

**Narrator:** Lorraine “Larry” Marrier (LM)

**Company Affiliations:** Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers Association

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**Interviewer:** Ernie Epp (EE)

**Recorder:** Owen Marks (OM)

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**Summary:** Accountant and office manager Larry Marrier recounts his late father’s (Ambrose Marrier) work as a member of the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers Association. Marrier describes his father’s first connection to the grain industry through construction, his eventual acceptance of a grain trimming job, and his ascent to the head of the local Grain Trimmers Association. Marrier details the skilled work done by grain trimmers, their tools, and their interactions with the grain elevator and shipping companies. Other topics discussed include the negotiation of contracts, local longshoremen and stevedore unions, loading lakers versus salties, wartime industry, and personal family stories.

**Keywords:** Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers Association; Grain trimming; Lake shipping; Grain transportation; Lakers; Salties; Manitoba Pool 1; Terminal grain elevators; Labour unions; Labour organizations; Longshoremen; Stevedores; Skilled trades; Canada Steamship Lines (CSL); War veterans; Wartime industry; St. Lawrence Seaway; Port Arthur; Fort William; Chapple’s Building (Grain Exchange Building)

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: Well, let me start by asking you to give your name for purposes of the record, and then we’ll get into the recording we’re going to do this afternoon, this narration you’re going to provide us with.
LM: Well, my proper name is Lorraine Marrier, commonly now called Larry.
EE: And as Larry, I’ve known you for something over 30 years, I think, having come to St. Paul’s late in the fall of 1978.
LM: Well, I went through high school using the name Lorraine with no problems. Of course, back then in the early ‘30s, Lorraine was as commonly used for boys as it was for girls. And it wasn’t until I was promoted to the officer ranks in the army that a certain

captain came along about the second day in the officer's mess and said, "I hear your name is Lorraine." "That's right, sir." "From now on, it's Larry and don't you forget it." So.

EE: It's been Larry.

LM: So it was Larry. And now I get both names depending on who.

EE: Sure, and how long people have known you and so on. Well, you haven't yourself worked in the grain trade I don't believe, which is, of course, the purpose of these Voices of the Grain Trade interviews.

LM: No.

EE: But you have told me that your father had a very intimate connection with it, and so you've agreed to tell us about your father's career since he passed on, you said, earlier 1975, was it?

LM: Yes.

EE: So it's 35 years he's been gone, a little bit more. Anyway, why don't you give us his name, say something about his earlier life, and then how he became involved in the grain trade, and we can begin exploring that.

LM: His name was Ambrose Peter Marrier, if you want. He was born in Saint-Damase, Quebec about 1887, I think.

EE: 1887?

LM: Yeah, 1887. Yeah. He left home when he was approximately 20 years old.

EE: 1907.

LM: He worked for two winters in the area of Spanish, Ontario.

EE: North shore of Lake Huron.

LM: Yeah, in the lumbering industry. And at the end of the second winter, he heard that there was lots of work around Port Arthur and Fort William because they were constructing grain elevators up here. And so he came up. He had no English at that point, unless he learned some in the bush—which I doubt. And he got a job on the construction of an elevator over on the Kam River running a donkey engine to unload pilings off flat cars or off wagons that would be hauled in by team. And during the course of that job, he got to know a chap by the name of Mackenzie from Stanley. Mackenzie had a sawmill in Stanley, and he also had some timber limits up there and was supplying piling for that particular elevator.

When the job got close to being completed, he said to my father one day, “You were brought up on a farm, weren’t you?” “Yes.” “You know how to drive a team of horses?” “Yes.” “I’ve got a job for you.” Driving his team. So dad took that job and moved to Stanley. Now, the important part of the job was to pick up rich Americans at the Murillo CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] station and drive them out to the silver mines up towards Hymers—the Beaver Mine, the Animikie, and Silver Mountain.

EE: And they were working at the time, were they?

LM: Those mines were working, yeah.

EE: This would be 1910 or ’11 perhaps?

LM: And these were the guys that owned the mines.

EE: Oh, yes.

LM: And he would drive them up and they’d arrange for him to pick them up and take them back. And of course, in those days, two cars or three cars through Stanley and you had a traffic jam. [Laughing] It was mostly horse and buggy or horse and cover in the winter. That’s where he met my mother. Her father worked for the CNR [Canadian Northern Railway/CNoR]. He was a section foreman, ostensibly on the PD Railway [Port Arthur, Duluth, and Western Railway], but in those days, the mainline from Port Arthur went through Stanley and up along the Kam River.

**[0:05:27]**

EE: Yeah. The Canadian Northern people had taken over the Port Arthur, Duluth, and Western Railway, the PD as you said, and made it part of their transcontinental line as it was becoming.

LM: Well, it was--. The transcontinental line branched off at Stanley from the PD, and the PD continued on up to North Lake.

EE: Ah, yes. Where this other line ran onto Fort Frances and onto the Prairies then.

LM: No.

EE: Or is it the other way that we're tracing it?

LM: No, the line going to Fort Frances branched off at Superior Junction, which was on the far, on the west side of Kakabeka.

EE: Ok.

LM: Yeah. The PD was supposed to connect with a railway coming up from Duluth. That railway got as far as Grand Marais and stopped.

EE: The original intention, yeah.

LM: But the PD continued to operate until about 1934. I don't remember exactly which year, but about then when the big wood supply up through that area ran out. If you weren't born here, you won't remember, but starting where the Old Fort is now and following the ridge, the high stuff, from there up beyond Whitefish was white pine like that. Great huge white pine.

EE: And that was all cut out during those, over 20 years or so?

LM: It was cut right out, and not replanted. Not replanted.

EE: Well, of course, regeneration of the white pine was supposed to happen naturally the lands and forest people were told. Anyway, pressing on towards the grain trade. [Laughs]

LM: Anyways, he worked for Mackenzie I don't know quite how many years. He and my mother were married in 1919, and I think the wedding was the 30<sup>th</sup> of June.

EE: Oh, yes. So you were the eldest then, I take it?

LM: Yeah. I'll go into that. But in the spring of that year, he was hired by the Thunder Bay Grain Trimmers Association.

EE: Ok.

LM: That was quite an organization. It was both an association and a union, the same group.

EE: Now this was quite a jump for him from working--. Well, of course, he was driving, and so had he been doing that work through the teens, through the war years? Or had he been working in the city?

LM: No, he had been doing that job. He couldn't get in the army because at some point during his teen years, they found it necessary to take the bone out of his right thumb, so he just had a little stub with a thumbnail on it.

EE: I suppose he was righthanded to boot, so.

LM: Yeah. And they said he couldn't do the rifle drill.

EE: Yeah, I was thinking.

LM: They wouldn't take him. [Laughing]

EE: May have been spared death in the trenches as a result.

LM: Yeah. Now, they continued to live in Stanley, and he rented a house on Machar Avenue in Port Arthur. He was the boss trimmer at Pool 1, Manitoba Pool 1 Elevator.

EE: Now which one was that?

LM: That's the second one from the far end at Intercity. The one closest to the Keefer Terminal is the--. I had the name.

EE: P&H?

LM: P&H.

EE: Parrish & Heimbecker.

LM: Yeah. And Pool 1--. Parrish & Heimbecker. And Pool 1 is the next one this way.

EE: Ok. So that was in operation circa 1920 already, and that's where he would--.

LM: And it's been enlarged quite a bit since then.

EE: Right. So how come he got the job?

LM: I don't know. I don't know. He probably had rubbed up against somebody in the work he was doing.

EE: And so, a career with the grain trimmers began.

LM: Yeah. And the grain trimmers were the highest paid labourers in Canada by far because they signed their own contracts with the grain companies, with the boat companies for loading.

EE: Can you tell us something of what a grain trimmer did?

**[0:10:00]**

LM: They loaded the grain on ships. That doesn't sound like a great deal, that it would take a great deal of skill, but it did. It took quite a bit of skill. They had two tools: a wooden shovel and a plow. But it wasn't the kind of a plow that you would have in a field. It was a piece of sheet metal about, I would say, maybe 30 inches wide and maybe three to four feet long turned up at the side and fastened to a piece of one-by-three lumber, which projected out at one end in the form of two handles. It was open. And when a ship's hold was about three-quarters full or maybe a little more, one of them would take a plow and jump into the hold, and the plow would go under the stream of grain coming down the spouts, and they would fill in under the decks.

EE: This would be--.

LM: They would plug it in tight.

EE: He would be directing the flow of the grain using this plow?

LM: Yeah, yeah. Now I saw all this happen because in my young teen years during summer holidays, I'd go down to Pool 1 with dad for an afternoon. [Laughs]

EE: Sure. And did you get to do any of the work? Or were you mostly just watching?

LM: No, no. I was just watching. I was too skinny to do that kind of work. [Laughs]

EE: The grain would come down the spout with quite a force and speed.

LM: Oh, yes. Yes.

EE: And so this plow device would really--.

LM: They'd put the plow under that stream, and they could shoot grain, oh, 15-20 feet. They could plug it up under the decks.

EE: Sure. How large was a hold as a rule? Any kind of standard size?

LM: Oh. I couldn't give you--. You can probably.

EE: Living room size or--?

LM: Oh, no. It was more than that.

EE: 20 by 30 feet or so? Would they be square as a rule?

LM: No, they weren't. They were built more like this table, but--.

EE: In any case, the--.

LM: They'd be 25 feet wide and maybe 35-40 feet across.

EE: Sure. And the force, if they were able to redirect the grain from the centre--.

LM: The spout.

EE: Yeah, the spout. I was just thinking what the hole would be called.

LM: Well, they could move the spout.

EE: The hole would be in the centre, and so I suppose the centre of the hold as a rule. What would you call the hole? The trap door and so on and so forth, in any case, the arrangement. It would be open.

LM: No. The holds had an opening almost the full width of the ship, 12-15 feet wide.

EE: I see.

LM: And they'd take that covering right off it.

EE: Right. So it wasn't a small trap-door sort of thing, it was--.

LM: No, no, no, no. And the spout was moveable.

EE: Sure.

LM: Up and down or back and forth.

EE: Right. Now would a grain trimmer be involved in the movement of the spout on the deck as well?

LM: Yes.

EE: So there are two of them at least working together?

LM: But they also had one guy down on the dock working a cable reel to raise or lower the spout. And--.

EE: So it would take three men per spout then as rule? Or even--.

LM: Oh, well, usually four or five.

EE: Right. I see.

LM: Because when you got to a certain place, it took maybe a couple of guys to pull on the rope to get that spout extended far enough. And the ships weren't all the same size.

EE: No, of course. That's one of the things I've been asking for sort of standards, but--.

LM: I've never been down there—well, I have once or twice, but I don't remember too well—with the big new liners, the freighters we have because back in the early 30s, 100,000-bushel ship of wheat was a big ship.

EE: This would be one of the big lakers.

LM: Yeah. That would be a big laker. Well, the Miseners and the big CSL [Canada Steamship Lines] ships now are over 700 feet.

EE: Yes, the ones that were built after the St. Lawrence Seaway was--.

LM: So instead of 100,000 bushels, they hold a million bushels. But each hold had to be filled separately.

EE: And that was the real skill, to fill the holds, both to make them as full as possible, but to keep the ship balanced, I guess, while they--.

LM: Well, not only that, but if it got out in a storm on the lake, that cargo could not shift. It had to be plugged tight.

**[0:15:05]**

EE: Right. Yeah.

LM: Yeah. And these guys knew what they were doing. They were very good at it.

EE: Yeah. So that's what your father began doing with others then.

LM: Yeah.

EE: He began, I suppose, simply as one of the guys in the crew.

LM: Yes. Yeah. I don't know when he became boss trimmer at Pool 1.

EE: But he did rise to that position there.

LM: Yes. And there was nothing more than that. He gave the orders at Pool 1, and if he was working over at McCabe's, somebody else was telling him what to do.

EE: Sure.

LM: You know?

EE: Yeah.

LM: I can remember the super at Pool 1 at the time, fellow by the name of Johnny Belanger. He'd come onboard, and he'd walk around on the deck on his hands. [Laughing] He was an athlete of the first water!

EE: And this was the Manitoba Pool superintendent?

LM: The super, yeah! [Laughing] But with a name like Belanger and my father's name, they got along very well. Maybe that was why.

EE: Was Belanger from Quebec as well?

LM: I don't know. I don't know.

EE: Spoke French though, I presume?

LM: Well, he didn't sound French.

EE: Yeah. Of course, the franco--.

LM: Of course, my father didn't sound particularly French by the time I really got to know him, except he said "duh" instead of "the." [Laughing]

EE: But he'd become well Anglicized. Ontario did that to the franco-Ontarians.

LM: Well, my mother didn't know any French. She was Swedish descent.

EE: Oh, yes. [Laughs]

LM: I don't know whether--. It's not relevant, but he was raised a Roman Catholic. She was raised a Swedish Lutheran. They got married in St. Luke's Anglican Church. I was baptized in St. Luke's Anglican Church. And when they moved to Thunder Bay, to Port Arthur, when I was 7 years old, on the second Sunday of September of the year they moved, they went to St. Paul's United Church.

EE: Just barely United! Presbyterian until two years before. [Laughs]

LM: But why? And they stuck.

EE: Well, I think some number of people who didn't have Methodist or Presbyterian heritage found St. Paul's a welcoming place.

LM: Yeah, well, the thing that—and I never thought to ask questions—the thing that puzzles me now is they walked right past St. Anthony's Catholic Church to get there.

EE: Yeah. [Laughs]

LM: They rented a house on Crown Street, 111 Crown.

EE: Oh, yes. So they did walk past St. Anthony's!

LM: Yeah, and the Swedish Church was just a block down the hill on Secord. And then it was built right beside.

EE: That's right, behind St. Paul's in effect up there on the corner.

LM: But not--.

EE: Although, that was a little church. Of course, it took a long time for them to get out of the basement and so on at that church, but. Well, it may have been the sheer size of it. He thought he could fit in. Were there other trimmers going there by any chance? Because that could be--.

LM: It could be. The Chisamores probably went there.

EE: Chisamores were trimmers too?

LM: There was a couple Chisamores were there. And I talked to a fellow yesterday morning or Sunday morning at St. Paul's handing out bulletins. His name was McKinnon.

EE: Tom McKinnon?

LM: Yeah. His father was a grain trimmer too.

EE: Yeah. Yeah, we've interviewed Tom already.

LM: Oh, have you?

EE: Now, Ken Graham was a trimmer, was he a trimmer too? Oh, sorry. Helen Graham's husband, his name was Ken, wasn't it? On River Street.

LM: I don't recall that name. I don't recall that name.

EE: No. I had the sense that he was, but I need to check back sometime to check why my memory says that. I guess go back into an old Henderson's directory and see what it says for Graham. Well, the likeliest is that someone from the trimmers who was going to St. Paul's said, "You know, why don't you come to our church?" Because that would answer the question. Could have been Tom's father!

LM: Could be.

EE: The McKinnon connection strikes me as fine, fine people, so I can understand your--.

LM: I have no idea. It would probably be--. His connection would probably be to someone who had gotten him into the trimmers. Uh, George Squire might have been the touch. He was a member of the one up on Red River Road.

EE: Trinity or--?

LM: No.

EE: No, you mean--.

LM: The Anglican.

EE: St. Michael's?

LM: St. Michael's. Yeah.

EE: He may have got him into the grain trimmers originally?

**[0:20:00]**

LM: He may have got him into the trimmers. I don't know.

EE: I wonder if the records of the trimmers exist from those early days. It's another--.

LM: Well, let's go on.

EE: Yes, by all means, press on! [Laughing]

LM: We moved. My brother, I had a younger brother. Two years younger. He died in February of 1927, and we moved to town in the August of '27. There was only one doctor in the two cities that would go out on calls out to that, and that was old Doc Caldwell. He lived on Hill Street. If you turn left on Hill going up Red River Road, there's a brick house on the left. That's where Doctor Caldwell lived. He would come out in the winter with a horse and buggy and in the summer with a horse and carriage.

EE: Wow.

LM: So he came out and visited sometime in late January or very early February. I'm 7 years old. I'm just 6 years old at that point! And I think my brother got pneumonia. I brought a bug home from school, and it turned into pneumonia. And he was--. It was a three-bedroom house, and my bedroom was here, my parents' bedroom was in that corner upstairs, and this was a spare room. And I can remember waking up about three o'clock in the morning. I just had the--. And Arnold was sleeping in their room. It was in their room. The light was on—no electric light, just a kerosene lamp—and they had been keeping the window open because the doctor said he needed extra oxygen. And I could hear the wolves. We were on the south bank of the river, and there was a hill behind the house.

EE: This was still all out at Stanley?

LM: Yeah. The wolves were a-howling that night. I could hear them.

EE: And the air was pretty fresh too?

LM: Oh, yeah. So he died. That night he died, and I think that they decided then that come summer they were gong to move into town.

EE: Sure. Closer to services of all sorts.

LM: In March, on a night when there was a tremendous snowfall—it was almost a blizzard—nine o'clock at night, there was a knock that came to the front door. Of course, I'm all ears to anything unusual. And it was Doc Caldwell. Some woman out in South Gillies had phoned. She was going into labour, and it was going to be a difficult one, and he decided he would have to go out. And he hired a cutter horse, and he asked if he could come in and get warm. And my mother made him a coffee, a hot coffee, and he went on. The next afternoon, there was another knock at the door, and it's Caldwell. "The birth went fine. It's a good boy."

[Laughing]

EE: Those are the joys of a doctor's life, I'm sure.

LM: Yeah. Yeah. So we moved into town. Now, sometime in late '33 or early 1934, the trimmers became aware that the guy that was running them—a fellow by the name of Moran—had been dipping into the till quite a bit. He'd been playing the stock market, and of course, that was the wrong thing to do in the Dirty Thirties.

EE: Yeah. The four years after black--.

LM: And he lost a fair bit of money, and they fired him, or he quit. I'm not sure which. He committed suicide about six weeks later, and they appointed my father to take his place. And he finished, and he cheated a little bit too. He was supposed to retire when he reached 70, but he worked until he was 72. [Laughing]

EE: Well, that's the kind of cheating that's tolerable if a man is good! So '87 you were saying, 72 would make it--. We have a nine. Now let me see, am I getting the numbers right here? 23 off--.

**[0:25:03]**

LM: He retired at 72, and he died at 88, so 16. Go back from 1975, go back 16 years. So if you go back 15 to 80, 1979.

EE: So that's '59. '33 to '59.

LM: Yeah. Or 19--. No. He died in '75. Yeah.

EE: So for about a quarter century then roughly.

LM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Now you saw him in that office, you got--. Did you ever help him yourself?

LM: No. No.

EE: But what was involved in heading the grain trimmers in the Lakehead? And this was in all the elevators, I presume? There was no distinction of Port Arthur, Fort William didn't exist?

LM: No, no. They did all the loading. They did all the loading. He had to look after the bookkeeping, but he had to assign trimmers where the job opportunities were. Now, the trimmers' office was in the Chapple's Building, and the Lakehead Grain Exchange office was just around the corner from the trimmers' office, so that there was close connection. First thing every morning, they would tell my father or whoever was in charge where the ships were going to be loading that day. They'd probably do it in the evening, and he would have crews assigned, and they would be on the job at 8:00 in the morning or 7:00 if it warranted it.

EE: In a sense, one could compare it to the hiring hall function that some unions have maintained for a long time. He was really in charge of assigning the men, as you were just saying.

LM: Now, first thing in the spring and then through the fall, they would be a lot busier, so they would hire extra people. They wouldn't bring them into the union, but--.

EE: Did they call it a union actually or was it an association?

LM: They has a separate title for it, I think, but it was all one thing.

EE: Well, it was of course, but it masqueraded as an association, I guess, or something.

LM: Well, the contracts were Lakehead Grain Trimmers Association or whatever. Grain Trimmers Association. And the other activities were Lakehead Grain Trimmers Union, local number so-and-so of the stevedores.

EE: Oh, they belonged to the stevedores?

LM: I think it was the stevedores, yeah.

EE: It must have been, or it still is I guess, an interesting amalgam of the two. With whom were the contracts signed?

LM: With the boat companies.

EE: With the various shipping companies.

LM: I walked in one day, and dad was on the telephone. There was nobody else in the office. He was on the telephone, and he motioned me to be quiet and sit down. So I sat down at the end of his desk, and I listened to this conversation. And he was being really hard headed, and it became apparent that he was negotiating a raise for loading ships of the certain company. It went on for about a half an hour, and at the end of the half hour, he said, "Okay, we have an agreement. Would you put that in writing Mr. So-and-so?" I've forgotten the name. "And we will abide by it. It will start at the first of this coming month." "Yeah, okay." He put the phone down, and I said, "Who's that?" "That's the CEO of the Canada Steamship Lines." My father had a Grade 8 education. Now that's Paul Martin's predecessor.

EE: Yes. Yes, indeed.

LM: Talked to him on an even basis. No question. And he got the raise that they wanted. So much a thousand bushels, I've forgotten the exact figure what they loaded.

EE: You don't remember when this would have been?

LM: Well, I think maybe he expressed it as 35 cents 100 bushels.

EE: Yeah. No, I mean when exactly in time this happened?

LM: No, no. It's sometime after 1934.

EE: Yeah. Oh, I see. Yeah. Okay. Before you went off to war and so on.

LM: Oh, yeah.

EE: Back when you were in your teens.

LM: Several years before the war.

EE: Right, yeah.

LM: Yeah.

EE: Well, carry on. How many people were there in the office? Did he run it by him--?

**[0:30:06]**

LM: At most there were two. When things got really busy, there was somebody else come in to assign crews and phone them because all the communication was by phone.

EE: Sure. I guess the grain trimmers would have to have telephones at their homes so they could be reached and so on?

LM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: You commented earlier on the quality of labour if you will or the kind of work that this was in terms of the incomes that men earned and the position they had in the community, I suppose, as a result.

LM: Well, at some point back in the Dirty Thirties, they were making \$4,000 a year, and they were making it in nine months. And that was a lot of money.

EE: Yes, it certainly would have been.

LM: Yeah, yeah. Because I started at Harry Black's as a student in account at \$50 a month.

EE: So \$600.

LM: The banks were hiring tellers at \$50 a month.

EE: Hm. 600 and 720--.

LM: When I came back out of the army, I went back to Black's, and he gave me \$100 a month.

EE: \$1,200.

LM: But then my wife got pregnant, and in those days, when Susan she started to show, she was out of a job. And her job was she was in charge of the payroll department at Northern Wood Preservers. Well, we can't live on \$100 a month. You could live on \$150. Harry Black offered me a \$10 raise. I left.

EE: Yeah.

LM: Yeah.

EE: So \$150 would have given you, let me see. Six times three, 18. \$1,800 a year or towards \$2,000, and this is ten years after, at least, after the period when you were mentioning the trimmers earning \$4,000 a year.

LM: Sure, yeah.

EE: Yeah, that's good money. What did they tend to do during the wintertime?

LM: The trimmers?

EE: Yeah.

LM: Oh. Dad ran a bush operation in the winter. [Laughing]

EE: Cutting wood?

LM: Now, while we were living in Stanley—and I don't know how big the operation was—but he had an agreement with Great Lakes Paper, which is Bowater now, and he would have a crew or two cutting pulp along the banks of the Kam River towards Kakabeka. You could start at the edge of the houses at Stanley, and there was maybe 200 yards between the railway tracks and the river and go up to the bridge and cross the bridge and beyond.

EE: And his crews were cleaning this out year by year working at it?

LM: Yeah, yeah. And they would stack the stuff on the ice, and they had a way of marking the end of the log so that Great Lakes would know whose it was. That's how he put in his winters. And even after we moved into town, he got together with George Squire and one of the other ones, might have been one of the Chisamores. Squire had some property on Hilldale Road, and there

were a couple vacant sections beside Squire's, and they got permission there, and they cut the timber on that and sold it probably to Great Lakes.

EE: So he kept his connection with the forest operations even when he was running the--?

LM: For a while, yes. Yeah, yeah. For a while.

EE: Because one could, of course, have spent the winter in Florida given--.

LM: Not after he got into the office.

EE: No, then he--. Was it a year-round position for him?

LM: It was a year-round position, although he got paid the same as the other trimmers, and he got it in so many months. Now, before he went into the office in the wintertime, a couple winters, he dug sewer trenches down on Hodder Avenue. Pick and shovel.

EE: Not easy work in the wintertime.

LM: Oh, it was tough.

EE: Yeah, I'll say.

LM: Well, until they got rid of Moran, and then they were suddenly surprised their wages doubled at least.

EE: He'd been in--. Now, he was investing for himself?

LM: Yeah.

EE: He didn't plan to repay them?

**[0:35:04]**

LM: Oh, no, no. They didn't invest any money. They paid it all out. Paid the bills and then they split the rest.

EE: Yes. Was the manager of the association, the union, paying the men as well then?

LM: Yeah.

EE: They had a contact with the shipping lines. The shipping lines would simply lump-sum them for whatever the costs for doing a ship was?

LM: They would bill. They would put--. The elevator would tell them how many bushels they loaded on the ship, and the grain trimmers would bill the shipping company at the agreed rate.

EE: And then the office would, well, they would know--.

LM: The cheques would come in and--.

EE: They would know how many men had done the job and how long they'd been there and so on.

LM: Well, the trimmers as a whole split, whether they worked or not.

EE: Right. Well, your father would have been in charge of that paperwork as well, paying them?

LM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: This is the--.

LM: After he took over.

EE: Yes, of course.

LM: Yeah.

EE: So he had a certain amount of numerical facility, I suppose. Numeracy, which his son, of course, inherited, as I happen to know.

LM: Yeah. For a Grade 8 education, he had a very, very active mind. Now, he read voraciously. He read every *National Geographic* magazine that came out and lots of other reading. Yeah. He read all the time.

EE: Well, the *National Geographic* is a great way of educating oneself. It has been. I've got the *National Geographic* from the beginning now on DVDs. They sold it for about \$100, you could get it back to the 18--. Whatever start. The 1880s, I think. It's very interesting to look through some of those issues or scan them on the monitor. And you can print them off too, PFDs [sic. PDFs]. It's a really lovely job. [Laughing] So, he was enjoying that. Let me see. What more can you tell us about the work that he did? Memorable stories? Now, you were away from home. You were at war for how many years?

LM: Five years.

EE: '40 to '45?

LM: '41. No.

EE: '41 to '46?

LM: '41 to '45, December of '45. April '41 to December '45. I couldn't get in to start with because my eyes weren't good enough. I had to wear glasses. As I told the MO, "What the heck does that matter? If I get a bullet in the eye, it doesn't matter whether I've got glasses or not. I'm dead!"

EE: Yeah.

LM: And then they lowered the requirements, and I got in.

EE: Which unit were you in?

LM: I was in the 49<sup>th</sup> Field Battery, which was a unit recruited in Kenora and Dryden. When I passed medical, I had to attend the armory. "What unit? Where do you want to go? Where do you want to go? They have openings in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Battery," which was recruited in Port Arthur, and I said, "No." I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance Militia for about three years. I got up to company sergeant major.

EE: This was '38 to '41 or something like that?

LM: Yeah. And I said, "No." "Well, the LSR [Lake Superior Scottish Regiment] is getting ready to go to Europe." "No, no thank you. I don't want the infantry." They suggested the Service Corps, and I said, "No. Artillery reinforcements." "Okay, you'll be on the train the day after tomorrow for Winnipeg. You'll go to the 10<sup>th</sup> District Depot up there." And sure enough, I spent Easter Sunday up on the Water Street Depot. [Laughing] Actually, I spent Easter Sunday with the Freemans, Lois Wilson's parents.

EE: Oh, yes.

LM: He had been the minister here.

EE: Right, he had been indeed.

LM: And I chummed with her oldest brother during high school years. So on Easter Sunday, I was invited out to their place along the Assiniboine River. I've forgotten the name of the street.

EE: Because he was professor of theology. Was he already dean at that point at the United College?

LM: Yeah.

EE: Yeah. And so you served and came back at the end of '45. I was thinking in terms of your--. Did you hear anything of what your father was doing during the war?

LM: Oh, he was doing the grain trimmers job.

EE: The grain continued to move, of course, yes.

**[0:40:02]**

LM: Yeah, yeah. He got special gasoline allowance because he had to deliver paycheques. There was tremendous grain shipments in the '30s and '40s and even into the '50s in spite of the size of the ships. They were shipping over 400 million bushels of wheat alone through this port. It was the largest grain shipping port in North America, probably in the world. Plus barley, flax, rye, screenings, you name it.

EE: Yes.

LM: They don't even come close now.

EE: [Laughs] No.

LM: 100 million now.

EE: It has fallen off very badly from what it used to be.

LM: Well, a lot of it's going west.

EE: Indeed.

LM: The federal government got meddling here with--. I think—I don't know which way it went—but it had something to do with shipping across the mountains. Whether the federals gave them an extra allowance or whether they took something away from the allowance here, I'm not quite sure what it was. But Prince Rupert got a lot of the trade and maybe the market shifted.

EE: Well, I think the shifts to the Pacific certainly were China rather than Russia, I suppose, and so on. Of course, that was beginning to happen around 1960 with Elvin Hamilton's endeavours selling wheat to the Chinese. Well, the Russians continued to buy for some period of time, but the markets certainly did shift. Now, we won't explore--.

LM: Oh, yeah. Well, until they found out the commune system didn't work. [Laughing]

EE: Yeah. Well, there's a lot of history on the other side for sure. Did you have any sense of what your father was doing during the 15, 14 years or so after the war when you were back and getting into offices, bookkeeping and so on, yourself and your--?

LM: He bugged me. [Laughing] "Get me a job with Hewitson's." About a year after he retired from grain trimming, I got him a job as a flagman. We were repaving Lakeshore Drive from Hodder Avenue to--. Or no, from Bare Point to Mackenzie. There was no highway then. That was the highway.

EE: No. That was the Trans-Canada Highway you were working--.

LM: Well, it wasn't Trans-Canada then. It only went as far as Schreiber. [Laughs]

EE: Oh, ok. This was in the--. It was 1960. Well, it was being built. [Laughs]

LM: And one of my last instructions to him was, "And you be careful of the equipment because they won't watch for you. Make darn sure you're out of their way." So, he did the job, and it was getting near to the end, and the super on the job was a fellow by the name of Jerry Williams. He lived right on River Street, right opposite the end of Peter, right across from where Peter comes in. And Jerry was a little hard, but he was a smallish guy and full of energy, you know? Well, he had to go off the job for some reason, and one of the 12-tonne rollers was a brand-new machine, and the guy that ran it took every opportunity he could to have a little rest. Well, Jerry had to go off the job, and the guy pulled over, parked the roller here. And dad was flagging just a little bit behind him, ten feet maybe. Maybe less. And all of a sudden Jerry appeared coming around the corner in his car—and he drove fast—and this guy hit the starter on the thing, and it was in reverse, and he broke dad's leg. [Laughs] It's lucky he didn't do worse!

EE: Yeah, could have crushed him to death.

LM: So he was off for the winter, and he'd stomp around the house. They were living in the basement of our house on Deacon Street then. In the spring, he's bugging me again. So I said, "I'm not going to put you flagging."

EE: [Laughs] That could kill you! [Laughing]

**[0:45:00]**

LM: I forget. It would be probably at the beginning of July. We were starting to lay pavement on the city contracts that we had. Red light comes on. We're going to need a scale man down by the asphalt plant, which was at Hewitson's Quarry where Glacier Ridge home is there. There was a quarry in there. You come in off Winnipeg Avenue off along the road, and that's where the shops were, and we had the asphalt plant there, and we had a scale. So, I gave him a little education in how to operate the scale and what tricks to watch for. I said, "You watch the trucks. If they've got chains and spare tires when they come to weigh in in the morning, make sure they stay on all day." You know? "If somebody loses his turn, ask him what the problem was. And if he tells you he had to change a tire, what he probably did was took the tire off, emptied the water out of the tube, and then put air in the tube." Oh, they would fill all the wheels with water, all the tires, and then they'd go and take it to a filling station, empty the water out, and put the air back in. And they got paid for that water every load!

EE: Sure. This was the first weighing in the morning was what counted. After that it was as the loads--.

LM: Well, for the rest of the day, that particular truck had that weight on his weight slip. "Watch the driver. Don't let them get out of the cab. They'll weigh in with them out of the cab and then they'll weigh every load with them in the cab." "Oh, ok." Well, he was sharp. He got to it. So he did that for several years. I've forgotten how many.

EE: Yeah.

LM: But he was developing glaucoma or cataracts, and in those days a cataract operation was a lot more serious, and they didn't have the skills or the internal lenses. So they would take the cataracts off, and then they gave you Coke bottles, the bottoms of--.

EE: Glasses, yeah. Thick lenses.

LM: Yeah. And he got those, but he was coming up to the point where he was going to have to have the operation. It was late into the fall. It was in October some time. My mother called up to me, and said, "It's 6:30 and Dad isn't home yet." I knew they had been running in crushed gravel to get things started in the spring. I figured he might have been late, so I told her. I said, "He may be working a little later tonight." I said, "Wait until 7:00, and if he isn't home at 7:00, I'll go down and see what's wrong." There was no phone I could get him at. So, 7:00, he wasn't home. So I take off in my car.

Now we lived at the corner of Egan and Chamberlain. My driveway was off Egan Street. His driveway was off Chamberlain and into the garage, and the back door was in between. So I go down Shuniah onto Algoma, and as I crossed Wolseley, I saw his car come around the corner by the clinic, where the clinic is. Now, River Street didn't go through there, but I saw him come around that corner. So, I pulled over—there were no curbs—I pulled over and he passed, and I did a U-turn, and I followed him. He goes up Macintyre onto Shuniah, and he goes through the turn on Shuniah, then there's a car coming towards him. He's right over to the curb, passed, then he's right over almost to the curb on the other side. And it's dark at this point. He passed a couple cars, and then there's another car, and he's over again. And I realized that he couldn't see into the headlights.

So we get home. He pulls into his driveway, the door goes up, he puts the car in, goes in. I go around the corner, which takes me a little longer, go in. Went in, went downstairs instead of up. I said to him, "Dad, do you know how bad your driving is?" "What do you mean?" I said, "Well," I said, "when you were driving over on the right-hand curb, you wouldn't have seen a parked car. You would have plowed right into it." And I said, "Once those oncoming cars passed you," and I said, "you couldn't see into their headlights, I'm sure." "No, I couldn't." I said, "You ride over to the left edge, and if there had been a second car, you would have plowed it."

**[0:50:32]**

EE: Yeah.

LM: “It was that bad?” “Yes.” “Stop for a minute. Here my wife, you’ll have to drive from now on.” And he never drove again. Just like that.

EE: Decisive person!

LM: So she had to drive him to work for about a week and then go pick him up. And she wasn’t much of a better driver than he was. [Laughs]

EE: Time to retire again!

LM: They had a big Dodge Royal, and they went down to Florida. She went through some small town somewhere in northern Florida or in the next state up, and the police pulled them over. She was doing 85 miles an hour. [Laughing] She used to give me heck for driving too fast! And then one of their trips, they took Bruce and Marilyn—my two oldest—around Lake Superior. And I told them, “When you leave Sault Ste. Marie, you can get home here easily in an hour. Or eight hours.”

EE: In a day.

LM: I said, “Give us a call from Nipigon, and we’ll have supper ready for you.” So, we get a call from Nipigon. It’s 5:00. “We’re just filling the tank now. I’m going to get a coffee, and we’ll be in right after that.” “Ok.” So I figured, well, they’ll be in 6:15, 6:30.

EE: Or the quarters went--.

LM: Right on the dot of 6:00 they pulled into the driveway, and she was doing all the driving! [Laughing] So you figure it out! And the highway then wasn’t like it is now.

EE: No, that’s for sure.

LM: She eventually cracked it up and learned that. She pulled out of a parking lot onto a street and didn't see a car coming. She quit.

EE: But survived the accident?

LM: Well, yeah. Yeah. She cried and broke a lot of ribs, but yeah, they had to fly her back.

EE: Do you remember much about what your father was doing after the war in those last 14 years of his—almost half—of his employment as the head of the grain trimmers?

LM: Oh, he was still doing all the office work right up until the time he retired. From 1934 until he retired, he was in the office.

EE: Is there anything distinctive about that that you remember or was it pretty well the routines were well developed earlier? Who--? Did he himself helm the association?

LM: No, no.

EE: So there were--.

LM: The president of the union did.

EE: The stevedores local?

LM: Of that local, yeah. That local.

EE: So he was the business manager for them then.

LM: That's right. Yeah.

EE: Or business agent, I guess, it was common enough in unions, isn't it?

LM: The elevators union probably supported them because--.

EE: Yeah, I would think so.

LM: These guys, they knew their job, and if there was any twitches in the loading, the elevator people knew that they would be told, you know, something happened. You can never tell what's going to happen in that situation. I was down there one day when I was about 14—13 or 14, somewhere around there—I was still too young to get a job myself in the summer holidays. And they were loading, I think, it was a cargo of oats, and the hold was almost full, and a cat came down the spout. [Laughs] It hit the grain of the hold. *Meow!* And took off and went down the bow anchor rope onto the dock. Just a grey street cat!

EE: One way to get out of a ship. [Laughing] As stevedores, I suppose, they could have had a relationship with the men on the ship as well, the merchant seamen, I suppose.

LM: Could very well be, although--.

EE: Obviously, the merchant seamen would be standing around, I suppose, while the trimmers were at work.

**[0:55:02]**

LM: Yeah. All they needed from the merchant seamen was to get the holds open and closed.

EE: Yes.

LM: When the ship needed to be moved, well, they would tell the mate, whichever mate was in charge of the deck at that time, "We're ready for Number 4 hold." And he would winch the boat forward or back, whichever was necessary. They had the most trouble with the ocean-going ships that managed to get through. The smaller ocean-going freighters could come up to the Lakehead before the Seaway. There were some locks on the St. Lawrence, but the ocean-going ships, they weren't nearly as efficient as lakers.

EE: No, I daresay.

LM: I watched the ocean-going ships come in, and the trimmers always made fun at them. It would take an ocean-going ship anywhere from half to a full hour to dock in one of those elevator slips. Whereas the lakers, the lakers would come along, they'd have a couple guys on the dock with the bosun chairs, cables around two of what they called [n-word] heads—the anchors on it—and they'd stub the thing down there. The ocean-going guys, they'd come in, and they'd get to the end of the slip. They'd want a

tug to bring them in, and they'd have to be in right position and up against the dock before they put anyone ashore to put the cables on. You know? It was a slow and tedious job, but that's the way these ocean guys did in on the ocean ports. I saw it when we came back from Kiska. Took them three-quarters of an hour to get tied up into a wide slip in Vancouver Harbour.

EE: Whereas these lakers had been doing it time after time and they were experienced.

LM: Yeah, they knew everything. They'd come in there in ships--. Well, even the big ones now, they do the same thing.

EE: Yes, there's not a lot of need for tugs in Thunder Bay harbour.

LM: Well, it depends.

EE: There is a small business.

LM: There are certain areas where you couldn't turn a big ship. You have to have the tugs to help them around.

EE: Yes. Did you get any sense from your father of were there changes taking place in these years? The Seaway was completed in, was it '57?

LM: No, it was later than that because I was working at New Ideas Sheet Metal when it was completed.

OM: '59.

EE: Was it '59? So the retirement then coincides roughly with the completion of the Seaway.

LM: Somewhere around there.

EE: With the official opening, Queen Elizabeth and President Eisenhower, wasn't it?

LM: Well, he was 88 when he died, and he was 72 when he retired. So, that's--.

EE: That does put it in '59.

LM: Yeah.

EE: Well, any other insights into your father's career? He would have worked with a number of different presidents of the association of the local over the years, I suppose.

LM: Oh, yeah. But the president didn't interfere with the office at all.

EE: Presiding. Were they on strike at any time during those years?

LM: Not that I know of.

EE: No. So, the grain was moving, they were working, and--.

LM: And while he was in the office, I heard no comments of any sort from him, even when he was talking to my mother, about having difficulty getting the contract with a shipping company. The shipping companies knew these guys. They knew their capability, and they weren't greedy.

EE: No.

LM: They weren't greedy.

EE: Well, they were essential to a really efficient trade, efficient use of the ships. Filling them up as much as they could and so on.

LM: Yeah.

EE: I wonder if the grain trimming is a trade that exists in other ports as well. One would think it would, but I wonder how it got started.

LM: The Thunder Bay port, and I'll call it that—it was Port Arthur and Fort William—but the Port Arthur and Fort William elevators and grain trimmers could load ships about 25 percent faster than they could load them in Duluth. They were that much better. Not only the grain trimmers, the elevators themselves were that much better than the American elevators.

**[1:00:22]**

EE: I wonder if Duluth and Superior will have had grain trimmers as well working in the--?

LM: Yeah, they would. But there was no association.

EE: No connection at all?

LM: No, no.

EE: Even though the stevedores local is probably continent-wide.

LM: Uh--.

EE: Longshoremen. International Association of Longshoremen?

LM: I would say they belonged to that, but I have no knowledge of that.

EE: I mean, for another industry, lumber and saw was a completely distinct organization within the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. Did its own thing in more ways than one.

LM: No, uh--.

EE: Well, any other thoughts about--? It's a remarkable career. He wasn't thought of as someone from Quebec, I suppose, through all of these years?

LM: No.

EE: Did your parents become members at St. Paul's?

LM: Oh, yeah. Oh, dad was on the session for years.

EE: So he was an elder?

LM: Oh, yeah. He became an elder. He brought--. Baptism was a little different then than it was this last Sunday. [Laughing] But what is now the minister's office used to be the robing room, minister's robing room. And when there was a manse, the manse had a study for the minister.

EE: Immediately behind the church in those days.

LM: The new manse had but two.

EE: Sure, yes. Of course.

LM: So the people with the babies to be baptised assembled in the room, and at the appropriate time, and it was during the first verse of a certain hymn—I've forgotten the hymn but—dad would lead them in. Go over and take the top off the baptismal font and stand aside. And when the baptisms were over, he would cover the font, and then lead them out.

EE: How long did he do this? For many years?

LM: Oh, he did that for years. Yeah. I don't know when he went on the session, but he was on the session probably at the beginning of Mercer's tenure anyways.

EE: That's early, mid-40s. Soon after the war.

LM: Yeah. At least then, if not sooner.

EE: And did Mr. Mercer leave about 1961 or so, I guess, was it actually?

LM: Yeah, somewhere around there.

EE: I'm trying to remember.

LM: He was--.

EE: Was Hugh Macdonald his immediate successor?

LM: Yes.

EE: So that makes it about '62 give or take.

LM: Yeah.

EE: Yeah. A lot of very interesting--. Do you want to add? I might ask you, Owen, is there any aspect of this business--?

OM: I was just thinking of how, again, of how they got paid. The money would--. They would bill the shipping company and then the cheque would come in, so the boys would have to wait until that cheque came in before they got paid, or did they have a bank account?

LM: Uh, well, they had a bank account. Yeah.

OM: Yeah. A little bit left.

LM: Yeah. The cheques would come in and the cheques would go into the bank, and there would be a stream of cheques. Now, they had a record of how much they had loaded and how much money they would get. I don't know that they had any borrowing arrangements made with the bank, but they probably had a pretty fair idea of how much they would make in a season, and then they would apportion the money out accordingly.

EE: Because, of course, the contract monies would have to include your father's salary even though he wasn't actually moving any, redirecting a single kernel of grain.

LM: Yeah. But he got the same pay as the fellows that were working on the boat.

OM: One more question of extreme importance. Did you ever have a chance to keep your dad's wooden shovel?

LM: No.

OM: Because I understand each grain trimmer had their own tools.

LM: Yeah. There is a possibility that it may be out on Highway 61 at the museum out there.

OM: Oh, ok.

EE: The Pioneer?

LM: It may be.

EE: The Founder's Museum?

LM: Yeah. It may be out there.

EE: One of the other--.

LM: They didn't own the plows. Well, they owned them, but they left the plow at each elevator. There was a plow at each elevator.

EE: For each of the men?

LM: No, no. They only needed one plow.

EE: Ok. Because--.

LM: Because you only--. If a hold was coming up to being complete, you could only have one man working under it anyways.

**[1:05:02]**

EE: I suppose they took turns then doing that, actually?

LM: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

EE: Spelled each other off and--.

LM: And some of them were better at it than others. They knew if dad was--. If it was at Pool 1, Dad would say to so-and-so, "Get ready with the plow." I'm sure that he would say, "Get ready with the plow," and the guy would go over and grab the plow and

prevent anybody else, because there were certain ones that were fairly clumsy, and it would prevent them. There wouldn't be any fuss about it, you know?

OM: I think the reason I ask, I think we were talking to the McKinnons. They were quite proud of their family shovel, and it was hand carved, I think, by their grandfather. So.

LM: Oh, they were handmade these shovels.

OM: Yeah.

LM: Yeah. They got them somewhere locally. They got them made locally. It was a small shovel, but it was all wood. One piece.

OM: Yeah. They didn't want sparking, I think, that was one of the reasons why it was wood, when they were working in metal.

LM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Yeah, you wouldn't want a single spark.

LM: And they were light because they used it to spread the grain, you know?

OM: Yeah.

EE: Yes. You mentioned they had this tool, but you also mentioned a second tool. Or was there just this one?

LM: The plow.

OM: The plow.

EE: The plow. But you also mentioned the shovel that--. Or was there a shovel?

LM: This wooden shovel, yeah. But each trimmer had his own shovel.

EE: Right. Quite aside from the plow that was the main--.

LM: Yeah. There was only one plow at an elevator.

EE: To go with the chute.

LM: Because they very seldom were loading more than one hold at a time, although they could because the spouts were stacked along the front of the elevator. But again, a lot of that was dictated by where the grain was stored in the elevator because when the grain came in, it was not cleaned. It had to be. There might have been a rough cleaning on the Prairies, but it had to be cleaned in the elevator, and that's where it was, the initial cleaning. And then it would go into those storage tanks. Now, if there was a big shipment coming in, it would go into the storage tanks and then be cleaned and sent back into them. But it came out of the storage tanks at the bottom on a long belt into a hopper, and then there was an endless belt of buckets.

EE: An elevator.

LM: That took it up the thing and dumped it into the weigh scales.

OM: Yeah.

EE: Yeah.

LM: And from the weigh scales, it went into a hopper at the top end of the spout.

EE: Right.

LM: Yeah.

EE: Any other aspects, Owen?

OM: That exhausted my questions. [Laughs]

EE: One of the interesting things that gradually has come to light in some of the interviews is the consumption of alcohol at the workplace.

LM: Uh, I was never aware of it so I can't-- [Laughing] I can't comment.

EE: Right. Well, that's fine too!

LM: I wouldn't be surprised. [Laughing]

EE: You weren't a grain trimmer or a grain handler or whatever or various other things. [Laughing] Well, thanks very much, Larry, for taking us into the life of your father.

LM: Oh, you're welcome.

EE: And quite a remarkable man. We have the portrait here. I don't know whether its worth carrying an image away after we shut the machine down perhaps. But it's a lovely picture. To think that he served as an elder for some years, whatever length of time it was, at St. Paul's, I mean, that's--.

LM: Well, you can get that from St. Paul's.

EE: The records, of course. Yes, no question about it. Well, thanks again very much, and I'll have Owen shut this down in a moment, and--.

**End of Interview.**