Narrator: Donald McKay (DM)

Company Affiliations: Canadian National Railway (CNR)

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Summary: Railway locomotive mechanic Donald McKay discusses his work in repairing the steam and diesel locomotives that drove Canadian National Railway trains—many of which were grain trains from the Prairies. He details the path of his career from Neebing to Winnipeg to Sioux Lookout and back again to the Neebing roundhouse, where he describes the usual work done on locomotives and the typical problems that could occur. McKay also discusses changes to the railway's operations over the years, particularly in terms of modernization, computerization, downsizing of staff, and changes to his work responsibilities. Other topics discussed include different unions on the railway, training apprentices, railroader social activities, other rail shops in Transcona and Fort Rouge, winter work on export grain trains and the ore dock, workplace accidents, health and safety, and the eventual demolition of the Neebing roundhouse.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: Well, it's a pleasure to be here this afternoon with you, Don, we'll say, but perhaps we can start by your giving us—the recorder—your name and describing--. Well, you didn't work in the grain industry direct. So, anyway. Perhaps you can give me your name first and then we can get into--. DM: I'm Don McKay.

EE: Let me ask, you said before we began recording that you were born in Gilbert Plains, Manitoba, then you made a reference to something in the back 40. Did you grow up in Manitoba on the farm?

DM: Oh, no. My dad was a railroader, and he was a telegraph operator. He came after the First War. He had his arm blown off in the war, so this was a job he could handle. But he, at that time, in the steam days back then, of course, every 100 miles there was a telegraph operator who would relay messages et cetera. And he lived everywhere from here, Gilbert Plains, up the north line towards Sioux Lookout, several different places, you know, little stations. And of course, I was born in Gilbert Plains, and then we moved to Thunder Bay—Fort William at the time.

EE: And so, when you say Sioux Lookout, this means he was working for the CNR [Canadian National Railway]?

DM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. Absolutely. That was the only railroad around. [Laughing]

EE: Yeah. And so, you settled here in Thunder Bay, working here in, what, Fort William back in those days?

DM: We came here, I'm not quite sure. It was probably prior to my birth, around sometime in the early '30s. And of course, I was born here, and I pretty much lived here all my life. We did—the wife and I—we did live in Winnipeg for a while. We lived in Sioux Lookout for a while, but most of the time we've been living in Thunder Bay.

EE: At what age did you begin working for the CNR?

DM: I joined the railroad--. I came out of high school, and I always wanted to be a diesel mechanic. I went to Kam Motors as an automobile mechanic. Spent about a year there or so, and then, of course, being the son of a railroader, I was pretty much guaranteed a job on the railroad if I ever wanted it, you know? So I took my apprenticeship about in 1953.

EE: At the railway?

DM: On the railroad, CN, yeah. And then started over in the Port Arthur roundhouse, which I don't know if you were aware there was a roundhouse in Port Arthur.

EE: Where was that roundhouse?

DM: That was located just north of the ore dock between the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] tracks and Great Northern. Not Great Northern.

EE: Or Northern Wood Preserver later.

DM: Northern Wood.

EE: Right, in there.

DM: In between those two there was a roundhouse in there, and there was a rip track. A rip track is just another term used for a repair track for all the equipment other than locomotives were repaired. So I started there in '53. Transferred over to Neebing here in '54, spent a couple years at Neebing, and then moved out to Winnipeg in–'56–Joan? I think it was–yeah, '56 as an apprentice. I spent 23 months in Winnipeg. And why the odd number was because if I had been able to stay there 24 months, I could claim my seniority in Winnipeg, and they didn't want any outsiders coming in there and staying there, you know?

EE: So management shifted--.

DM: Yeah, back to Neebing. Yeah.

EE; Right.

DM: The day I finished my apprenticeship I was laid off, so that's when I went up to Sioux Lookout.

EE: Ok. Working for the railway there?

DM: Working. Oh yeah, I was working for the railroad. And at that time, you know, here comes a young kind coming up to a small town, and I'm going to put somebody out of work because I'm exercising my seniority and that. The guy was pretty uptight about that you know, but it turned out fine. The guy that I replaced, I pushed him back onto a day job, so he didn't mind that all that much either. [Laughs]

EE: No, I daresay.

DM: And we spent about--. Oh, should I tell them the story, Joan? [Laughs] About--.

JM: Leaving me at the depot?

DM: Yeah. I left my wife at the depot with the baby. At that time, they used to have, we called it the "loco," but it was a train coming from Fort William up to Sioux Lookout through--.

EE: The old Superior Junction line?

DM: Yeah. And of course, it never ever arrived on time. So that one day when she was coming, I said, "I'll slip across the street. I'll have a beer. Train is never on time." Jeez, I got out there, and I says, "Oh, I better go over and see if the train's in." And this is probably half an hour after. The train had arrived, and I guess it was the CN police directed my wife how to get to where we were living, and I didn't know anything about it. I wasn't in the good books. That's for sure. [Laughing] But we spent--.

[0:05:35]

EE: Now early in a marriage, these things will happen. [Laughs]

DM: Yes. Oh, yeah!

EE: Later on, one knows better. [Laughing] Yeah, I was once almost stood my wife up at the Toronto subway line.

DM: Oh, yeah? [Laughing] So we stayed there about, what, November to the following July I think it was, and we got called back to Neebing here. Came back again and worked for, oh, two years? one or two years, and got laid off again. Then I went out on the highway as a welding, out on the Trans-Canada Highway working for a contractor.

EE: Right because the Trans-Canada was still under--. This would be about 1960-61, I guess.

DM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. This was, yeah. This was just west of Ignace, and we were building a stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway in there, and I was a welder out there.

EE: Right.

DM: Stayed there for a while and ended up getting--. Well, actually, I quit there, and came back here and got hired back on the railroad again. And then I was on the railroad from that point on.

EE: From that point on around 1960-61 until your retired, which--.

DM: Until I retired in ’91.

EE: In ’91. So about 30 years unbroken, then, with the earlier service here.

DM: Yeah. Yeah, I was with--. Oh, yeah.

EE: And you mentioned welding in this last period away. That had been part of your training earlier, I suppose.

DM: Oh, yeah. That was part of my apprenticeship.

EE: Part of the apprenticeship.

DM: Oh, yeah. I learned how to electric weld and gas weld.

EE: Sure. On whatever you were repairing.

DM: Whatever we were doing, yeah.

EE: The work that you did--. Well, let’s--. Were there different kinds of things you did, let’s say, after ’61? Unless you want to glance back at the earlier--.

DM: Well, actually, we should go back further than that.

EE: By all means.

DM: Because I started out, like I said before that, I wanted to be a diesel mechanic. Well, the first day I went on the job, I went to the machinist there, and he took me down to a steam engine, and we had to grind in a throttle valve, which I knew absolutely

nothing about. I didn't know nothing about a steam engine or steam locomotives or anything, you know? I had to help him grind this throttle valve, and I was just ready to quit that day, you know?

EE: He was testing you?

DM: No, that was--.

EE: That was the work that had to be done.

DM: That was before diesels were actually being used on the railroad.

EE: Sure. How long did the steam locomotives remain in service in the area?

DM: They remained until '58.

EE: '58. Then the trains--.

DM: By 1958, pretty much all the steam engines were gone.

EE: And what drew you to the diesel locomotive if they weren't common yet? When you were in highschool if you had this dream of being a diesel locomotive mechanic.

DM: Well, I wasn't considering diesel locomotives. I was thinking of diesel trucks.

EE: Diesel engines and whatever they--

DM: Yeah, diesel engines and whatever they were going to be used on. Didn't matter, but it certainly wasn't locomotive.

EE: Right. So in a sense, it was your father's being with the railway that had you think the diesel would end up being diesel locomotives after they came in.

DM: Oh, yeah. I actually thought when I started the railroad, I would definitely be right on diesels right now, you know? Then I spent half my apprenticeship working on steam locomotives. Then of course, by that time, they were changing over here at Neebing and we all had to go to school and change the course of our education from steam to diesel.

EE: What made the diesel engine interesting for you?

DM: Well, I was always interested in mechanics. I took a mechanic course in high school, automotive, you know. And it was just an interest I had in mechanics.

EE: Because it's a different kind of engine isn't it. My father--.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: My father was quite mechanical and repaired his own machines, rebuilt an old Model D, the old two-lunger John Deere tractor, and so on and so forth.

DM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EE: And then later on he had a Fordson Major diesel engine, and so I have some sense of these different engines. So that's why I'm curious about what drew you to the diesel engine. No spark plugs, compression fires the fuel, and so on and so forth.

DM: Fuel air mixture with high compression, you know. That high compression creates heat and that's how it would ignite the diesel fuel.

EE: It's the--.

DM: But when we did that changeover, it was kind of funny that the senior machinists at the roundhouse here when the diesels first came, they were issued white overalls because they thought these diesels locomotives would be squeaky clean, you know? And they'd be only working on the thing for half an hour, and they'd come out and they were just as black as when you worked on a steam locomotive. They were no cleaner whatsoever. Only the most senior machinists would be allowed to work on diesel locomotives. The others all worked on steam. So every once in a while, they'd send an apprentice, "Yeah, you can go down and work in the diesel shop today." That's what you're looking for.

[0:10:36]

EE: Right. Yeah, my father's Fordson Major had a Perkins diesel engine from England.

DM: Oh, yeah. I worked on Perkins engines.

EE: Am I right that you had to get the nozzles re-gauged every once in a while? You could screw them out of the engine and take the nozzles.

DM: Yeah.

EE: He'd take them into Winnipeg. We lived about 50 miles out. He'd take them into Winnipeg to the business where, I think it was probably an English machinist or whatever it was there--.

DM: Yeah, probably.

EE: To clean or whatever, make sure they were the right sizes–these nozzles which injected the fuel into the cylinder.

DM: Yeah.

EE: Anyway, here we are with the real guts of the machine! In your working, did you work on locomotives mostly?

DM: Always.

EE: After '61, it was locomotives all the way?

DM: Oh, yeah. It was diesels all the way through after that.

EE: How large a crew was there working on the diesel engines? How many diesels did you have to be responsible for?

DM: When they first came in in full numbers, the Neebing roundhouse was assigned, let's see, ten road locomotives, diesel locomotives. And we had seventeen diesel yard engines assigned to Neebing roundhouse for maintenance.

EE: 27 in all then.

DM: And we did almost, almost all. We didn't remove diesel locomotive engines because we didn't have heavy-duty enough equipment, but we did almost everything else. We started with that. We had, at that time, there was around 100 employees working at the roundhouse at the time.

EE: On the locomotives or on other things as well?

DM: On all aspects of the locomotive. When I'm talking of the roundhouse, that was strictly locomotives.

EE: I see.

DM: The repair track was down further, and they looked after all the other equipment.

EE: Rolling stock.

DM: All the other rolling stock, right. But we had all these engines assigned to us and that took up a lot of time because you did maintenance work everyday, and we had what we'd call mileage test to do, and they were pages long of things that we had to do.

EE: The locomotive would come in and you would work it over from one end to the other, I suppose.

DM: Right from one end to the other.

EE: Checking everything out.

DM: Yeah. Everything. The whole works. And then besides that, we did the repairs that were required, like changing out wheels and stuff like that. Believe it or not, those wheels wore out pretty quick, you know.

EE: Did they really?

DM: Oh, yeah. They--.

EE: Wearing out from the friction on the--?

DM: From going around corners.

EE: Oh, really?

DM: On the tracks. Because if you notice how the wheel has a lip on it, and of course, every time you go around--. And the way the wheels were designed—people are probably not ever aware of this—if you get a pair of wheels, turn them and power both of them, they would still turn at the same RPM. So one would be turned trying to go slower and one would be trying to go faster to get around the corner. Well, that's what wheels did were so designed that they were sloped. They were actually sloped like this. And when you went around the corner, the one side would be higher up than the rail and would ride higher on the wheel, and the lower one would ride lower on the wheel, and it would act like a differential.

EE: Right.

DM: So one would be actually be covering less ground, going the same speed but covering less ground on one side than the other.

EE: Because these locomotives were direct drive from the--. Well, not direct, by via transmissions from the engine, or were they electric?

DM: They were totally electric.

EE: So should have been possible to have—well, later, perhaps computer controlled—so the one wheel would run a little slower than the other on a turn.

DM: No. No, no.

EE: Why not?

DM: Because it had an eight-inch steel axel going from one side to the other. There's nothing--.

EE: So it's a single axel?

DM: It's a single axel.

EE: One engine is driving, or one electric engine is--.

DM: Well, it drives one pair of wheels. Yeah.

EE: Whereas I'm talking about an engine on each of the wheels that could've been done.

DM: Yeah. If there was--. The newer ones have six-traction motors they're called, each driving a pair of wheels.

[0:15:04]

EE: Still a pair though?

DM: The diesel--. Oh, yeah.

EE: On the axel.

DM: Yeah. One on each side. Yeah.

EE: I suppose they're centrally mounted then.

DM: Oh, yeah. On the tracks they're set right in the middle of the axel, and it was gear driven. The--.

EE: I guess that's the problem. The transmission is probably the problem. The gearing down from the engine and so on.

DM: Well, there's quite a bit involved as far as--. There is kind of like a transmission effect if you run the engines in parallel and then you run them in series. That would be just like shifting from low gear to high gear, you know, for the power the traction motor is getting from the--. The engine itself just drove a--. What do you call them?

EE: A generator.

DM: Well, nowadays it's an alternator. But when I was on, they were called main generators. And they stood about five-foot in diameter, the main generator, and you'd have a 16-cylinder engine, and that's what it did.

EE: Sure.

DM: It drove and developed the electrical power for the--. Well, most of ours at that time were four-wheel trucks, and they would drive the four traction motors.

EE: So a diesel locomotive, in a sense, is--.

DM: Diesel electric.

EE: Is an electric locomotive.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: Except that you're using diesel to generate there rather than feeding it in across the top.

DM: Exactly. Yeah.

EE: I don't--. Do you have any knowledge of solely electric locomotives?

DM: Oh, yeah. There was, but we of course never had them here. But there was with the wires. The overhead wires.

EE: Yes, overhead wires. There are places where that could happen.

DM: Oh, yeah. Back in 19--. I think the first all-electric locomotive was in 1948. It came out in 1948.

EE: Now the interurbans that Ontario Hydro was experimenting with running trains out into the country in the 1920s, there was a real struggle in North America between the possibility of railway interurbans or the automobile highways and so on.

DM: Oh, I see.

EE: In that context, they must have had small electric locomotives, which would be streetcars blown up.

DM: With overhead wires, yeah.

EE: Yes, if you will, expanded. But the diesel locomotive, I guess, which may have used some of that same technology, of course, has the big 16-cylinder diesel engine.

DM: Yeah.

EE: Who made the diesel engines?

DM: Well, we all had General Motors here.

EE: These were all General Motors.

DM: But there were other companies.

EE: Other shops in--.

DM: Fairbanks Morse and Alco, which is an American locomotive company.

EE: Right. General Motors was building them in London, Ontario, was it? I think.

DM: I don't remember where they were built.

EE: I know we lived in Nelson for nine years, and Nelson was notable in Canada for having old Fairbanks Morris locomotives.

DM: Worst thing ever built.

EE: And people travelled across the continent to come to Nelson to get pictures of these Fairbanks Morse locomotives.

DM: I never liked working on them, they were just--.

EE: You had worked on some?

DM: Oh, yeah. We had a couple here.

EE: What, yard machines?

DM: No, road engines.

EE: Oh, really?

DM: And they were eight-cylinder opposed pistons, which, you know. In effect, yeah, they're this way though.

EE: Oh, up and down?

DM: Up and down. They had a crank shaft at the top and a crank shaft at the bottom. And they were a big, big boot. Heavy. Everything was hard to work on those things.

EE: How high from crank shaft to crank shaft would it be?

DM: Well, the engine itself would be from here--.

EE: I was thinking of crank shaft to crank shaft, would it be six feet or something?

DM: What do you mean?

EE: Well, from the crankshaft and through to the--.

DM: Oh, yeah. Like I said, the pistons would meet in the middle here about here, and the crank shaft would be there, and the upper crank shaft was up there.

EE: A good six feet.

DM: I would say close to that, yeah.

EE: Because I was just wondering if there was an advantage to having them run up and down rather than sideways.

DM: Ask the manufacturers.

EE: Actually, I guess if you had them running sideways, you would have the effect of gravity pulling them downwards this way. It was sort of gravity-free, I guess, except for the pull.

DM: Well.

EE: Yes. In any case, you didn't care for them.

DM: When we got rid of those two locomotives, everybody was happy.

EE: The CNR then was experimenting a bit then with locomotives if you had a couple of those, I assume.

DM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they of course--.

EE: They came around to the General Motors ones.

DM: They bought from three different companies at that time. The Alco was the American locomotive company. Our yard engines were Alco for a while, and then they switched over to General Motors. The General Motors is just an all-around perfect engine, you know. You get easy, not easy, but a lot easier to work on than the others.

EE: Right. And so in terms of the shop where you were, the efficiency of repair and maintenance and all the rest of it would argue for one system, and the best kind you had was the General Motors.

DM: Oh, yeah. Sure. Sure.

EE: Right.

DM: And you're virtually geared up to maintain that type of locomotive. Yeah.

EE: How many changes in model occurred over the years that you were working?

[0:20:00]

DM: Oh, they went for years. Well, of course, there was the A and B units. Those were the enclosed units. They were just the same as the one down at the Kam River there by the CPR Station. That's an A and a B unit down there. They were totally enclosed, and everything you worked on, you did it from the inside. And then they went to the we call them "geeps," but they were general purpose units. And then, of course, you worked on them from the outside, opened up all the doors, and there was the engine. Then it went from there to the--. Those were around for years and years and years and years. And then they came out with basically what they have nowadays, which is, still in all, the same. You opened all the doors, and you worked at them. I don't know. One thing people always wondered why CN units on their geeps—their GP-9 units—always had the cab at the rear of the unit, and the CPR always run theirs at the front of the unit. And that was a manufacturing process to have the cab at the front. But the CN and the unions decided that they have that long nose in front was a lot more protection in the event of an accident. They would rather have that in front of them rather than just going ploughing right into it with the cab or whatever, if you had a head-on.

EE: Now that was, surely, true.

DM: Oh, yeah. That was a fact.

EE: Did you in your 30 years plus in the industry, do you remember many collisions of locomotives?

DM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We had collisions on the shop track!

EE: Well, those, that's slow speed though.

DM: Oh, yeah. They're slow speed. I was never--. I've been out to wrecks where there were engines all bent all over the ground and the rest of the train, but I personally was never in an engine when it happened.

EE: But there were collisions so that the CN system may have saved some lives then as against the--.

DM: Oh, yeah. I mean, I don't know that. I don't know if that was ever proved, actually, you know.

EE: But you understood that the unions negotiated this with CN management.

DM: Yeah. That was a fact, yeah.

EE: Yeah. And so, these are sort of three different kinds of locomotives that you were involved with over the years in doing the work.

DM: Yeah.

EE: Well, let me see. When did you start working? How long did you work there? Who did you work for? What kind of work did you do? We've been working through those questions just in pursuing this and getting detail. Would it make sense for you to describe a typical day on the job?

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: Lots of typical days, I suppose, in this work.

DM: Oh, yeah. There were lots of days where you're doing these mileage tests. It got to be so routine it got monotonous, you know, so you always liked to run into something different.

EE: Sure.

DM: But anyways, yeah, you go to work. We worked 8:00 to 4:00 or 4:00 to 12:00, midnight to 8:00.

EE: Eight-hour shifts including a meal break?

DM: Eight-hour shifts, yeah. And you got 20 minutes for lunch. And of course, we got paid right through. You didn't lose any time for lunch, you know? You'd get your assignment in the morning, you'd go to it, and if it was possible, you'd finish up by day's end. Usually, first thing in the morning when I was working day shift, you'd get the yard engines in from the night shift, you'd get them into the shop right away, and do the maintenance on them. They used to go through a lot of brake shoes, steel brake shoes. They go through thousands and thousands. I've changed thousands and thousands of them.

EE: This is on the yard--?

DM: The yard engine.

EE: Because of the stopping, starting, and all the rest of it.

DM: Stopping. Constant stopping and going. So we'd get those ready first thing, get them out on time, and then you'd just do your regular daily routine. Whether you were changing out wheels or doing mileage tests or changing our air compressors or whatever, you know?

EE: Right. And every once in a while you'd have more challenging work when you really got in on an engine?

DM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. It happened on much more than one occasion that, in the wintertime, for the engine freezing up. And once it froze, once the water--. The water wasn't antifreeze or anything. It was called chromate. It just had a chromate chemical in the water to prevent corrosion, you know. That was the big thing. But if they quit on the road or whatever at the engine, you go out and turn one valve and figure you're draining the whole thing. You didn't always get it all, and of course, it would come in and it was froze solid.

EE: Every pipe that broke.

DM: Pipes were broke. Oh, you just hated to see that one come through. Then you figure you got them all fitting, and you fill it all up with water again. *Pshh, Pshh!* It's here, there, everywhere.

EE: Yes. One easy way of testing whether it's waterproof. [Laughs]

DM: That's how you test it! After you figure you got it all, you pump the water through it and see what happens.

JM: Remember the ore dock?

DM: Yeah. I'll get to that. [Laughs]

[0:25:06]

EE: So this would be winter work when someone had made a mistake and--.

DM: And then sometimes they'd run out of water, and they'd keep the engine running for whatever reason. They had shutdowns on them, but it didn't always work, I guess, because it would fry the seals in the--. Like in a GM, you'd take a power somewhere.

That's one piston, piston rod, cylinder, cylinder head, all as one unit, and then you'd lift them out and they all had seals around them.

EE: So the engine had separate units like this?

DM: There was 16--.

EE: There was not a block of--.

DM: No.

EE: Right. I see.

DM: Not on the GM. No. They were 16 individual units you could change out. Which was an excellent idea!

EE: Probably facilitated repair.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: One of the strengths of the locomotive, I guess.

DM: If you threw a rod in one, that was just that one assembly was gone, and you'd pull that out.

EE: Buy a new one and drop it in.

DM: Put it in, yeah.

EE: Overhead winches and--.

DM: We had some overhead cranes.

EE: I see. So the repair of engines would be a lot--. I was thinking of where would be the big shops? CN's shop would be Montreal, I suppose?

DM: No. Transcona.

EE: Oh, Transcona. The Transcona shop.

DM: Yeah. Oh, yeah that was the big shop.

EE: Yeah, of course it was.

DM: For western Canada.

EE: It was a western railway out of the Grand Trunk and the Intercolonial.

DM: And they did everything there, you know?

EE: And still do, I suppose, a certain amount.

DM: Not so much. Edmonton's got it all now.

EE: It's moved out to Edmonton?

DM: It moved out to Edmonton, yeah. In fact, my son, he works in Winnipeg on the railroad, and he says there's not much going on in Transcona anymore. Yeah. Shifted all out west out to Edmonton.

EE: When you mention these problems with locomotives, their engine drivers are responsible for these problems, aren't there? The railways were distinguished by having a number of unions representing the various workers.

DM: Yeah.

EE: You would belong to which union?

DM: The International Association of Machinists.

EE: Of Machinists. The IAM. Right.

DM: And later, and Aerospace Workers. [Laughing]

EE: And aerospace workers, right!

DM: I got a kick out of that.

EE: *Choo choo choo!* up in the air. Now, and then there were of course all the other unions.

DM: All the others. There was locomotive engineers, electricians, car knockers, and then of course there was all the trades involved with passenger service at that time, back in that time.

EE: Yes. Yes. Porters and all the conductors and so on and so forth.

DM: Yeah, and conductors.

EE: The running trades.

DM: The running trades, yeah.

EE: As they were proudly called.

DM: They were the elite, so they thought.

EE: Yes, indeed. The running trade.

DM: I said, "You wouldn't go two feet if we didn't fix them!" [Laughing]

EE: And what were relations like between the various groups of workers and their unions?

DM: Well, like I say, with the hoggers, they thought they were the number one, eh?

EE: The running trades?

DM: The engineers, you know, they thought they were the--. They could do no wrong almost, you know?

EE: Until they ran one dry.

DM: Or whatever, you know. And then they'd be complaining, "Well, why did this engine break down?"

EE: "You didn't repair it right."

DM: But yeah, they thought they were top of the heap.

EE: Were the encounters of this sort mostly sort of on the street casually, or were there meetings of the various bargaining units together? Did you have those at all?

DM: Well, we used to bargain with the electricians.

EE: Because they were also in the shop?

DM: They were in the shop.

EE: Were there just the two groups?

DM: No. There was the Brotherhood of--. Ah. All the labourers and guys that worked in the stores department and the office staffs were another unit. I forget what they were called now.

EE: So the labourers, the office people, and so on were in one union?

DM: Yeah. Well, not one union. They bargained together.

EE: Ok.

DM: While the engineers, conductors, they were--.

EE: Because there was a Brotherhood of Railway Employees in the ‘30s.

DM: Yeah.

EE: Was that it?

DM: Yeah. Brotherhood of Railroad Employees.

EE: Was that Mosher’s union back in the middle years of the century?

DM: I don’t know.

EE: Anyway, we don’t need to pursue that too long. So you were saying--. Now would you bargain at the--. Were contracts concluded at the same time?

DM: No. No, no. The hoggers—the engineers—they generally settled first, and what they got all the other unions kind of feed off of.

EE: They were the price setters in a sense.

DM: That’s right, yeah.

EE: in their negotiations. But the contracts might still be ending at the same time?

DM: Not necessarily. Not necessarily, but--.

EE: No? So they might negotiate 1st of January, whatever, and three or four months later--.

DM: Exactly. Oh, yeah.

EE: You’d be guided by that.

DM: By what their decision is.

EE: You weren't working when the big strike of about 1953 took place?

[0:30:05]

DM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EE: Were you working then?

DM: Yeah. I started in '53.

EE: Okay. At the time, or just after the strike? Or was it--. I'm a little hazy as to when exactly the strike took place.

DM: Because there was strikes after that. That had to be after, after the--.

EE: Because there's a big strike--.

DM: Because I started in October of '53.

EE: There's a big strike that precipitated some of the shipping of freight to highways, to trucks, as I've heard it in terms of the development of the industry or transportation in Canada. There were, of course, later stoppages as well, I'm sure. Strikes and lockouts took place.

DM: Oh, we never had a long--.

EE: Never a long one, eh?

DM: Never. Seven days and we were ordered back to work by the government.

EE: Well. [Laughs] A crown corporation.

DM: Every time. Yeah.

EE: It happened every time?

DM: Yeah.

EE: So the calculations were made in those--. [Laughs]

DM: Yeah. You work it out accordingly.

EE: Right. Were there social gatherings of all--? Well, of course--.

DM: The railroaders?

EE: You could hardly sit at the same table as the hoggers, I'm sure.

DM: Oh, sure you would.

EE: You would, eh?

DM: Oh, yeah. There was no--. Yeah. Because they liked to--. I knew some of the guys.

EE: They liked to--.

DM: They'd come back and try to tell you how some of the systems on the locomotives work and kind of just sit back and, "Okay, sure." That kind of a thing. They weren't telling us something we didn't already know.

EE: So there was a certain amount of camaraderie in its own various ways with CN.

DM: Oh, yeah. There was.

JM: You had a ball.

EE: What about the CP, CPR?

DM: We, actually, we didn't have--. Actually, I shouldn't say that. That's not true. I was going to say we didn't have a lot to do with the CPR.

EE: That's what I was wondering.

DM: just because they weren't working in our area. Like they were in their own roundhouse, and they had their own system.

EE: Right. Had their own system.

DM: But eventually, yeah, we kind of got together with the CPR as far as curling goes. We started a curling back in 1955 somewhere in and around there. And we were looking for some curlers, and the CPR was looking for some curlers, so we formed a CN-CP curling league. It went on until today. It's still in operation.

EE: It still goes on?

DM: It still--. Down to four rinks, mind you, but curled every Thursday morning.

EE: Where do you curl?

DM: Fort William Curling Club.

EE: Fort William Curling Club. Great.

DM: Been there all the time. I curled there for about 30 years, and then my knees gave out on me and that was the end of that.

EE: Sure. Yeah.

DM: But it's still going today.

EE: I wonder what--. Credit union shared as well or not?

DM: No. The CN had their own credit union, yeah.

EE: Had their own credit union?

DM: Yeah.

EE: And the CP whatever--.

DM: I don't know. I don't know what they have nowadays because there's no CN employees anymore. Like when I said before--.

EE: We'll talk about changes later on.

DM: Okay. [Laughs]

EE: That's one of them quite clearly. Right.

DM: But, yeah, we had that league for years, and that's where the CN and CPR guys got together. Yeah.

EE: Sure. Chiefly at the curling.

DM: At the curling.

EE: All-Canadian activity.

DM: And after curling. [Laughing]

EE: Oh, yes. Thank God for the after curling. Okay, so what you did, who did you interact with, what tools and equipment did you use? What maybe distinctive equipment in the shops?

DM: Oh, yeah. We had--. Like changing out wheels involved huge turn—or not turntables—drop tables. Like when you take a traction motor and a pair of wheels would weigh in somewhere around 10,000 pounds, so you had to have a table. You dropped--. You put the locomotive over the table, and you unhooked the traction motor and wheels and dropped them down, moved them over to the track next to it, lift them back up, roll them off, and then roll the new ones one. Now, that's a very--.

EE: This was partly the structure of the building?

DM: Of the building, yeah.

EE: The shops involved a number of lines, rail lines, through on which machines could sit on.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: How many bays?

DM: We just had--. The roundhouse was 24 pits. The diesel shop occupied six, and the others were for the steam locomotives. And once the steam locomotives were gone, well, they were just used for storage and anything else that was required.

EE: Is the roundhouse still--?

DM: No, no.

EE: It's gone?

DM: Oh, yeah. It's long gone. In fact, I took pictures of it in various stages of--.

EE: Demolition?

DM: Demolition. Right from when it was all there. I went up on the roof and took a picture looking down to see how it looks like. You know what a roundhouse looks like?

EE: Yes.

DM: Then right from when the last wall came down. I was standing--.

EE: Well, we'll talk about that in terms of changes. I'm just--. This happened after you retired?

DM: The final--.

EE: Because there were always diesel locomotives to be worked on here as long as you worked.

DM: As long as we were there, yeah.

EE: What happens now? They're done in Edmonton?

DM: They're done--. Yeah. It's all done there now. All they got here is one machinist now that checks when the train comes, checks the oil and water, and that's about it.

EE: I see. The locomotives that shunt the grain cars in the elevators and so on, are those road locomotives?

DM: Yeah, they are now. Yeah, they are pretty much, yeah. Well, no. The 1900s are still yard engines per se, but they do--. And you know they're remote controlled, eh?

[0:35:12]

EE: Are they now?

DM: Yeah.

EE: All the changes we can talk about. [Laughs]

DM: You can talk about that, yeah.

EE: And we will. Right. Well, what would you like people to know about the work you and the--? Well, there's one place you worked primarily if we ignore Sioux Lookout. What do you think would interest people about what you were doing?

DM: Well, I don't know. Of course, I'm working with railroaders, so that was the interest, I guess.

EE: What might surprise people about the work that you did? What you were just describing about the repair of an engine, the fact that there are the several units and so on and so forth, I think that's interesting to people. But there are probably other things as well.

DM: Well, what I kind of thought, people always through the railroad was an engine and a train, and nobody gave thought to what keeps these things running on. Of course, the engineer--.

EE: The general public doesn't.

DM: Yeah. The general public, they see a train and there's no thought gone into what kept them going. But, yeah, that's about what--. That was my impression anyway.

EE: A couple of historians, I think they were at York at the time—York University—suggested that people tended to think of railways as transportation organizations along the lines you were suggesting. There was a locomotive in front, there used to be, of course, the tender with the coal when it was a steam locomotive, and then, of course, all the cars, the rolling stock. But their observation about railways in operation was that one could think of them as well as being manufacturing organizations, in days when they would conceivably build even the steam locomotives.

DM: Oh, I see what you're saying. Yeah.

EE: But build rolling stock and so on and so forth. That in fact, there was a great deal of production done by a railway as another aspect of a successful railway.

DM: Well, that was done way back though.

EE: Yeah. Way back. By this time, you were depending on GM locomotives or whatever and so on and so forth.

DM: Yeah, of course. I don't know who built the iron ore cars. I don't if the CN did or--. I don't remember now.

EE: There was a, at one time—and there may still be—a steel car manufacturing business in Hamilton. In fact, 100 years ago, steel car building, and then, of course, Can Car was a combination of a number of car building facilities in the Maritimes and Montreal. Now--. And then of course, they began Can Car here before the Great War.

DM: Yeah.

EE: Envisaged it as a big facility to supply rolling stock to the Prairies, but I don't know whether they did ore cars. Later on, of course, the grain cars came, many of them, I think out of Dominion Steel or Sydney Steel in Cape Breton Island.

DM: Yeah, something like that.

EE: This was employment creating work, I think, for the federal government, building those grain cars. You weren't ever involved with the repair?

DM: No.

EE: Was there any rolling stock of that sort, were there cars repaired here or not?

DM: Oh, yeah. Like I said, when we had the repair track, they had a staff larger than what we had. And they had all the--. Their repairmen were called carmen, eh?

EE: Sure. Oh, so--.

DM: And part reefers with car knockers.

EE: Who were the car knockers?

DM: Were the car men that did all the repair on all the rolling stock, such as iron ore cars that came by, boxcars. And there was boxcars, you know, made of wood, back then before they all went to steel. And they were delivered, built all--. You know, take the old number off, build a new boxcar.

EE: This would be an example of the railway as a manufacturing or--.

DM: Yeah. As doing their work. Oh, yeah.

EE; Right. Okay. So what might surprise people? What are you most proud of in the work that you did over the years?

DM: That I was a pretty good mechanic. We used to have–. Apprentices would come from Winnipeg for what they call their on-line training. Instead of working in the big shop there, they get out and see what the rest of the railroad, how it worked. And I

would get--. I always liked to have an apprentice. I liked to say, "Well, now, what you learnt in Transcona, you forget about now because this is a whole different thing here."

EE: Was that completely true?

DM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

EE: In what ways was that true?

DM: For one thing, an apprentice would come down here, and they would expect a heavy-equipment chains, like taking locomotives up from one tie overhead crane and moving them down to other ones and doing all this heavy work, extremely heavy work. But the change out of brakes here, they had no clue how to do that.

[0:40:11]

EE: So Transcona had equipment to do that kind of heavy stuff?

DM: Oh, yeah. Oh, I was most impressed. First day I walked in the Transcona back shop, I walked in there as an apprentice, and I looked up and here's a steam locomotive being lifted up way up in the air and then moved down about 200 feet further down in the shop and then laid back down again. I just, you know, just couldn't believe that something could be lifted like that.

EE: Well, that's machinery!

DM: Oh, yeah. That was machinery. But they came down--.

EE: But you were saying about the more detailed work here.

DM: I enjoyed teaching them about, if fact, naming parts of a diesel locomotive, you know? Like every part had a name. And then explaining the theory of how air compressors work and how the diesel locomotive engine theory worked and how the air system works and all that. I always kind of liked that, liked doing that.

EE: Do you get a sense that maybe they would send them here for this kind of fine-tuning in their training?

DM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

EE: Because Transcona, surely, they needed that kind of knowledge there too.

DM: It was a whole different type of knowledge in Transcona than what was here. They actually see how the locomotive actually worked on a daily basis. So yeah, they got pretty good training here I'd say.

EE: I guess I'm still curious. What was happening at Transcona for those kinds of machines? There must have been people doing similar work there when it came right down to it, or not?

DM: Well, no.

EE: Or were the road locomotives, rather, ending up at the Fort William shop, Neebing shop?

DM: No, it wasn't that. It was the fact that when you went to the back shops, Transcona, when I went there, the steam engines were still being done in Transcona. The diesels were being done in Fort Rouge, which is another part of Winnipeg.

EE: Right, right. South Winnipeg off Osborne.

DM: When I went to Transcona, you had--. With steam locomotives, the machine is there, made virtually everything for a steam locomotive. They made it there.

EE: Manufacturing.

DM: Machined it and molded it and the whole works. And they did all that kind of work.

EE: You're going to kick me if I say they really deserve the name of the union, International Association of Machinists.

DM: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They were really the machinists there, yeah. We had a small machine shop at Neebing, which of course, when the steam engines were there, we--.

EE: Did work.

DM: Did machine work, you know? But once the diesels came in, it wasn't making, it was replace.

EE: And so when the diesels came in on the Prairies, this Fort Rouge shop was probably enlarged. Or would they even have been built at Fort Rouge?

DM: Well, no. Actually, what they did eventually once the steam engines left Transcona, they moved Fort Rouge over to Transcona and utilized all the facilities.

EE: Ok. I lived in Fort Rouge as a university student.

DM: Did you?

EE: '61 through '64, which would have been the time when those Fort Rouge shops were in operation, I imagine.

DM: Yeah. I lived in Fort Rouge for a while, we did. And it was always close to work, you know?

EE: Yes, very convenient indeed. Right.

DM: Yeah.

EE: Okay. So you certainly have every reason to be proud of keeping those locomotives operating.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: How close the elevators and the grain trade would this have brought you? Would it have been as close as the fact that the grain didn't move if the locomotives weren't pulling it? Or did you get closer to it than that at any time?

DM: I'll have to say that we never concerned ourselves with the grain trade.

EE: Just didn't think of it?

DM: Just didn't enter into our train of thought anywhere along the line because we get trains, the foreman would say, "All right, we've got," just as a figure, "we've got ten trains ordered to go. Got to be out at 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00." Whatever, you know?

And that's what we had to work toward. "Don't be late off the shop track because there's a train out there waiting to go." And everything is geared to time.

EE: And the fact that that locomotive—this would be a yard locomotive, I suppose, you're talking about--.

DM: Not necessarily.

EE: Some of them, they could be--.

DM: Oh, no. We would be working on the engines that actually pulled the trains.

EE: But the reason why that locomotive was needed to be rolling out just didn't arise as a consideration?

DM: Oh, no. No. You didn't want to be late. Boy, phones were ringing right away. "Where's that locomotive? Let's get going here. We've got crews waiting to take it out."

EE: Sure. And it wasn't your concern where the crews were going to take it or what they were going to do?

DM: No. We couldn't care--. The ore trains seemed to be, back in those days, were a big thing in town.

EE: These were iron ore from Steep Rock?

DM: From Steep Rock, yeah.

[0:45:01]

EE: Or from the--.

DM: Atikokan.

EE: There was more than one Atikokan mine, wasn't there?

DM: Oh, yeah. There was Caland, Steep Rock, and I forget the name of the other company that was there. But that was a big thing, ore carriers, you know?

EE: Did you have some kind of sense in the shops then that keeping the locomotives operating on the ore was--. That was important?

DM: Oh, that was number one as far as--. That was number one.

EE: And the grain was just sort of incidental.

DM: It was there, yeah. [Laughing]

EE: Well, the locomotives, of course, were involved also in moving the package freight, passenger cars, and so on and so forth.

DM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Sure.

EE: More of the business.

DM: I remember years—back in the steam days still—remember the Royal American Show? The circus that used to come here? Well, we used to have to get the locomotive ready, the steam locomotive, to pull that train out of town. And I'll tell you, that thing had to shine. And when you shine up a steam locomotive, you take oil, and you wipe oil all over. You paint the wheels white, you know? And it had to--.

EE: All done in white coveralls of course!

DM: Oh, yes. [Laughing] That train had to really sparkle, that engine. They pulled all the Royal American show's train. The circus train.

EE: So how far would that locomotive pull it? To Sault Ste. Marie or wherever the next site was?

DM: It would go—no—it would go up to Winnipeg, probably be the next place that it would--. Well, that would be the next place, yeah.

EE: Yeah. And then they'd clean it off once it got--.

DM: Yeah, they'd do it all over again. Yeah, sure.

EE: Yeah. I wonder if the Royal American shows paid extra for that business?

DM: I don't know.

EE: To my--.

DM: I would imagine they did.

EE: To what extent were you conscious of competition between the two railway companies for business? Did that reach down to your level or not?

DM: Well, no. No, it didn't really. We always thought we were a little better than CPR, but they thought the opposite, so. [Laughing]

EE: I suppose they did. What went into this sense of CN superiority?

DM: Well, I think because it was a Canadian-owned railroad.

EE: They both were, but this is government.

DM: Yeah, but the CPR was privately-owned.

EE: Of course.

DM: You could buy shares into the CPR. You could not buy shares in the CN.

EE: No. It was a crown corporation.

DM: It was a crown corporation, and just to be part of a crown corporation just seemed to be the steadiest thing in the world at that time, you know?

EE: And I guess for a long time it was, actually.

DM: Oh, yeah, for all the time I was there.

EE: We'll talk about changes I guess because that was one of the things that changed later on, I suppose. There wasn't ever a sense by the 60s, shall we say, of how the CNR system actually got started or was there? Was there any kind of consciousness about it?

DM: Well, no. There was not, you know? When I joined the railroad in '53, my brother joined the railroad prior to that, and of course my dad was in the railroad. He joined the railroad, I think, it was in 1920 or '21. Here's his watch. There's his railroad watch.

EE: Oh. Now did he talk about the beginnings?

DM: He never--. I was ten years old when he died, so we didn't really--.

EE: Yeah, unfortunately.

DM: I wouldn't know.

EE: Couldn't talk to him as an adult, ask questions of that sort.

DM: No. So even in all the time that I worked there, rarely was there mention that the CN combined with several railroad companies.

EE: Right. Did you ever hear of the Grand Trunk?

DM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

EE: Or the Intercolonial and so on?

DM: I probably learned more about that after I retired.

EE: Right. You read some history?

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: Because, of course, the Canadian National Railway system was designed for a number of purposes, but it combined--.

JM: All those books.

EE: Ah, the library is here! I hadn't looked at the shelves. Ah, yes. [Laughing] The Canadian National Railway system was created about 1920 out of the bankruptcy of the Canadian Northern, the Grand Trunk Railway—the Grand Trunk Pacific. Of course, the National Transcontinental, Winnipeg to Moncton I guess it was, existed as a government line, and the Intercolonial out there and so on. I think the cynic might say that it was designed to save the Canadian Bank of Commerce, which had loaned an awful lot of money to the railways. Because the Canadian National Railway system started out with the burden of all these bonds, this indebtedness put on the system. It was supposed to pay off the debts. A clean bankruptcy, of course, would have done it, as I say, the Bank of Commerce and so on. If the government had taken them over at $1 per line or something, it would have been very different than taking over the bond, the indebtedness of the railway companies, which then--.

DM: And any money that was made was sent over to England to all the former owners of the railroads.

EE: Well, yes. Many of the bonds would have been held outside the country.

[0:50:01]

DM: That's why we were in debt for so many years.

EE: This is the ironic thing. The leading government line here is actually in debt to foreign. Well, it was in the Commonwealth, of course.

DM: Well, yes. Sure, of course.

EE: Fellow British subjects and all the rest of it. Let's not be too hard on them. [Laughing] Yeah, it's an interesting history that, but by the '60s fortunately—even in the '50s—a lot of that was 30 years in the past and so on. The Great Depression was a different story, but we're not talking about that. So let me see. Do you think that the work you did contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trade? Well, you can't answer that.

DM: No, I can't answer that.

EE: In the simple way. But of course, if the trains hadn't been moving, the grain wouldn't move. So in that sense, you were keeping the grain moving from the Prairies to the elevators. Was there any sense of the winter business when the lake froze over, when the navigation season ended? A certain amount of grain some years was moved by train.

DM: By rail right down east, yeah.

EE: By rail. And so that would mean additional work, I guess, that wouldn't have happened otherwise, I guess. Were you conscious of that some years?

DM: Yeah. We knew once the port closed that there would be grain shipped east by rail. Of course, we didn't have nearly as many trains that went east. It was wintertime in the Prairies too, you know? Even if the grain was stored, you can get rid of that eventually.

EE: Yes. And I suppose from the Prairies, they could run it on the Northern Line for that matter.

DM: Yeah, they could, but they ran it through here pretty much. You know what they did do? And I know this. They would bring a train of grain here, run it through the elevators whether it was the middle of winter or not to dry it, and then load it back up and ship it by rail. So there was a purpose of the elevators in the wintertime.

EE: Sure. Kind of a hospital elevator function if you want to call it that in terms of the drying.

DM: Because it had to be dry.

EE: Right. Describe any connections you see between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain handled in the grain trade. [Laughs] I guess that's the other end of it.

DM: That's the other end, yeah.

EE: It wouldn't have got from those country elevators to here, again, if the locomotives weren't doing their job.

DM: There was a lot involved in getting it.

EE: Well, the next section is on changes, and we've been restraining ourselves a couple of times here. So what major changes did you see in your job and the railway business over the years?

DM: Modernization of the railroad as far as locomotives go.

EE: Because of course you saw the steam into the diesel and--.

DM: Yeah. You know, like, steam engines were pretty inefficient. A steam locomotive might be able to put out 25 percent of their horsepower to the track. All the rest of the power would be running various things on the locomotive. Well, diesel were far more efficient to getting power to the rail, and that's the whole picture.

EE: They were having to power the rest too. Although, the fact that these functions were now electrical, I suppose on the steam locomotive they wouldn't have been electric, these other things that were being--.

DM: No, no. They were a lot of mechanical things would run.

EE: So that was one of the factors.

DM: That was a big factor. The diesel locomotive could haul much more than a steam locomotive could. If you put it like one-on-one, back them up together, the diesel will just pull the steam down the track.

EE: Did you ever see a competition of that sort?

DM: No.

EE: No.

DM: But what they did do, is they used to get ore trains, and they would start off with maybe one locomotive and see how many cars of ore it could pull, and then they'd add another locomotive and see how much it could pull, and then add another locomotive and see how much. And these were loader-door cars at 125 or 130 tonnes each. They kept doing that in one period of time until the couplers started to pull apart. Then they, "Well, that's the limit. We can't haul any more than that."

EE: Did they then run trains with that many locomotives?

DM: Oh, yeah. You could--. When I was at it, there was a rule. Now I don't know who put the rule out, but you couldn't run more than three locomotives in tandem. You could put five or six of them together, but three of them had to be off power. You couldn't run three--.

EE: Right. Deadheaded is the term? Dead--.

DM: No, no. They weren't deadheading.

EE: Now what's deadheading?

DM: Deadheading is taking a dead locomotive. A dead locomotive.

EE: Ok. Just like a car?

DM: Yeah. It's not running or anything. But they would hook up maybe. Maybe they had to just transport locomotives, and they'd put two extra. But they wouldn't shut them down, they'd run them, you know? They wouldn't run more than three because that's what the law.

[0:55:15]

EE: Well, that's what I was wondering. So they'd never have more than three on because that was the limit?

DM: No, not until more recent times, after I left the railroad. I guess they can run more units now.

EE: Deregulation has allowed for that.

DM: I suppose, yeah.

EE: For the rail.

DM: My son tells me that they run two-mile long trains now. That's a lot of train!

EE: It is, indeed.

DM: If you ever had a train here a mile long, when I was working that was considered a long train.

EE: Sure. Well, it is. And once the caboose is gone, which is a--. I was in the House when that was a consideration. It seems to be Iain Angus and I made some speeches on removing cabooses--.

DM: Oh, I would've added. [Laughing]

EE: Because we thought that was dangerous. So there were the technical changes then in the locomotives.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: What other changes do you remember?

DM: Well, of course, the maintenance of the--. Centralization. That was a big thing too. Central Terminal Control, CTC. That was a big thing on the railroad. That's where I could--. The people in the yard office–not the mechanical department–the people that could run a train from Winnipeg to here and move all the switches by pushing a little button here. They didn't need switchmen out there or anything.

EE: What kinds of electronics were they using? At what point did the telegraph lines no longer serve?

DM: Oh.

EE: That's a long time ago, I guess, is it? Because they went to, what, radio then?

DM: Oh, yeah. They went to radio, but radio--.

EE: Had its limitations.

DM: That was fairly late, you know, radios. It was back in probably ’70, maybe in around there.

EE: Are satellite linkups used at all by rail?

DM: I don’t now if they are today.

EE: You’re not aware that they are?

DM: No.

EE: Because that would seem once the satellites were there, that would be--. I mean, a railway could afford to install the equipment on a locomotive and have the signals come that way.

DM: Well, they used to have towers. They used to have towers for the radios years ago.

EE: As they would have to.

DM: They figured they had about a 35-mile range for the radio. They’d have to have a tower and that, you know.

EE: And so they were controlling the switches at the sidings by--.

DM: Yeah. All that kind of stuff, oh, yeah.

EE: And so a control room would have to be established.

DM: Oh, yeah. It was there.

EE: With all the lights and so one.

DM: Just like you see where it shows all the lights and everything. Yeah, they had that. Oh, yeah.

EE: And at some point, they didn't need an engine driver any longer.

DM: That happened not all that long ago. In fact, if you go to the Neebing yards here, I've seen it here. The guy's on the ground, and he's got his little control box here. He'd move the engine forward, backward. Nobody's in the engine and does all the yard switching.

EE: Yes. What's the basic intention would you say of this kind of electrification, radio controls?

DM: You know, it does certainly save on staff, but I think primarily it's just a more efficient way to run the railroad.

EE: So reduction in workforce is an obvious reason for doing it, but you say the end result is more efficient?

DM: Oh, yes. It has to be. When I told you before that we had 100 plus employees in the Neebing roundhouse, now there's one mechanic, one electrician, and a couple of labourers, and that's it. There is no more. There is no shop here anymore.

EE: No. Do they do an adequate job in your opinion?

DM: All they do is just check them out, the water, and if there's something wrong with it, they'll shut it down, hook it onto another engine, and haul it to Winnipeg. That's what they do.

EE: In the Transcona shop or conceivably--.

DM: Yeah. In the Transcona or Symington.

EE: Yes, that's right. The big, huge Symington facility you've got there now.

DM: So that's what they do, you know.

EE: Did you have any involvement with the development of the Symington yards?

DM: No.

EE: I mean, indirectly you were aware of it?

DM: I've never been to the Symington yard.

EE: You've gone by it on the highway?

DM: Yeah. My son works at Symington or--. Well, he still does. He still works out of Symington. His job is basically the same type of work that a labourer did here years ago. Like they look after them, supply the locomotive, fuel them, move them around to where they have to be. So he's still doing that out of Symington now.

EE: The Symington yards were built, what, in the early mid-'60s as I remember.

DM: Hm.

EE: No?

DM: Let me see.

[1:00:01]

EE: Because I read the description. The--.

DM: You might be right.

EE: The hill--.

DM: The hill, yeah.

EE: That was used to make up trains.

DM: The hump yard. Yeah.

EE: Yeah, the hump. Is that the mid-'60s it seems to me somewhere. I was in Winnipeg '60 to '64 and then in graduate school, but back summer of '65, '66. I was back in Winnipeg. So it seems to me I read about it being put--.

DM: I thought it maybe was a little later.

EE: Or was it later?

DM: But I could be wrong on that too. You know we had a hump yard here at Neebing?

EE: Did you?

DM: Oh, yeah. There was a hump yard here, and the trains would come in, and they'd have the hump riders. They'd ride it down the hill, and they'd go into each track for each car that whatever track it was supposed to go on. They had an old streetcar that would run down beside them, pick them all up, and bring them back to the top of the hill and do it all over again.

EE: Yeah. [Laughs]

DM: That streetcar went down east to some railroad museum down there. But, oh, there's been so many changes. Like now, everything's automatic, you know? Well, you were talking about they were getting rid of cabooses. Nobody believed that that would work, and they proved them wrong. It worked 100 percent.

EE: Well, 95 percent. [Laughs]

DM: Well, they're still using them, aren't they?

EE: Well, it can be done, but there must be at least a one percent of the time or sometimes when not having a conductor at the back or people in a caboose can create some challenges for the operation of the train.

DM: Eh. I don't know. At one time I thought that, but now they've been running them for so long now, they don't have any problems.

EE: With few enough accidents.

DM: I guess it's a pretty near foolproof system that they've got.

EE: The accidents happen in the Rockies, I guess.

DM: Oh, yeah. Well, that's not because of [inaudible] conductors or in the tail end. That's just too long a train and putting engines in the middle.

EE: Yeah. Or what's happening in the locomotive at the front, I suppose.

DM: And then they put locomotives in the middle of the train. Literally what happens out there is when they go around a curve that there's so much power and the trains are so long that the cars in the middle or anywhere, when they start to go around, they stretch out so much it lifts the wheels right up off the rails. Then it's on the ground.

EE: Yeah, right. [Laughs] What impact did these changes have on your job and industry? Enormous reduction in employment, I guess, over the years.

DM: Yeah. It was pretty good up until, oh, the '80s. I know like my boy, he would get a job in the railroad no problem at all. Anybody who was a railroader and had a family, I mean, they would get in, but that went on for quite a while. And then, of course, the time came when they had to cut staff, you know?

EE: Because I would think of two or three things. If the grain trade declined as it did in the mid-'80s and later, if there were once upon a time—in the early '80s, 25 years ago—1,800 grain handlers on the waterfront, and then it dropped down to 300—150 working it and so on and so forth—there'd have to be fewer trains. Some of that's automation, of course, too, but there are fewer trains running, so that's bound to impact somewhat. But then other things do kick in. There was a deliberate intention to reduce employment on the railways.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: Did some of that happen in the late '70s already?

DM: Yeah. Yeah.

EE: I have a memory of--.

DM: Like when my kid had been there 21 or 22 years now, and--.

EE: That would take him back to, well, that's '87.

DM: Somewhere around--. And you know, prior to that, you could get a job on the railroad. I don't know when they hire anybody.

EE: No. And then when Mr. [Tellier] took over--.

DM: Yeah, he cut a few. [Laughs]

EE: It seems to me there was one year when the railways cut thousands of jobs and shifted—for CN it was still really a clearly a crown corporation—it was shifting the cost from the transportation system to the UI system out in the country when these guys all ended up there mostly–

DM: Well, you have to realize, another huge change in the railroad when they got rid of the express, CN Express.

EE: The package freight business?

DM: The package freight.

EE: When did that happen roughly?

DM: Oh, that happened way back.

EE: As far back as the '50s conceivably?

DM: No, no. It would be later than that.

JM: '70s?

DM: Somewhere in the '60s, I would say, where that first--. And then of course, they went to–. CN Rail went to trucks.

[1:05:12]

EE: Right.

DM: You know? Haul freight by trucks.

EE: Diesel engines, I suppose.

DM: You know, I saw here just the other day, and it amazed me when I see the CPR train going by here. You'd always ship a load of wheels on a flat car, you know, to go wherever. Go down the highway and here's a transport hauling a load of wheels, railroad wheels. Why? Why? I don't--. You could just tack that on any old train that's going.

EE: Sure. It's bound to be more expensive with a truck.

DM: I would think so, but I don't know. I don't know.

EE: it certainly ought to be. [Laughing]

DM: Certainly. You would think so.

EE: I was astonished to see in a supplement to one of the Toronto papers a little while ago the assertion that railways were still carrying, I think, it was something like three-quarters of the freight in Canada.

DM: Hm.

EE: Now, I found that difficult to believe, although of course, if you're thinking of Crow's Nest Pass coal, for example, or Saskatchewan potash or Prairie grain, obviously there's an awful bulk there in terms of tonnage. But still, with all those trucks rolling it seems difficult to believe that to be the case.

DM: But that's what they do. They run these unit trains just as you said—potash, grain, whatever—and they're unit trains. That's all they haul.

EE: Sure. And I don't suppose you would have any comment on the change from the diversified trains, express and all the rest of it, to these--.

DM: No. That all happened after I was--.

EE: To these unit trains. I suppose there's a certain simplicity of running a unit train.

DM: Oh, it is.

EE: Because you have a train that runs from, well, Sparwood or whatever the destination is in the Crow's Nest Pass to Robert's Bank on Georgia Strait, and it's run sort of back and forth.

DM: That's exactly what it is.

EE: There's a certain simplicity to it, but life doesn't have to be simple. If you can make money with complicated things, you should! [Laughs]

DM: They would run those trains, you know, with the same locomotives, get to their destination, unhook the locomotive, go around the other end, hook them up, and go back.

EE: Empty then.

DM: Empty, yeah. They'd go back empty.

EE: Bring another load down. Well, there were lots of changes to deal with at various times. What challenges did you face on the job would you say?

DM: Well, what I found really challenging was in 1985, computers came in on the railroad. At that time, I didn't know anything about computers, you know? Then a job came up. They wanted a computer coder. A guy took the job, and he didn't like it. I said, "Well." I wanted to get off the floor. I've done enough maintenance work all my--. I put 30 years in that. I said, "I'm going to just see what this is all about." So I went in the office, and I said, "Got anybody for this?" He said, "No." And they didn't have anybody that knew anything about it, so I said, "I'd like to give it a shot." That was my first experience with computers, and I spent half my day talking to Winnipeg and Montreal trying to find out what--.

EE: What did you have sitting in front of you by way of a computer?

DM: Well, basically the same thing. You had a monitor and a computer and a--.

EE: But it was, what, IBM equipment tied in with a mainframe somewhere? I mean in that sense.

DM: Oh, yeah tied in with a mainframe in Winnipeg. What my job was--. Every little thing, everything, to do with maintenance on locomotives had to be coded in. And this was strictly for efficiency purposes. They wanted to know how efficient the shop was. When I say everything, I mean everything. If they had to have a guy go from his worksite to his toolbox to pick up a tool, that was--. We had a book that was about that thick of everything.

EE: So you described step-by-step, stage-by-stage--.

DM: Step--. Everything.

EE: Everything that someone did.

DM: And it was a lot of time.

OM: Time-motion studies.

DM: Yeah. And that was done, and it was my job to code this in everyday, you know?

EE: Now were you told what to type or did you make it up yourself?

DM: Well, I would get the data reports from the mechanics. They had to book everything off that they did, so I would collect all that--.

EE: And then you would input that?

DM: Then I would input that.

EE: And when you print it out, you've got the stuff of a manual.

DM: Yeah. But the thing is, it ended up--. It lasted for about five years, and then they realized that this isn't really a true reading. We had a shop out here, I made it 80 percent efficient.

EE: How do you do that?

DM: Just by not coding something or not getting everything in or the time that it took or whatever, you know? It became such a routine to just go to the--. You look at the sheet, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." And then you put it in. And it should have been--. And that wasn't just me. That was every place across the system did that.

[1:10:19]

EE: It was really playing with the--.

DM: Oh, yeah. And they realized after five years that this is--.

EE: So this is '85 through '90 roughly then.

DM: Yeah. We were just a great railroad according to the figures. [Laughing]

EE: So you may never heard of Mr. Taylor--.

DM: Oh, yes. I worked--.

EE: Oh, you've heard of Taylor?

DM: For Brad Taylor.

EE: Pardon me?

DM: Brad Taylor.

EE: No, this is a different--. One hundred years ago, there was a fellow named Taylor.

DM: Oh.

EE: Who developed this, and so where historians will talk about Fordism—you know, Henry Ford—the idea of paying workers enough so they can buy your product.

DM: Oh, yeah. That's right, yeah.

EE: And so similarly, you get discussion of Taylorism and this fellow and his time-motion studies. One of the easiest ways to get at some of this is in a book on furniture making in--. It's *The Gender of Breadwinners* by Joy Parr in Hanover. She has some discussion about the weaving, the mills in Paris, Ontario, and then the other is on the furniture makers of Hanover. It's very interesting because the Paris people are women, many from the North Country of England—Lancashire and so on—who were brought in to knit in the Penman's mills. And Hanover is largely German in origin, so you have these German furniture makers. So she then discusses how these two places developed over the years, including the big Penman strike about 1947 or 8 I think it was. But in the Hanover case, there's discussion about the attempt to speed things up in the early '20s when Taylorism was applied to the place. Of course, it just caused an awful lot of trouble there as well. So this is kind of my background to my listening to what you were describing here in '85 to '90.

DM: Yeah, so one day, I went to work, and I logged on the computer, and I couldn't get in. I talked to my boss, and he said, "Well here, I'll phone them up. Well, didn't they tell you? Your job's been abolished." [Laughing] Just like that!

EE: And you retired the next year?

DM: No, I had to wait six months.

EE: Oh, six months! [Laughing]

DM: Yeah. I said to the boss, I says, "Brad, you know, I don't want to go back out on the floor." I was senior man in the shop. I said, "I'm not going back out on the floor. I've been off it for five years. I don't even know what's going on out there anymore." He said, "Oh, no, no. We'll look after you." He said, "But your number won't come up until--." I learned that I think in January. He said, "Your number won't come up until June or July before your number will come up for--."

EE: For retirement?

DM: For retirement. So I said, “That’s fine with me, but I don’t want to go back.” “No, no. You can be a gopher.” Go here, go there, do that, do this. So that’s what I did for the last six months of my job.

EE: And you didn’t mind it too much?

DM: I didn’t mind it one bit. I was quite happy.

EE: So this change from being on the floor to working at a keyboard is quite a change.

DM: Quite a change, yeah.

EE: A lot of people in the community would think that you wouldn’t have been able to hack that, I imagine.

DM: Oh, yeah. You know--.

EE: A lot of skepticism?

DM: I didn’t think I could handle it for a while. I’m telling you, that job sure got to me after a while until I finally learnt it, eh? But everyday. I’d be coming home, I’d have numbers going through my head right, left, and centre. Phone Montreal and phone, “How do we do this? How do we do that?” Then of course, after a couple years or so of doing that, I became the computer expert at Neebing. [Laughs] Yeah, sure! Nobody else was doing it, you know? So I became the expert. [Laughs] You’re talking to the wrong guy.

OM: Ahead of the curve.

DM: Yeah.

EE: Well, that sounds like adaptability. My hat’s off to you.

DM: It was good for me because, like I said, I’d been on that floor for five years, and you’re up to your elbows in dirt and grease and all–and heavy work. It was all heavy work.

EE: Now, it did require a great deal of skill.

DM: Oh, yes.

EE: Mental acuity to do that.

DM: Yeah.

EE: But this other required all of that mental acuity plus some.

DM: Yeah, plus. Yeah.

EE: As another change then, you retied in ’91. Would you say that the five years working as a coder and all of that prepared you for retirement by any chance? When did you get your internet or email address?

DM: I’ll tell you about that. When I quit the railroad, I said to the wife, I said, “You know, I don’t care if I ever see another computer for the rest of my life.” [Laughing] So I didn’t. I said, “I don’t need a computer at home. Why do I need a computer?” Well, my daughter started to get after me. She was into that.

EE: She wanted one?

DM: My son wanted it. No, they were out. They were out, out of the family already—or out of the house. So finally, I decided, “Oh well, maybe I should get a computer.”

[1:15:08]

EE: Because they wanted to be in touch with you via internet?

DM: Oh, yeah. Sure. So I got one, and now of course, I wouldn’t be without it, eh? But it took a long time before I decided, “Eh, might as well stay with it.”

EE: Sure.

DM: I got my first computer, and of course, knowing nothing about computers whatsoever, I had 1 GB of hard drive and I though that was--. "Oh, I'll never use that up." Well, you know what happened there.

EE: What kind of computer did you buy?

DM: At that time? Oh, I don't even remember. One of the popular ones.

EE: A PC?

DM: Yeah, it was a PC. Yeah.

EE: Not an Apple.

DM: No, no. I'm thinking about that now too.

EE: Oh, by all means, do. I'm just--.

DM: I'm really thinking about that. I'm getting a little a fed up with my PC.

OM: What do you use it for?

DM: Well, I used to, and I still do–. I spoke to you earlier about this about this tire-iron club, and I was on the executive and still am. No, I'm not. I just retired this year out of that job. But I was on that as secretary-treasurer, and of course, we had a lot of emailing to do to various places and everything. And we have an RV club that the wife and I are both on the executive of that, and that involves setting up--. We have a group that we had trailers and away we'd go to various places. We're called Wagon Masters, and we set up the trips to wherever we go, the wife and I.

EE: Yeah, we should get on the record that we're talking about Airstream trailers here. [Laughing] And of course--.

JM: No, we're the only Airstream in the group.

DM: Yeah, we're the only ones that got an Airstream.

EE: Oh, so these are groups that have--.

DM: Of our group, just with trailers.

JM: You name it, we got it.

EE: Of RVers using whatever.

DM: Yeah, RVers. Whatever they have.

EE: I was thinking, though, that you probably do get to Airstream gatherings, do you?

DM: No, we never went for them, with them.

EE: Oh, you haven't?

JM: They want to much money to join their clubs.

EE: Oh, really?

DM: It's--.

JM: You get a number.

DM: It's just something we never did do. We have our own club here, you know? It's just a great mix of people.

EE: An Airstream club or an RV club?

DM: RV club. It's an RV club.

EE: An RV club. Sure. Doesn't matter what you're--.

OM: How many Airstreams in Thunder Bay?

JM: Three.

OM: Three, eh?

DM: I don't know if there is still. There's just two now.

JM: There used to be three Airstreams in town. Used to be.

DM: What's the name across the way has one and there's mine.

JM: Mc--. Whatever.

DM: We ran across ours during an election. The wife was--. What were you doing?

JM: That was the--.

DM: Enumerator or something?

JM: The chief or whatever there, yeah.

DM: And she talked to another woman, and they got talking about trailers.

JM: This was February.

DM: In February, yeah.

EE: Oh, yes.

DM: She said, "Oh, we've got an Airstream at home." We had to have a look at that.

EE: Right.

JM: Well, I phoned him at home, and I said, "People here have got an Airstream. I've never seen the inside of one, but we want our Airstream." So that was it! February, we were talking camping.

EE: Well, we were talking about--. Were we talking about vivid memory? No, we weren't. I should ask you. What are your most vivid memories about your job?

DM: You know, one memory—I was thinking about that last night—is all my kids and the neighbourhood kids, I'd take them over to the shop and let them run a locomotive. You know, you get a 10-year-old kid or whatever and--. **[thud sound]** Fell down?

JM: Oh, don't worry about it.

DM: And I'd take them over to the shop and get them on a locomotive on the shop track and let them actually run the--. I'd sit them on my lap and let them actually run the locomotive.

EE: They'd actually move it?

DM: Yeah. Take the brakes off, open the throttle, ring the bell, blow the horn.

EE: Oh, boy. And the feeling of power that little guy or girl would have.

JM: Kid's 40 years old and they still remember Grandpa, well, Uncle Don taking them.

EE: I can well imagine!

DM: Yeah, I really, I enjoyed that. That I was allowed to do that, you know? Of course, you wouldn't dare do that nowadays. You'd have insurance problems and everything else, you know?

EE: We have become a frightened society and lost a great deal in the process.

DM: Yes. Oh, God, have we ever.

EE: I'll say.

DM: It's unbelievable.

EE: Other vivid memories?

DM: Well, there are memories of incidents. Incidents that have--.

JM: Good times with the people.

DM: Yeah. You know, we built the CN Hall out here across the swing bridge there. It belongs to the Natives now, but we built that back in '72 I believe it was. CN Recreation Association, and we built that. And we'd have great parties going on there, occasions. And everybody, every railroader was involved with that in the Lakehead.

[1:20:03]

EE: So this was one of CN-CP--.

DM: Just CN.

JM: No. Just CN.

DM: Canadian National Recreation--.

EE: Oh, but all the different kinds of all the trades.

DM: All the unions, all the trades, all the people from--. Any CN employee was more than welcome. They'd join the club, you know, and we run that for many years. Then finally, well, due to the government, they gave it all to the Indians now.

EE: Well, of course, it was originally taken from them.

DM: Yes. Yes, that's right.

EE: Yeah.

DM: But anyways, yeah, that was a good time.

EE: Did they compensate you or give you--.

DM: Oh, no. No, no.

EE: So you just lost it?

DM: We lost, but then--.

JM: Well, they paid the taxes on it and everything.

DM: The railroad paid all the taxes on it.

EE: Oh.

DM: All the time we were using it, and the railroad supplied 90 percent of the building supplies and built it. So we didn't have any debt at all.

EE: Sure. You didn't build it on company time, I don't suppose.

DM: Oh, come on. [Laughs] Of course it was built on company time!

EE: Right. Got the picture.

OM: Coffee breaks.

EE: Your wife was encouraging you to mention something earlier, and I cut her off at that point. What was it?

DM: What was that?

JM: Oh, that was when you used to go up--.

EE: Was it the ore dock?

JM: To the--.

DM: The ore dock.

JM: The ore dock in the middle of winter when it was so freezing cold, and everything was frozen up there.

DM: We used to go up there and do maintenance. We'd go up there in January and get all the chutes—those were the big chutes that came down to load the iron ore onto the boat—and we'd have to go up there and do the maintenance on them. Make sure all the winches were working right. And that was, like she said, didn't matter the weather. You went up there, and you had to get this all done before the first ship come in. And there was 200 chutes to maintain, you know? No safety devices up there at all. You're walking on a walkway this wide, and then there was a drop down in a great big, the size of this room hole where they dropped the ore. The trains would come up and just drop them in there. And then you'd do that all in the wintertime. I did that just for one year, but that was enough of that.

EE: I can well imagine. You wouldn't volunteer for it.

DM: No, I wouldn't do that. At the time it was good because it got me onto a day job, and this was one way. By the time I finished this winter at this, spring is going to come, and the next guy on the day shift is going to retire—the next older guy—and I was next to get onto the day shift. So I said, "Well, I'll do that just for now, and come summer I'll have a nice day job." And that's the way it worked out.

EE: Because you had been working, what, night shift earlier?

DM: Oh, yeah. I worked a swing shift from, what, three afternoons and two day shifts. I did that for a dozen years anyways. I worked 4:00 to--. I didn't work much midnights though.

EE: Were there people who worked just midnights?

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: Maybe got used to it and liked it.

DM: Preferred. Preferred. They wouldn't take day jobs or anything.

EE: But there wasn't any swinging where you'd--. A son-in-law works at Abitibi—sorry, he's out at OPG at the generating station now—and it would be out three days and then a day or two off and then he's nights and so on and so forth.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: That kind of stuff was tough on the body.

DM: No, we had pretty well fixed shifts. Like I said, a couple of guys worked midnights, and everybody would think you're nuts, How come you work the midnights? But they'd just done it for so many years--.

EE: Sure, got used to it.

DM: Just that's the way they lived.

EE: When they got rested enough to do something, they had the daylight to enjoy, I suppose, would be part of the rationale for it.

DM: But there were things that went on on the shop track, there were accidents that you remember.

EE: Do you want to tell us about one or two of the accidents that happened?

DM: I can remember one. Yeah, there was that too. That was a bad accident there. We had a crane, a mobile crane, and they were--. Actually, what the crane did, they were unloading traction motors out of a flat car onto the ground—or onto the rail rather—and we had this mobile crane was lifting them up and swinging them over. And this mobile crane, we had it situated on the edge of the turntable. They didn't block it right, the operators and his guys. They lifted one motor out, and a very good friend of mine was standing beside the crane, and they swung it over, and the crane flopped right over. Right over on the side of the turntable. Pinned him underneath it. We were, oh, I don't know how many hours before we had to get, what is it, Twin City Harbours? They had big cranes. Not Twin City Harbour, I forget what it's called now. But they had to get their rigs out there to lift this crane up to get him off. That was a bad situation. Bob, he's still got--.

[1:25:05]

EE: He survived it?

JM: Oh, yeah.

DM: Oh, yeah. He did survive it, yeah.

JM: We don't know how. We got pictures and everything.

DM: He went after the railroad, and he got nothing from the railroad. They just kind of backed right away from it. They just wouldn't accept–. They slapped the operator's hands and said, "You shouldn't have done that." But that was bad. That was really a bad incident that happened. And I was there at the time, and you've got your best friend there pinned under this crane and can't do nothing.

EE: Yeah. It was too heavy to move.

DM: There was a couple of things we wanted to do to relieve the pressure off where his leg was pinned, but we couldn't do that because the machine was on its side and it was leaking fuel. So you couldn't light a torch up and just cut it.

EE: Right.

DM: You just had to wait.

EE: And there's no way you can get a jack under it to try and jack it.

DM: No. Oh, no, no. There was no--.

EE: It was just too heavy for that.

JM: And then it was the pressure on his chest and everything. The doctor that came, they had to move the crane up or whatever like millimetres at a time--.

DM: Slowly there.

JM: To relieve the pressure on him.

EE: It's amazing what people can survive. This farmer I was interviewing in Manitoba had a tractor run over his chest. And when he said that I could see there was a certain amount of misshape to his chest, but he survived that! I marvel to it, what people can survive.

DM: There was one other funny--. I always remember this funny incident. When you're moving a locomotive down a track and you've got a side track over here and a crossover track to move over to that other track. Well, what you usually do is you have your helper—the engineer has a helper or what's called a hostler—and this helper would--. You would stop the train, and he would jump off, turn the switch, and then you'd cross over. This guy, I don't know what he was thinking, but he jumped off, and the engine was still going forward. And he jumped off, and the front truck of the engine went over the switch, and then he turned the switch under the locomotive. [Laughs] So the back end of it started to go over here! And the thing was actually going down two sets of tracks like that, you know?

EE: And there's a limit to how flexible the carriages are.

DM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there is, but there was enough. And actually, it pulled the whole rail toward the--.

EE: Yeah, I can imagine.

DM: We looked out there. Jesus, that was funny! This poor guy, he thought, "I'm done. I've just lost my job." [Laughing] Yeah.

EE: But he survived?

DM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EE: Was a lot of attention paid to health and safety in earlier years?

DM: No. That came in, it really came in, in the probably the' 70s when all this WHIMIS program came in and all that kind of stuff. Then they started to really bear down on health and safety on the railroad, you know? And that was a good thing. First thing everybody had to wear hardhats and all that. There was a lot of–. Most of the employees didn't want to do that. I enjoyed a hardhat

because I used to bump my head on the locomotives all the time underneath, you know? But I always wore mine. I thought it was pretty good, but a lot of guys, you know. And the company threatened to fire them and everything if you don't wear your hardhat. I never heard of anybody ever getting fired over it, but they would sure threaten you, you know?

EE: Well, it's changing the work culture.

DM: Oh, yeah.

EE: It takes a while, I'm sure. There are always blockheads around who don't think they need to do it! [Laughing]

DM: But then it got real good. And I used to think they'd waste a lot of money on this health and safety because they'd take me and the boss and maybe somebody else and fly us to Winnipeg for a one-day meeting and then fly you back home. What did we do? We didn't accomplish anything, you know?

OM: Due diligence.

DM: Yeah, due diligence. That's right, yeah. And then towards the end there, I thought they were slipping quite a bit. Health and safety was starting to slip quite a bit.

EE: Well, that's a suspicion of some--.

DM: Less employees there.

EE: More and more automation, more and more central control, and so forth, so there aren't bodies to worry about.

DM: That's right, and you know, guys would get away with a lot more. There wasn't the--. The management was less as far as--.

EE: Sure. Fewer supervisors.

DM: Like our department had a locomotive foreman, head shop foreman, and then the rip track they had the same thing. And then in later years, there was one boss. Never came over to either the rip track or--. He worked out of the yard office, you know?

EE: Had no idea what people were doing out here?

DM: No idea what was going on.

EE: Were you active in your union at all?

DM: Not really. I was a union member, yeah.

EE: Of course, yes.

[1:30:00]

DM: I never took a--.

EE: Not on the executive or anything of that sort?

DM: I run for shop steward one time, and I figured I had a couple of votes. I probably had a fair chance. I ended up getting one vote, and that was my own. That was the end of it! [Laughing]

EE: Why do you think the winner got the support? Any ideas?

DM: Well, the guy that got the job, he was pretty good, you know? He could yell at the boss, and he did. [Laughs] He was pretty good.

EE: Of course, the joy of being a shop steward is that you had the right to yell at the boss.

DM: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah.

EE: You would get away with it and not get fired.

DM: That's right. Yeah. But no, I never run for office.

EE: Would you have any thoughts about either the role of the union effectiveness or management? Industrial relations, shall we say. Any thoughts about industrial relations with CN?

DM: As far as unions go, that was the best thing that ever happened to the railroad. We didn't get big raises, you know. We were getting—which we didn't like about it—is if everybody got a five percent raise, an engineer is making $20,000 a year and I'm making $10,000, who's getting the best raise here, eh?

EE: And of course, parliament would end up doing that. The arbitrator or whoever is put in charge of--.

DM: The percentages.

EE: They'd do these percentages across the board.

DM: And we didn't like that, but the railroad, I think, if it wasn't for the union, would have been back in the whole 1918 years.

EE: Yeah. Or earlier, because actually 1918, I think, there was centralized bargaining for all the railways in Canada. [Laughs]

DM: Yeah.

EE: Of course, it was the war, so that allowed some opportunities. Back to the 19th century or 1919 Winnipeg Strike you might have in mind. Of course, Winnipeg shut down, but the trains never stopped.

DM: Well, we had a few incidents that year. A couple of strikes where running crews go to work or tried to go to work. There was some hard feelings that way. Occasionally. Not too much though.

EE: It was the problem. There was never, other than this 1918 attempt I suspect, to have common table negotiations with all the unions together.

DM: Oh, no. Not the time that I--. I don't know what goes on nowadays, you know.

EE: But through those 35 years--.

DM: In fact, the unions now, I think the shop staff unions are CAW [Canadian Auto Workers] now.

EE: Yeah. They may well be.

DM: The IAM is out.

EE: Well, vivid memories about your job, you've given us a few. Where are we here? Adjustment, no. Maybe you better just tell me.

OM: 25 minutes.

EE: Twenty-five. [Laughing] I don't think we'll need that looking at my questionnaire here. What were the most important evens that happened in your workplace? Do you think you've covered those or are there others?

DM: Oh, yeah. The switchover to the computer was the biggest thing that happened to me.

EE: Yeah. Do you know Roy Lamore at all?

DM: I know of him.

EE: Yeah. He was the first one we interviewed, actually, as it happens. He worked for CPR, of course. He was involved in the designating of grain cars as far as the elevators they were sent, but he talked about computerization in the early '70s coming in there. And were there 30 people were working in that room?

OM: Yeah.

EE: And when they were finished with the computerization, there were maybe three or four or whatever. Just incredible drops.

JM: Well, how many are left on the railroad now, Don? Not too many.

DM: Oh, there's no yard office staff, or virtually none.

JM: No, I mean across the country.

DM: Oh, I don't know. I don't know. I know when I started the railroad, there was 120,000 employees.

EE: Yeah. I mean this was an organization to make waves with.

DM: Yeah.

EE: To move freight.

DM: I have a--. I don't know if you're still interested in interviewing anyone else, but I have Howard Mackie's number if you want to call. He worked in the yard office, and he would be--.

EE: We'll add him to the list.

DM: Add him to the list.

EE: We're interested in talking. Do you think it's important to preserve and share the—the questionnaire, of course, is grain trade history—but your experiences?

DM: Oh, yeah. Because it won't be long now that Neebing shops will be forgotten. Nobody will remember. "Oh, was there a shop there?" Like how many people remember or knew about the roundhouse down in Mission? Out on the reservation out there. There was a roundhouse out there. 1925 when they moved it from there to Neebing. In 1925 there was a roundhouse down there.

JM: And the Port Arthur one.

[1:35:01]

EE: A roundhouse usually leaves remains behind because it's a fair amount of concrete in one, I suppose, is there?

DM: Yeah. There is, but--.

EE: Or does that get blasted and taken out as well?

DM: No. No, no, no. No, not if you're--.

EE: So if there's a roundhouse, usually, you can find the site.

DM: You can probably find--.

EE: See the evidence.

DM: I'm sure over here that the cement foundations and that are still there. I haven't been over there to look, mind you.

EE: But the steel all went to a scrap house, I suppose.

DM: Oh, everything. Those roundhouses were all made out of BC fir, 16-inch timbers–beautiful lumber and worth a fortune!

EE: And what happened to that?

DM: Oh, the guy that bid on the destruction, tearing it down, demolition, that was part of it. He got all the lumber. And he took that apart very carefully.

EE: Oh, I see. He knew what he was getting. Okay.

DM: Oh, yeah. He knew exactly what he was getting. Oh, yeah. And that ended, I think, it was '91 when they finally tore down the last wall. It looked like such a barren space, you know? It was gone. And yet, ask people today, and they don't even know what Neebing was.

EE: Sure. You have pictures of that, you were saying earlier of--.

DM: Yeah, I took a lot of pictures of it as the--. And then I sent them into a railroad museum down east.

EE: Where is the museum that you were mentioning?

DM: This one was in Ottawa, or Montreal rather.

EE: In Montreal?

DM: Not Ottawa. In Montreal. Oh, I can't think of the guy's name.

EE: I may have some--. It wasn't a McCabe by any chance?

DM: No, no. No, can't think of it.

EE: Well, if you turn it up, give me a call, let me know. Let me see. What aspects of the history do you feel we should concentrate on preserving? Well, I guess, these parts of the railway business.

DM: We tried, just the local employees here, roundhouse employees–. Like when we knew that the roundhouse was going to be torn down--. One year prior to that, they spent over $100,000 in repairing the roof in this roundhouse. Oh, jeez. You just spent--. You're talking about money. And we tried to see if we could get it designated as a museum.

JM: Heritage.

DM: Heritage thing, and it didn't go nowhere. That didn't work out.

EE: Well, it took $100,000 to repair the roof. It would take a certain number of thousand to keep it up and so on. It was repaired to--.

DM: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. But then we thought if we could keep it up as a museum.

EE: Sure. But there are factors.

DM: There was just no doubt that was coming down, and that was it, you know?

EE: Sure. Are there any questions that we might have asked that you can provide now, and I'll ask them? Anything we didn't ask about that comes to mind?

DM: Oh, I thought we covered it pretty good. Well, my aspect as far as the railroad.

EE: Yeah. Well, that's the intention.

DM: I moved up to Sioux Lookout, and to me that was like a brand-new railroad. I'd just finished my apprenticeship, and I went up to Sioux Lookout, and I thought, "Well, I know everything there is to know about locomotives." Until I went up there, and I found out that a passenger train comes through there twice a day, and it just stops there for 15 minutes. And if you've got a problem, you had better have it fixed. [Laughs] You had better. And then I thought, "Well, jeez. I didn't know about that. I didn't know." You get it done and you get going because you don't delay this train. I learnt a lot about railroading in a hurry up there–like mainline service, you know?

EE: Sure.

DM: And that was--. I just didn't believe how little I did know about railroading at that time. But then you learned. You learned.

EE: Sure. One does.

DM: That's for sure.

EE: It's always--.

DM: But yeah. I figure I covered pretty much--.

EE: Great. Well, there are the last couple of questions about memorabilia and other persons to interview, which we don't have to put on the tape, I don't think. So, let me wrap up Mr. McKay, Don. You've done a great job. I'm very grateful that you deigned to give us this time after having thought it wasn't grain trade stuff.

DM: I certainly didn't think we'd be going into this detail. Actually, I had no idea what you were going to do.

EE: No, of course not.

DM: I talked to--.

EE: We're going to wrap it up. Thanks very much. Push the button, and we can flip this over to add names to the list. Howard Mackie, you were saying?

DM: Yeah, I'll give--.

End of interview.