business all my life. What do you want--.

OM: She is kind of like our Elsie. She's our Elsie. She kind of drives [inaudible] and we have to follow.

JM: And she was sincere. I felt kind of sorry for her because I couldn't give her what she wanted, eh?

EE: Well, today I think we may have done it.

JM: Yeah.

EE: That's good. Well, I hesitate to ask whether there's any memorabilia you would like to see preserved to commemorate the history of the grain industry and your part in it. I feel a little bit like, I shouldn't say grave-robbing, but it feels a little bit like that asking--.

JM: We have given her--. We gave her all the stuff that we had pretty well, eh?

EE: That's already been done, eh?

JM: We had some pretty good pictures of the old terminal, but they never come back. So.

EE: The pictures?

JM: Well, I give her--.

EE: Would Nancy have them?

OM: I don't know.

JM: I don't know who had them.

EE: Well, we'll have to ask her because, I mean, pictures can be reproduced so that you get the originals back. Let's make a note of that.

JM: Well, I'm not too concerned about it, so don't getting her in a tangle up.

EE: Whatever you say. We won't ask for your plaque yet. You know, that's in the family.

JM: You're not going to get--.

EE: I didn't think I'd get that. [Laughs] But when it commemorates the longest period of service in the company, it's a pretty impressive piece of work. But I can understand the family wanting to keep that for the long haul.

JM: What I'm really awfully proud of is my family following the trail. It was good. They were good. Good elevator men.

EE: I can understand that.

JM: And I heard that a lot after I retired from different people in the trade. So, it was a kind of a nice thing. And they're nicely retired now, too. They got a good pension.

EE: So they're entitled to our interview?

JM: Eh?

EE: They are entitled to our interview because they are retired. We are looking forward to that.

JM: He's pretty clever this guy. So I ain't going to worry about him.

EE: Right. Well, the only other question we have in this basic questionnaire is are there any other persons we should interview? And I can flip over to a blank sheet of paper here.

JM: I don't think he should go to Billy, but he should go to you, eh?

BM: I think he should go to Billy instead of me.

JM: I think you'd do alright. You went through the hoop pretty good.

EE: I think I've written both of you.

BM: We both received a letter.

JM: Eh?

BM: We both received a letter.

JM: Sure, so--.

EE: Are there any other people? We could wrap up the interview. Thank you very much John, Mr. Mallon, for telling us about your long career with Manitoba Pool Elevators. We've enjoyed it and we appreciate very much your doing it.

JM: And so have I. And I hope I haven't missed anything. If I am, I'll send it to you.

EE: We'll look forward to the shipment.

End of interview.