

**Narrator:** Tal Morgan (TM)

**Company Affiliations:** Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)

**Interview Date:** 17 April 2009

**Interviewer:** Ernie Epp (EE)

**Recorder:** Owen Marks (OM)

**Transcriber:** Sarah Lorenowich (SL)

**Summary:** Government grain inspector Tal Morgan discusses the progression of his career through the Canadian Grain Commission, starting off in the Grain Exchange sample room, becoming an assistant inspector on loading ships, and eventually making his way up to supervising inspector. He details his responsibilities at each level in both the Grain Exchange and within the elevators, and his movement across the waterfront to each operating elevator. Morgan describes his pride in representing Canadian farmers and upholding standards that gave Canada an international reputation for quality, as well as sharing his fears of recent debates about getting rid of the CGC. Other topics discussed include the dusty conditions of elevators, winter grain transportation by rail, the importance of visual identification in inspection, changes to the overall Lakehead grain industry, possible reasons for the local industry's downturn, and vivid memories of work on the cold waterfront.

**Keywords:** Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain inspection; Chapple's Building; Thunder Bay Grain Exchange; Grain sampling; Grain grade appeals; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Outward inspection; Inward inspection; Grain dust; Dust control; Health and safety; Lakers; Salties; Thunder Bay terminal grain elevators; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool 7; Paterson Elevator; Richardson Elevator; United Grain Growers Elevator A; Untied Grain Growers Elevator M; Canadian wheat varieties; Port Arthur; Intercity; Fort William; Prince Rupert; St. Lawrence Seaway; Grain industry downturn; Grain elevator closures; Computerization; Automation

Time, Speaker, Narrative
EE: Well--. <b>[Loud beep]</b> Something wrong somewhere.
OM: Aha!

EE: Could you start by giving us your name for the purposes of this recording? And describing how you came to work in connection with the grain industry.

TM: Well, my full name is Emrys Talfryn Morgan. I go by Tal. I lived across the street from a gentleman by the name of Peter Fraser, who was a 2-IC of the government grain inspection in 1951. I graduated from Port Arthur Tech in 1951, and I had started to work for L. A. Green as an apprentice. And not too happy. And Mr. Fraser came across the road one night and said, "Have you got a job?" At which point I said, "Yes." He said, "Oh, I was going to offer you a job with the government." I said, "Well," I said, "when could I start?" [Laughs] And he said, "Tomorrow." I said, "I'll be there!" [Laughing] So that is the way I got involved in the grain business.

EE: And at that time the department, the organization was still called the--.

TM: Canadian Grain Commission [CGC]

EE: It was the Canadian Grain Commission already in 1951?

TM: Yeah.

EE: And so you worked there from 1952 until your retirement?

TM: 38--. 20 years ago, ok, 1989.

EE: '89. Yeah.

TM: Yeah. During that time, I think I was laid off maybe twice on seasonal layoffs, but other than that, one job for my working years.

EE: That sounds like a very happy situation given the ups and downs of the economy that occurred through those years.

TM: [Laughs] Yes!

EE: So even on a seasonal basis, you worked through most of the winters?

TM: Yes. And the couple of times that I got laid off because I was temporary-seasonal appointment at that time, I was lucky enough to get into the mill for the month and half or two months that I was off. And at that time, the mills were on three shifts. The elevators were actually on one shift, and if shipping or unloaded required, they would be working three hours overtime of a night. And I thought, “Jeez, that’s better. The government’s got better hours than the mills at that time.” So when navigation opened up, they gave me a call, “Do you want to come back?” Both times I came back, so.

EE: How long did it take before you were permanent staff with the Grain Commission?

TM: About five years. And then became temporary, and then it was seasonal. I was subject to layoff if it was required. But in those years every second year the elevators would be doing their audit, which required extra people. So I was fortunate enough to be kept on pretty well, like I say, other than the two or three—I think it was twice—that I got laid off maybe for a month and a half or so during the winter.

EE: How large a staff did the Commission have at the time? Did you have a sense of that?

TM: Oh, we had to have a couple hundred anyway.

EE: A couple hundred people?

TM: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

EE: Quite an organization!

TM: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

EE: So what did you find yourself doing then in the Grain Commission?

TM: Well, when I first started, I worked up in the Grain Exchange, which was over in the Chapple’s, third and fourth floor of the Chapple’s store. Up there it was a case of when the samples came in from the elevator from the cars that were being unloaded and the boats that were being unloaded, they were retained for—the car unload samples—were retained for 30 days. So they had to be put in tins and ticketed and put away on the shelf. And the shipment samples were kept for a year, and they were kept on the third floor. And again, they had to be tinned up and be available if there was a question arose at unloading or if the farmer or whoever owned the grain at unloading wasn’t satisfied with the grade that he had received, he had an opportunity to call for a survey on it,

and he had the 30 days. And we retained the samples for that time. After that, at the end of the 30 days, they were dumped. So it was an ongoing thing. Filling the cans today and then dumping them that were 30 days spent.

**[0:05:12]**

EE: So you spent part of our day-- Well, I suppose they would be coming in through the day, but whatever--.

TM: Well, basically, they were picked up for 1:00, and then as the inspectors up there wanted to look at samples, we would clean them up and prepare them, ready for them to look at. And they had a moisture testing room, so we ran moisture tests on the samples that were required as well. So there was a fair amount of variety. I'd say there was always wires—what we called wires—which would come in from the telegraph at that time that a farmer or an owner wanted us to look at another sample. So it meant going down the aisle and finding that particular sample and bringing it out, preparing it for the inspector to look at and decide whether or not the grade that was put on the elevator by the government inspector there was satisfactory or if it should be up or lowered a grade.

EE: I see. So there was a fair amount of work of that sort then?

TM: Oh, yes.

EE: The farmers were questioning the grade or wanted to be reassured, getting a second opinion on it.

TM: Oh, yeah. We could have-- I remember this time we had 30, 40, 50 samples a day that we'd had to bring off the shelf for reinspection by the inspectors up in the Grain Exchange.

EE: Did you get any kind of sense of the proportion that were successful, if you will, in an improvement in grade?

TM: As I remember, there wasn't-- If it was one that-- The owner might even call for what was called a "forward sample" in which case we would take half of the sample that we had here and put it in a bag, and it would be sent to Winnipeg for the Winnipeg office to take a look at. And possibly if it was an agent sample or even a farmer's sample, they could actually go into the Grain Exchange in Winnipeg, you know, for their satisfaction to see that it was the grain that they were talking about.

EE: The Commission was based in Winnipeg, I guess, was it?

TM: Yes. Yeah.

EE: That was where the boss was. Also of course, closer to the farmers so the farmers could come in and be satisfied.

TM: That's right.

EE: By comparison of his sample to other samples, then he's getting a good grade.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: The work that you did in some ways was--. I don't know what the right word. I'm not sure I should say menial work or whatever. It's sort of clerk's work, although it involved handling these things. Were you being trained in the process of doing this work, which had to be done obviously?

TM: Well, actually, the inspectors that were looking at the samples quite often would say, "Come on here and take a look at this. Here's something that we don't see that often." And it might be a variety of the grain, or it might be a weed seed or something that was in there. So this was a learning process in that regard. Now that--. I was up in the sample room for, oh, maybe four or five months at that time. There was other times that I was up there as well, but when you went out to the elevator, it was a situation where first thing when the boxcars at that time--. Where today we have the tankers, but it was the boxcars. In an elevator like Pool 7, you'd have five tracks, and each one had a dumper on it, and each dumper would dump 20 cars in the morning and 20 cars in the afternoon. So there's 100 cars that would go through during the eight-hour shift.

When the cars come in, they would have a ticket on them which indicated the station that they were shipped from, possibly the grade. And all these were taken off the car, basically by a member of the weighing staff. And they, at that time, if the door would be opened by an elevator employee, and they would look in and they would assess the load line in the car. Then the tickets would come to the elevator, and they would write out what we call "shunts," which would be maybe six or seven or eight cars on a sheet which indicated the car number, the station, and the type of grain. Then our job as samplers would be to obtain a sample from each of those cars as it was unloading. Now in earlier times, they didn't have automatic samplers, but during my time, there was automatic, chain-driven samplers. So it was a case of watching to make sure when the car was completely dumped and the hopper was empty, we would retrieve the sample in a bucket, take it up to our office, make sure that the right information, the right ticket goes in, and then an inspector would look at it and put the grade on it.

**[0:10:47]**

EE: So there'd be one sample generated from each car by this--.

TM: From each car.

EE: Particular device that was pulling it out as the grain flowed, I suppose.

TM: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. Now once the inspector had assigned a grade to it, in the meantime, the weighing staff have weighed that car. And if it is close to what the load line that the trackman had put on when he pulled the tickets, okay. If not, then there would be a checking out system that was carried out. But once our inspectors put a grade on it, then all this information had to be recorded. So we had, dare I say, typical government operation where you had three, four, and five copies [laughs] on the paperwork. Canadian National [CNR] cars had to be on a separate sheet from Canadian Pacific [CPR]. Different companies required an extra sheet, so it was on a separate pad. So it all had to be recorded, and then up to the office. And again, if there was changes made as a result of a survey or a wire being called on a car, change made up in the sample room, then you had to make sure that change went into the office to change the original paperwork.

EE: Yeah. The original information on the load in the car would have been put on by whom?

TM: The loading elevator out west.

EE: Out in wherever.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

EE: So this was a matter then of either confirming their judgement or varying it?

TM: Yes.

EE: And of course, the final decision subject to this appeal would be--.

TM: That's right.

EE: What happened here.

TM: Yeah.

EE: And so the weigh staff, those were Grain Commission people as well?

TM: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

EE: How many sections, in a sense, or how many different kinds of things would people be doing, Grain Commission employees? Weighers, samplers, inspectors.

TM: Well, weighers, samplers, entomology, which checked for infestation.

EE: Of insects and things.

TM: And moisture test lab, which did the moisture tests. So I think that was basically the breakdown on the number of staff.

EE: Sort of five different functions, could one say?

TM: Yes. Yeah.

EE: Right. And so you did this, well, we got the first few months underway. Incidentally, the learning which you were pointing to is rather like that of an apprentice.

TM: Right.

EE: Was it largely apprentice-type learning or were there--. Did you sit classes along the way?

TM: No. It was pretty well on your own. There was grading booklets that were available and a variety books that were available. And if you were interested in going further, they were available, but it was up to you. There was exams, and once you got a seasonal appointment, the next step would be an assistant inspector. And usually, the assistant inspectors assisted the inspectors more closely, but they also were the people that were responsible for the loading of the ships. They would be on the ships and check the holds and make sure that the proper grade is going in the proper holds. That was an assistant inspector's step up the

ladder. And then from there, PI-1. A classification of one, two, three, four—four being inspector in charge of an elevator—and a PI-5 was a supervisor. So that was the various--.

EE: That was as high as it rose here at the Lakehead.

TM: Yeah.

EE: The person in charge of a--. [... **telephone rings**]

**[audio pauses]**

**[0:15:07]**

OM: Just pause for a couple of seconds because it takes a while for it to kick in.

EE: We were just talking about the loading of the ship. That's a pretty substantial responsibility, ensuring that the ship is clean, first of all, I suppose, because that's a concern I suppose right to the bottom of those holds. And then there are the various holds in the ship, I suppose, and the cargo might involve a variety of shipments of grain. Ships rarely took on everything at one elevator either, did they not? Did they move from elevator to elevator?

TM: Now it's an indication because of the size of them and the difficulty in loading and the volume of the ships now. But back in the '50s and '60s, much smaller, much smaller vessels.

EE: These were the old lakers, I suppose.

TM: Orders were much smaller. You might have a canaller. You could have a barge. If you were starting the loading, then the condition of the vessel was most important, to make sure it was clean and dry and that sort of thing. If it had been loading some place else, you received a pass-on slip from the previous elevator which indicated [No.] 2 Northern went in 2-Hold, [No.] 1 Feed Oats went in 3. So right away, you checked your order from your elevator to make sure that the same grade is going into the same holds. That basically was the big thing then. In case of inclement weather, you gain knowledge with time on the job. You looked over your shoulder and you saw a black cloud coming over and you're at an elevator like Pool 7 that had umpteen pipes and all running grain, you'd sort of advise the grain trimmer, "I think we better start covering up so you don't end up with the whole vessel open and get caught in a downpour."



EE: The grain inspector would be a single person from the Commission at the ship. How many trimmers would be working a ship?

TM: Well, again, depending on--.

EE: On the size, I suppose.

TM: On the size of the elevator. If you get an elevator like Paterson Elevator that I remember because when we had what we called a “flying squad” where an inspector and two samplers moved from elevator to elevator, Paterson had two spouts. So you might have maybe four, maybe six fellows.

EE: Trimmers?

TM: Trimmers. Those spouts had to be pulled out by hand. Where today, they’re all operated by power, by an operator up on the side of the elevator, and the trimmer just points his finger and that’s where it’s put.

EE: Out it comes! [Laughing]

TM: So that’s one area that has drastically changed over the years.

EE: The Grain Commission had in an overall sense a responsibility on behalf of the farmers and the Canadian Wheat Board—the sellers of the grain—to ensure that what had been purchased got to the buyer, I suppose.

TM: Yes. Yeah.

EE: So this is where the ship of course is going to move it there, and so they’re ensuring that it will arrive at the proper form.

TM: Yeah. The odd time, especially in the case of barley—barley was going down to Milwaukee and these places for malt barley for breweries—quite often they would have a representative here, and they would be checking the sample as it came in. When you’re loading the boat, if there was a large, well I’ll say, a large amount is going to take you a couple of hours to load. There would be samples going into our inspector in charge of that particular elevator maybe every 20 minutes just to make sure that it’s--.

EE: That the quality stayed up.

TM: They couldn't take a chance on waiting until the boat was loaded to find out if there's something wrong. And there was situations where the final grade was not up to what was ordered. And a couple of the elevators here have marine legs, and they would back the boat under the marine leg and have to--.

EE: Suck it out.

TM: Take it off and rectify the problem.

EE: I see. What's the nature of malting barley as against, let's say, feed barley?

**[0:20:09]**

TM: The malting barley was processed. In a lot of cases, it was started at Canada Malt, the malting process. So they could actually ship malt out of Canada Malt.

EE: But when it comes off the farm, what's distinctive about a malting barley, or a barley that will be malt?

TM: Well, it's a higher grade and the maturity and the--.

EE: Is it primarily grade--.

TM: Oh, yeah. Yes.

EE: And I suppose a farmer could bring in barley, and the agent at the elevator could decide it was of malting quality, I suppose.

TM: Yeah. Well, you could then--. See you'd want all 2-Row barley or all 6-Row. You wouldn't want a mixture, and sometimes you'd get a mixture, which your grade would end up being a feed, a feed grain.

EE: Because it was a mixture.

TM: But for malting barley, no, you want a [No.] 2 6-Row or a [No.] 2 2-Row. Top quality.

EE: I see. These would be varieties of barley basically that grew different types of heads?

TM: Yes. Yeah, yeah. And that was another thing that the inspection people--. I can't--. I've been trying to remember. We had a box that was about 18 inches by 12 inches, and they had the small, like medicine, bottles in there, and that was full of different varieties that was part of the requirement when you became an inspector to be able to identify all of these varieties. Because some of them were of a top-grade variety, and others were strictly a feed variety.

EE: This wasn't just barley in this?

TM: No, this would be--.

EE: The various kinds of grain?

TM: Yes, in all the--. Yeah.

EE: One of the distinctive features of Canadian grain production is visual identification, isn't it?

TM: Yeah, yeah. Yes.

EE: Just glance at it and you know what it is. [Laughs]

TM: That's right. Yes.

EE: The breeding has been focussed towards that, among other objectives.

TM: Yeah.

EE: So how then did you move up in the Commission or advance from these first months and then the first several years when you were moving towards--.

TM: Well, the opportunity came to write exams, like for the assistant. I had to get the marks that were set, and there was an allotment so to speak of so many assistant inspectors—so many P-1s, so many P-2s—depending on how many elevators were operating and the demand.

EE: A PI--.

TM: Primary Products Inspector.

EE: Primary Products Inspector. So it's PPI in a sense, although I take it as simply as PI.

TM: Yeah, yeah. So like I say, as the requirement come, the word would be out and say, "It looks like they're going to have an exam for assistant inspector." In which case, if you were interested, you put in an application, and then you went scurrying around trying to find books and get as much spare--. If you happen to be a spare at the elevator—not bringing samples in off the track—your job was to tie up the bags and take the bags down to the box for the driver to pick up. Then you'd get into the benches as much as you could, look out over their shoulder, and ask them, like, conversation with the inspectors. And the majority of them were quite good. They say, "Come on. Get over here. Clean this sample up for me and let me know when you've got it ready," which would mean weighing it, possibly doing a moisture test on it in the elevator, determining how much dockage was in it by putting it over the small cleaning machines we had in the office. The standard practice at certain times in certain years, stones were showing up in the grain quite often. They'd say, "Now, make sure you throw the whole 500 grams out and check to make sure if there's any stones in it." Like I say, there would be times when that would be standard practice. There'd be other times, say, well the likelihood of it would mean just take a quick look at it and satisfy the--.

EE: Do you have a sense of why there were stones in the grain some years?

TM: Well, if the combines were set down too low, they'd pick it up. I'd say the majority of it would be removed, but there was always a possibility that you might get some.

EE: Because they really have to be running the pickup pretty low to the ground in order to pick up stones at all.

**[0:25:00]**

TM: Like I say, it wasn't the--. In some cases, in the case of shipments, it was as much a guarantee that there isn't stones in it. Because I remember once if not twice getting a complaint from Europe on a shipment that they found stones in the shipment. And like I say, we retained the shipping samples for a year. Down to the third floor, bring all the samples up, go through. Not find one single stone in our sample. They say, "Well, where is this?" And then the boss in his wisdom—and that's the reason we have bosses—said. "Give me the map." And of course, get the map. And the location that was doing the location was quite a bit inland

up a river, and they had to take all the grain up there on a barge. And coming the other way, it was coming from a rock quarry coming down. And I guess they hadn't cleaned all the grit and one thing or another from the down trip and it got into the grain. But you know, we had the proof that our grain going out of here was--.

EE: Sure, stone free.

TM: Was okay. Stone free. Yes.

EE: I ask the question partly because there were years when farmers had big crops and couldn't sell them, and then storage in some of those years before they bought all the steel tanks and so on to store it, they might end up dumping it on the ground and having it conceivably--. But that would be more soil even than stones.

TM: Well, we really didn't have that. During my time, there really wasn't that much of a problem.

EE: I would think so, actually.

TM: There would be the occasion. Three to five stones in a 500 gram.

EE: My father would never let my brother and myself run the combine. He always did it himself. But the main concern on the farm—which he had had to clear in terms of breaking the bush, if you will, and getting the trees off and so on and so forth—was roots that would work their way out. He was always afraid that one of those roots being picked up and going through and smashing the separator in the combine. So he would run it himself, and so I can understand bits of wood as a possibility, but stones seem very difficult to--. For the pickup actually to--. Which is running in the front of the combine and bringing in the swath.

TM: When I'm saying stones, they're the size of a kernel of grain.

EE: Yeah.

TM: You know, they're--. [Laughs]

EE: Particularly that sort of stuff. You know, where would that come from? A quarry and a polluted barge I can certainly understand as against the farmers doing things.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: But these are interesting points in terms of the quality of the cargo.

TM: One of the things that I remember that the--. What will I say? When I started, it was all the small boxcars, and there were some elevators that had what we called shovels, which was approximately a three-foot-by-three-foot hardwood board attached to a cable. And the fellow would get in there and run as far into the back of the car as he could, and then the panel would bring the grain out to the door. That was one of the tough, tough jobs in the elevator, and again before the time of proper dust masks and stuff like that. Where today with the tankers, the majority of grain the comes down that's shipped now is in the tankers, and it's just a case of putting a power crank on the bottom of the hopper, and it's empty. I remember with the dumpers that farmers would come from out west for a visit and three to five minutes, the boxcar would be empty. They'd stand there amazed. "Do you have any idea how long it took us to load that?" [Laughing] You know? "It took us two days or three days!" Of course, wheelbarrow and that. Hand bombing it. So that was one of the big things that sort of caught your attention that you didn't really think too much about it. Just put it on, dump it, and put another one on.

EE: So these were farmers who were working with platforms at sidings, I suppose.

TM: That's right, yes.

EE: They'd ask for a car, and then load the thing themselves.

TM: Yeah.

EE: Which most farmers I don't think ever did. They had the advantage of a line elevator, and in came the wagon or the truck more likely, and the grain was dumped.

**[0:30:10]**

TM: But there was a lot of them that had those small screw, gas car screw conveyors, you know, that they would--.

EE: Yeah. Well, that's true. Went in with an auger is what you're describing, where the older elevators which some farmers still had. I remember seeing them with the chain running and the steel plate at eight or ten inch, 12 inches or whatever. It would be pulling it up a canvas. But the augers screw in a pipe were much more efficient. And of course, by that means, they could be

dumping it into the little hopper at the lower end of the auger and up it would go into the--. It would still take a while to fill a boxcar! [Laughing]

TM: Yes, definitely! Yes.

EE: I can understand their being astonished at--. It was that quick, the emptying of a boxcar here?

TM: Yeah.

EE: Now, of course, the joy of being a grain inspector was that you could watch that activity. You didn't have to get in there.

TM: No, didn't at all. [Laughs]

EE: You mentioned dust, of course. There would be dust all around in the elevators here back in those days.

TM: Oh, yes. Yes. You could look out and dust in the air. I remember coming home and my wife, as soon as I'd step in the back door, there would be occasions when she'd say, "You were shipping rye today," or "You were shipping malt barley today." Because it would be on your clothes. Working in it, you didn't give it a second thought, but other people, it's like you--.

EE: But she recognized the different smells?

TM: She could smell it, yeah. She could tell the smell. It's like somebody in the house across on the back deck smoking today. You know, you can smell it right away, but it--. And like I say, the elevators didn't have the pollution control that they have. They all had a burner out the back for all the straw and stuff like that, where today it's into the bin and hauled out to the landfill. There was a fire going behind every elevator on a permanent basis because all the straw and that kind of stuff was burnt right at the elevator.

EE: This would include some of the dockage as well, would it?

TM: Well, whatever.

EE: Whatever was waste?

TM: Whatever was waste was burnable. When it comes to the dockage, a lot of that stuff went into what was called screenings, which you end up with ground up feed. So that type of thing added to the pollution that was quite evident at that time.

EE: When did concern about the dust as an occupational health matter arise? I presume it did during your working life.

TM: Well, I don't know really whether I noticed it. Dust masks and stuff like that became more readily available.

EE: When would that have been? Into as late as the '70s?

TM: I would say possibly into the '70s, and again ear defenders and stuff like that that--. I mean the fellows working in the car shed and the railway running 40 cars in the car shed, just *bang, bang, bang, bang*. We never really gave it any thought. We got to the point where they said you had to have hardhats, but I can never remember anybody saying or reading anywhere you had to have safety footwear. You know, when--.

EE: This was throughout your working life?

TM: Oh, that's--.

EE: And did you begin wearing steel toes boots?

TM: No, I never wore steel toes all the time I was in the office.

EE: Street shoes?

TM: I mean there were some that did of their own choice, but like I say, it wasn't mandatory, and it wasn't even suggested. [... **telephone rings**]

**[audio pauses]**

OM: Get us going here.

EE: Yeah, let's.



OM: I'll let you know.

EE: Occupational health considerations, of course, could be raised by a union conceivably, or by health and safety committee or whatever. Was there any organization of that sort in the Grain Commission? Were you members of a union?

TM: Well, we had a union. I really can't remember a big movement or a big push on anything. You know, the odd time somebody would get hurt, and at that time would say, "Well, you shouldn't have been doing this. Or there should have been a bar here." For the buildings that we worked in—basically the elevator—it was their responsibility, and they provided office space for us. But they'd have the signs up that "No admittance here" for safety situations.

**[0:35:49]**

EE: And there was, of course, an enormous array of elevators along the waterfront in those days.

TM: I started to think after I received your letter. I think I got up to 18, and I mentioned it at another gathering, and they said, "Well, you didn't get them all." [Laughing] So it--.

EE: Well, I've heard numbers as high as 30 plus. I'm going to put such a list together using the resources, I suppose, at the Historical Museum first of all and maps and so on and so forth. But there were--.

TM: Well, again, when I was--.

EE: But you had 18, so you've been in quite a variety of elevators.

TM: When I was up in the sample room, the first thing in the morning, the fellow that took care of the samples and the work that was required on the boat floor would go up to Lake Shippers—and their office was on the top floor at Chapple's—and get the lineup for the boats. And we had a blackboard with all the elevators listed. And I remember mornings when there would be a boat at every elevator and three written across the bottom waiting to come in.

EE: Yeah. Those were the days.

TM: Oh. When you stop and think--. And of course, slower loading, smaller boats. One of the big things now that I noticed, the length of the shipping season. The 15<sup>th</sup> of December used to be the end of the shipping season, and if you had a boat at the dock, as

long as the lines were off—as long as it was not tied to the dock--. I remember, I think it was Grain Growers in one situation I remember, they wanted another couple of drafts, 2,000 bushels or something to run in. And the guy said, “It’s 12:00. Take the lines off. The ice will hold it up against the dock while you run that in.” And by 12:20 or 12:30, but the lines were off at 12:00.

EE: Mmhmm. And the shipping was finished.

TM: Shipping was finished. No insurance after.

EE: And these days they run through the end of the month, sometimes in January briefly if possible.

TM: Oh, yeah. Well almost year-round. You know, just a month or so. And again, depending on the severity of the ice.

EE: Yes, what kind of winter we’ve gotten and so on.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Availability of ice breakers and all of that. The winter shipping by rail occurred in some years or was it fairly general that there would be some continuing movement?

TM: Fairly general. Once the shipping stopped, then if they were going to do inventory of stocks and everything, that would be done. Then they’d be into shipping. And there would be I remember—I don’t know how general a happening it was—but I remember two occasions where buyers came up late in the fall, and they wanted a bin. In one case, it was durum they wanted for spaghetti and pasta. They wanted the elevator to run a bin, and they looked at it, and they accepted it. And they said, “Okay, put a lock on the bin. And starting in such-and-such a date, we want you to start shipping that down boxcar at a time.” So they would have a supply to their required grade during the winter. Canada Malt, I think, was another one that shipped malt to the breweries down in the States on a regular basis during the winter.

**[0:40:04]**

EE: So they would send it by rail around Lake Superior first, I suppose, and then across into Michigan? Or would it go even further than that.

TM: No, they would go through down Duluth way and down through.

EE: Oh, from Winnipeg?

TM: Go west and then down, yeah.

EE: Yes, of course. You cut across. That's right. You could ship it back to Winnipeg and have it on a--. And I guess that--.

TM: But like I say, there was a number of companies, and you get a company that was ordering malt, very, very specific. They sent out sort of a fibre coverall that anybody that was doing the loading had to wear these coveralls, and they had to have the paper boots that came on over their shoes, and their hair covered. Couldn't take a chance with a piece of hair or anything else like hat getting into the malt, into the brewery, into the malt.

EE: Because the barley would be going straight into the vats or whatever, I suppose, wouldn't they?

TM: Yeah. Very, very careful on the loading of barley was what--.

EE: Had you done much work with malting barley up here at Canada Malting?

TM: No, not really. When I was over working in the sample room as a sampler, one of the jobs you would get would be going over to what we called D&S Mill, which used to be the mattress factory over on the river at Intercity. And they specialized in oats. They would take a couple of cars of oats in, and they had special cleaners that they would clean every seed and every wild oat out of it. I remember the one that comes to attention, they had special brand bags that were shipped up from the States with Bing Crosby's name on it. Strictly for his racehorses. There was 50 bags, and every bag had to be--. Every bag went back! [Laughs] There wasn't any extra. It was direct shipment and direct order from racehorse owners down in the States came right up to D&S Mill here.

EE: To get pure oats.

TM: Just a prime, prime feed. Yeah. [Laughing] Too good for humans, but just what we need for the horses. [Laughing]

EE: Because the wild oats was just an unacceptable adulteration.

TM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EE: There just couldn't be any of that. [Laughs]

TM: Yeah. There might be one in your entire sample that you obtained, so.

EE: Well, no point to brooding over horses and being fed well, I guess. The horses were worth it, I suppose. [Laughing]

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: And did you have experiences with other unusual cargos? Malting barley in a sense, oats in this case.

TM: No, not--. One of the things in shipping, when you had the package freighters had two decks in the holds, And the first couple of times I was on a boat I was terrified because they'd be running into the lower hold, and they'd have to get the grain to the outside, and the trimmers would plow the grain. So they had what they called a metal plow—looked like a flat wheelbarrow, actually, is what it sort of looked like—but they would throw that down into the hold, and they would jump in and get it underneath the spout of the grain coming in. And they could direct that to the far corners and fill, plug every hole. Oh, gee! That guy could never get out of there. But they would. That was one of the jobs of the trimmers.

EE: We haven't interviewed a trimmer or two along the way. I hope they're still alive. I imagine there are.

TM: Oh, yeah. Then when they would have to hand-shovel the flax in the holds.

EE: Oh, yes. Slippery stuff.

TM: They had these special shovels that they handmade all made out of wood, and again, something specially to the trade.

EE: The ships in question here were ones that carried package freight on the upper deck or whatever?

TM: Yeah.

EE: As long as that business went on until the early '70s, I guess, when CSL [Canada Steamship Lines] gave it up.

TM: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

EE: I guess the buses or trucks took over completely on that particular work. So these ships were doing double duty.

**[0:45:05]**

TM: Bring up loads of apples and take loads of grain back down.

EE: I see. [Laughing] Apples would come up in boxes, I presume?

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Yeah, that's--.

TM: Bushel baskets. [Laughs]

EE: Round bushel baskets?

TM: Tubs and tubs.

EE: I see. Right. Yeah, that's--. We haven't thought about the reverse business when we're preoccupied with grain moving out. Are there any other elements, aspects of return cargo?

TM: Not really.

EE: Did many of the ships come up in ballast, or did they usually have a cargo?

TM: Oh, no. Most of them come up in ballast. Yeah.

EE: Water ballast it would be chiefly?

TM: Yeah, yeah. Like I say, your small package freighters would be the difference.

EE: The exception to the general rule.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Do you have memories of the appearance of ocean shipping, and then of course gradually the growth of the ships that were operating thanks to the St. Lawrence Seaway after 1959, I guess it is?

TM: Yeah. I remember when the salties started to come. Again, it was sort of terrifying because the language was a big thing. And of course, the size of some of them was so much bigger than what we'd been accustomed to. And the fact that you'd go back-aft because all the super structure was back-aft, their quarters and everything. Jeez, you'd get lost back there without any trouble at all. But it was quite a bit different. I think the language was the big concern, and they were--. The mates and the captains, and regularly so, "This is my boat. And you won't do anything, or you won't move it or you won't start or you won't shut off unless I say so." And this is--. [Laughing] No arguments!

EE: A ship is definitely a dictatorship in that sense, the captain and first mate.

TM: Yeah. Like I say, the majority--. Like I can never remember having a problem. You have concerns, but I can never remember having a problem with them.

EE: Your presence on these ships, involvement with grain trade at this point, would be as an assistant inspector, I suppose, by this time.

TM: Well, more likely even for P-1s ended up going on the boats as well.

EE: What was your own progress through the structure? When did you become an assistant inspector?

TM: Uh.

**[... audio pauses]**

EE: Walk us through it.

OM: All right. I'll start this in just a second.

EE: So we've taken a break, and you've picked up a piece of paper that records your movement through the ranks. And I gave it a quick glance. I didn't really note it. And perhaps you could walk us through it, your movement up in the Grain Commission.

TM: Well, I entered the service on July 26, 1951, and I was appointed as seasonal sampler in March of 1954. Permanent sampler, which meant that not very likely you would get laid off. As a seasonal, you'd get laid off at the end of shipping season. But then permanent sampler in '56. Assistant grain inspector in '61.

EE: So that's almost ten years after.

TM: Yeah, yeah. And at that time, anybody who had ex-service time--.

EE: Military?

TM: Military time automatically went to the top of the list. Anybody that didn't, which was my case, regardless of what your marks were, you came after anybody that had service.

EE: This would be in the context of writing an examination or the competition or whatever?

TM: yeah, regardless of where you came--.

EE: The ex-servicemen always got the advantage.

TM: Ex-servicemen were ahead.

OM: Veterans of preference.

TM: Yeah, yeah. So then inspector PI-1 in '65, a 2 in '68. I can't remember when I became a 3, and these are different levels. A large elevator like Pool 7 had four grading mats in the office. So you could have maybe a 1, two 2s, and a 3, and a 4. And a smaller elevator, you might just have maybe a 2 and a 3. So the size of the elevator sort of dictated the number of inspectors you had.

**[0:50:30]**

EE: And were there differences in the work done, or was it a matter to some extent of a level of responsibility in terms of the size of an elevator?

TM: Not really. The responsibility basically. If the elevator was working overtime, then they said, "Ok. You have to have a 3." The inspector in charge is a 4 could be working, but if he didn't want to work for whatever reason, then as long as you had a 3 then--. You had to have a 3.

EE: So this was to some extent, the privilege of rank in terms of getting more hours.

TM: Yes, yes. Yeah. Yeah. So a 4 in '71, and then I was promoted to a PI-5 supervisor in November of '85.

EE: And you were working for another four years or so at that?

TM: In '89. Yeah.

EE: So this had you at just short of the top of--. Or were you in charge of the—as a supervisor—were you in charge of the Commission locally?

TM: As a supervisor, we had four. Four PI-5s. And so as a supervisor, you would have Grain Growers Elevator, Pool 9, Pool 4, Richardson's, and Pool 6. North End. So as a supervisor, that was your responsibility.

EE: That whole group of elevators.

TM: Another supervisor would have Pool 3, Canada Malt, 7A, 7B, and then you'd have one up the river to Searle and Grand Trunk and those.

EE: Right. Paterson's and--.

TM: Paterson's. South End. So that's the way it was broken down. You were in charge of those elevators and staffing to see that they were properly staffed, and if there was vessels in, you had enough staff for inwards and outwards.

EE: And this was genuine supervision. It was organization of the staff. I'm sure you weren't doing any frontline work by that time.



TM: No, no.

EE: No. Was there someone on top of that whole organization? One person in charge of the whole, overseeing everything?

TM: Yes. We had two up in the office who were the district inspector-in-charge.

EE: District inspector-in-charge?

TM: Yeah.

EE: Right.

TM: And he had three under him. So there was a fairly extensive staff up in the Grain Exchange.

EE: Well, that's been very useful to have it laid out so neatly and explore the sorts of things. We've been using, I suppose, question five, "Please describe a typical day," which I hadn't asked you as the pretext for working our way through your life. But maybe was there such a thing as a typical day for the earlier and then for the later stages or not? I'm thinking of the PIs 1 through 4 anyways would be mostly doing the same sort of work I gather.

TM: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. The inspecting the samples as they come in and grading them. Like I say, at the inspector levels, the responsibility that you had increased as you went up the ladder.

EE: Did you ever find the work getting boring? Too routine? Or was there a variety in it that made the work more interesting?

TM: I was very fortunate. As an inspector-in-charge—a PI-4—you usually changed elevators every year. So you got to know the elevator staff, and sometimes a number of our staff would change at the same time. But the inspector-in-charge would change every year. I guess it was the fair thing to do because you'd have an elevator the size of Pool 7 that takes in 100 cars in the morning, 100 cars in the afternoon, and the fellow over at Pool 9 is getting paid the same money and he's taking 6 this week. You know? [Laughing] So the variety of positions and the operations at the various elevators was quite different.

**[0:55:30]**

EE: There's years when you really earned your keep?

TM: Yeah, that's right.

EE: And there were years when you rested a little bit on your laurels?

TM: Mmhmm. So this is, like I say, they would change every year for the inspectors in charge.

EE: Did you find the grain companies themselves different? Their staffs? You've of course mentioned the different sizes of elevators and different amounts of throughput. Were there other differences as well among the various companies?

TM: Not really. I can't remember being at an elevator where I dreaded going to work in the morning. They were all first-name basis. And especially when you got to the point of the inspector-in-charge, they knew that you were the inspector in charge, and you represented the government. They had to tow the line, and if they were having problems that they couldn't rectify, quite often they would come and say, "Look, we're in this situation. This is what's happened. How can we take care of it?" So like I say, I had good cooperation with all the ones that I was fortunate enough to work with.

EE: You were a little bit like a captain or a mate on the ship, I guess, at that.

TM: [Laughing] Captain!

EE: Once you were a grain inspector-in-charge at an elevator.

TM: Oh, yes. Yeah.

EE: Well, what should we say? What would you like people to know about the work that you did and the places you worked?

TM: Well, I think that the responsibility that we had to the producer, to the farmers out west. You know, a lot of times they, "Oh, those government guys." [Laughs] Be that good or bad. I'd always look at it and say, "Well, you know, this wasn't grown overnight. Somebody's put a lot of time and effort into it." They'd say, "Oh, don't bother with that." No. It calls for more than that, you know? And try to be as fair and as honest. Like I say, the rules and regulations that were in effect at that time were put in after much study, and let's keep up our end of the bargain.

EE: Were you given any kind of sense, however it might develop, of the development of the grain inspection system in Canada as a protector? The farmer at one end and of the markets or the buyers at the other end in terms of quality, was there any kind of esprit du corps in the Grain Commission along those lines?

TM: I think for the most part that there definitely was. We were in the middle, and we certainly had an obligation to the farmer in bringing it in and an equal obligation to whoever had purchased it or was receiving it. And the fact that the end result we could end up having on our table tomorrow, you know? [Laughing] Like it's--.

EE: Yeah, There's my tummy too! [Laughs]

TM: That's--. Well, this is one of the things that would cross your mind every once in a while.

EE: There wasn't much talk amongst the inspectors. People didn't come through and give you pep talks about the Commission or about Canada's grain inspection system? Or was there any kind of journal, a newspaper, anything of that sort?

**[0:59:53]**

TM: No, not really. But they had—every once in a while—they would have a seminar in Winnipeg for three or four days or maybe for a week or two weeks. When you got to the inspector level, you would go up to Winnipeg, and they would be on the overall grain operation. I went down to Quebec and Montreal once with another inspector, and we toured all the operation down there so that you had a better idea of what was happening to the product and the vessels after they left here, which I found very interesting and very beneficial. We went to Winnipeg because they have the facilities there. You know, they're baking bread, and they're showing you what happens with this kind of wheat against this kind of wheat, and the kind of macaroni and spaghetti that this type of durum provides as opposed to this. Which, again, I find—not just me but I think the majority of fellow that attended those—found them very, very beneficial.

EE: Quite enriching, I'm sure.

TM: Oh, definitely. Yes.

EE: Did you have much interaction with the Wheat Board, which was sort of the Canadian agent to sell the grain and--?

TM: No, no.

EE: No?

TM: No.

EE: And they didn't--. Did farmers come to the Lakehead very often? I think you mentioned earlier.

TM: They used to. They would come in, and we'd always get after them, "Oh, you're on your way to Florida for the winter? You thought you'd drop in and see what was happening!" [Laughing] They would take it in good turn, because I imagine some of them were going to Florida. But in talking to non-family members types, it's not quite as easy as you're plain putting it to be. You know, there's more to it than planting, harvesting, and going to Florida. [Laughs]

EE: Yeah. Well, the great distinguishing was between the mixed farmer and the grain farmer. Because anyone who had livestock and all the rest of it was tied to the farm, especially if they kept some cows. They've got to be milked morning and evening, and it's a terrible tyranny that. But someone who only grew grain could in fact go away for some months and come back as the snow disappeared and get ready to--. Unless they were in the machine shed, of course, making sure the machinery was all in shape for the spring, which could keep them busy too.

TM: One of the oddities that happened while I was on was the year that they had the damp grain, and they brought in portable dryers. We had Pool 2 Elevator—which is the one that's not operating now—I remember it had four or five portable dryers that they had along the side of the tanks there, and they were running 24 hours a day trying to dry the grain that was coming in. I think that was--. It seems to me it only happened once, but it was a really, really big problem. Of course, once the moisture gets in, it starts to sprout and starts to ferment.

EE: I wonder whether that would have been sometime conceivably in the late '50s? Or would it have been later than that?

TM: I think it would have been later than. I'm not quite sure. I wouldn't guess. I forget.

EE: I do remember one fall being very wet, and dad having my brother and myself out in the fields. It seems to me it may have been Remembrance Day. It was that late. He was taking off the flax finally when the fields were frozen so he could drive the combine on the ice in order to harvest the flax. I remember that day chiefly because it was very cold, and I guess the sides on the engine compartment on the truck were open, and I guess I reached my hand in to warm them a little bit forgetting that the fan was

spinning. [Laughing] It didn't break the skin, but to have your finger grubbed even for kind of a split second by a spinning fan on an engine is a sensation you don't forget very soon!

TM: Got your attention anyways.

EE: Oh, it certainly did. But that was one example, one fall that was incredibly wet, but there was surely others as well. My father was out of farming by then. Well, I was off the farm by 1960 myself, actually, pretty well and so on. Another of the questions here is what might interest or surprise people most about the work you did? Each of these questions is designed, of course, to elicit any really fascinating memories you can dredge up.

**[1:05:10]**

TM: I think that the majority of people would find it hard to believe that we were capable of telling one kernel of grain against another.

EE: Yeah. Recognizing the grain.

TM: The variety. The varieties were, oh, we spent hours and hours and hours. And the thing is, if you're going to be an inspector, you had to get passing marks on them. And that's all there was to it. They had a couple of variety experts. Well, they claimed they were variety experts. [Laughing] Come down from Winnipeg on a regular basis, and they'd call the--. They'd get a group up in the sample room after when all the rest of the work was done, then instead of getting an early quit, get the varieties out and go through. "This is this, and this is this. We brought this here to your attention." Like I say, it was an ongoing thing, and during my time, I would say, oh, I think maybe a third of the varieties that were on when I went on the job were no longer grown when I come off.

EE: Well, for the listening laity here, you might just run through some of those varieties. Because I have a bit of a sense as a farmer's son, but you're talking now, let's say in the case of wheat, of new varieties being put on the market.

TM: Yeah.

EE: And the names, can I press your memory a bit? [Laughing]

TM: Oh! Oh, God.

EE: Of course, there was a time when Red Fife, I guess, 100 years ago, and then now--.

TM: Marquis was the standard.

EE: I wasn't going to say the word. "Mark-wess" is in fact the term that was used by Canadians, wasn't it? "Mark-wess" rather than say, Marquis. It was "Mark-wess."

TM: Yeah. That was--.

EE: And that came in around 1907, I think, give or take somewhere?

TM: Oh--.

EE: The Saunders, I think, were involved in the breeding of Marquis were they not?

TM: Yeah, I really--. But I would say Marquis was the standard of quality, and any variety that qualified for the top grade, that was Marquis or equal to in variety. And the thing is there were, I guess, people wanted to say, "Well, why do you have to know?" Well, there were certain varieties because of their shape, basically, and their milling quality weren't as valuable a product. You didn't get as valuable a product from it. So therefore, they didn't qualify for your top grades. So they ended up either in a lower grade or a feed grade in the case of your barley, and 6-Row and 2-Row barley.

EE: When you started in the '50s, Marquis was not the prevailing variety even at that point, was it?

TM: No. Just by name.

EE: Yeah.

TM: [Laughs] I can never remember seeing a variety of Marquis.

EE: No, no. This sort of set the standard, but there were other varieties.

TM: Oh, yes.

EE: Do you remember any of them?

TM: Off-hand I don't, Ernie. [Laughs]

EE: Not off the top of your--. And I'm not really connecting either with the varieties of wheat that were available. This was of course an ongoing job for the plant scientists of Canada, both the government and universities and so on breeding new varieties of wheat and so on. There's a fascinating article in the *Equinox* magazine more than 20 years ago about one of the leading breeders, and it has a lot to say particularly about the importance of this visual distinguishability that Canadian grain had. The wheat, you had to be able to recognize it at a glance if you knew it so that anyone, the buyer too, would look at it, "Ok. Sure. Well, that's what it is." [Laughing] And of course, it was apparently—and maybe still is—a real power in the marketplace to have that for Canadian wheat. As you look back over your years in the Grain Commission, what are you most proud of in the work that you did through those years?

TM: Hm. I think the fact that I was able to work with all the members of our staff. And the same thing, like I say, I was fortunate with the elevators. I tried to treat everybody equally and as fair and as justly as possible. And as I look back, I think that everybody worked fair with me as possibly as a result.

**[1:10:30]**

EE: Yeah.

TM: And, like I say, that's with the elevator and the inspection and the weighing staff, because we had a very close relationship with the weighing staff. Yeah. I had a, like I say, I felt I had a really good relationship with them all.

EE: Well, that's a--.

TM: And I was sorry when I left. I was very fortunate that I had the time in. I would be going to work for a third of my salary type of thing. That the grain business was just starting to change. The number of ships, the size of the ships, the elevators in operation—all these things were just starting to change. Like I say, I really, I enjoyed going to work. I can't remember a day getting up and saying, "Well, I'm not going back there today!" You know? Which in talking to people today, is not the situation.

EE: In the Grain Commission?

TM: They're threatening now of basically doing away with the Commission.

EE: Yes.

TM: You know? So it--.

EE: Well, I listened to our Member of Parliament Bruce Hyer describing the debate in the House just ten days ago or so, I believe, when members were able to join in the filibuster and prevent the passage of the--. In fact, they gave the six-month hoist to a bill that had the potential to see the, is it, the whole inspection system disbanded as a matter of fact?

TM: Yeah.

EE: Yeah. Well, they gave it the six-month hoist, which is the way in which a Parliament kills a measure for this particular session. That's an enormous change.

TM: Oh!

EE: Would you want to sort of walk us through some other of the major changes that took place in your work and in the work of the Commission during these--? How many years did we say again? '51 through '89--38 years or so. There are various possibilities, of course. The varieties that you had to deal with, changes in the ships—you've mentioned those. Automation, I suppose.

TM: Yeah, like I say, when I came on it was an eight-hour day, and if they had a boat come in—and quite often—if a boat come in, they would bring the unloading crew in, and the boat would cover the cost of the unloading crew. Because the elevator would say, "We have to get what they're going to unload to put on that boat," which wasn't necessarily true. [Laughs] But it covered the cost. So when I left, it was basically a 24-hour a day job. If a boat came in at 2:00 in the morning, the elevator would start loading it, and we would have to put a staff.

EE: And people would be roused out of bed?

TM: They'd be on call. When the last few years that I was on the job, they had what they called a flying squad, which meant that every elevator didn't have—this was a means of cutting down on staff—every elevator didn't have an unloading crew and a loading crew. So they had maybe five or six what they called flying squads set up. There might be one in the North End, two in the Central End, and two out the other way. So they would get word that a boat is coming. "It'll be at Richardson's Elevator tonight at 6:30.



You have it. And wherever it goes, you follow it.” So it might finish there, or it could end up going up to Searle or Grand Trunk or Grain Growers. “But you followed the vessel.”

EE: And was the intention to complete the loading as quickly as possible then?

TM: Not--. It really didn't make any difference. Just wherever it went we sampled it.

EE: But I mean the fact that you were working through the night in these cases, rather than--. In that sense.

TM: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Right. It meant that in some cases--. The vessel would come in under normal conditions at 9:00 or 10:00 at night, which meant they had to sit there until 8:00 in the morning. Well, this way, they'd get a jump on it.

**[1:15:19]**

EE: How long did it take to load a--. It would vary at different--. Although, I suppose the loading capacity increased as the ships got larger too.

TM: Yeah.

EE: So was there a certain kind of a rule of thumb of how long it would take to load a ship?

TM: These big ones, if you're, like I say, if you're going to an elevator like, well, the ones that are left now are the bigger ones—Richardson's, Grain Growers, and Sask Pool—I would say maybe 10, 12 hours.

EE: So a ship could come in at 10:00 at night and be leaving with the sunrise in the morning.

TM: Yeah. Early, early in the morning. Early the next morning, yeah.

EE: Right. Of course, time is always money in so many of these connections.

TM: Oh, yes. Yeah.

EE: So things picked up. The small ships—the canallers initially, then the Seaway and salties come in 1960 and so on—the ships keep getting larger, and this runs for maybe 25 years give or take a little bit more than that. Because you were saying things were slowing down before '89, I expect, actually. The last few years you were employed things were getting slower?

TM: Yeah. Yeah.

EE: When would you mark the decline, early beginning?

TM: Oh, I guess around the '80s, around '81 and that. Like I say, the boats, the new ones were coming and there was only-- I'm trying to think. The Toronto Elevator had some big ones, and Misener had put out a couple of big ones. And almost immediately their smaller boats that they had just stopped coming up.

EE: Yes. That would be inevitable, I suppose. The bigger ships were just so much less expensive in terms of the men on them.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: The number of tonnes per crewman that you could move would make quite a difference. Did you have a sense of why the slowing took place in the '80s whenever it really began? What did you think were the reasons at the time?

TM: Well, there was a lot of shipping going to the Far East out of BC. The elevators got together and put a big elevator up in Prince Rupert, and it was, from what I understand, it was two or three of the grain companies went together. And so the grain from two or three companies went into that elevator. So if you had an order to go and you were one company and I was another company, that boat could go into the one elevator and get it all at one elevator. Where here, you'd have to go to Grain Growers to get some, then go to Richardson's to get some. And a lot of the trade was oilseeds, and oilseeds were going to China and going out of the West Coast.

EE: I'd gotten into politics, of course, in those years, and so I thought that the Western Grain Transportation Act lived up to its label. [Laughing] It was western transportation.

TM: And then they were talking about, you know, enlarging things up in Churchill. That was out two or three times that they were going to do that, and then they said, "No we're not." And they tore up all the tracks, and they said, "We're going to put them all back down again." [Laughing] So that was sort of up in the air.

EE: Churchill has had its own mixed history.

TM: Yeah.

EE: And the Atlantic business went down. Do you have any sense of the importance of Russia as a buyer impacting these things?

TM: I think they usually get a fair amount, but I really don't know what the situation is now. Of course, I've always sort of claimed that we can blame ourselves for some of this. We used to have more trade commissions come over here, and we told them everything we knew. How to grow grain, how to preserve it, how to dry it. Everything! And then they went back to their own countries, and they started doing it. [Laughs] And they don't need our grain anymore, you know? It might be the wrong way to look at it, but jeez, we--. [Laughing]

EE: Well, the first time I saw a picture of Massey-Ferguson combine rather, I think it was, a good sized one running a field in central France somewhere, I did sort of sit back in my haunches and say, "So the French are doing that too?" [Laughing] And then I saw a graph of wheat production in Saudi Arabia using irrigation. [Laughs] I think that was really the clencher of the--. If people are producing wheat for export, or even to meet their own needs in the first order, that's going to have an impact on Canadian sales through the Lakehead.

**[1:20:34]**

TM: Sure. Yeah.

EE: To what extent did changes in the work of the Commission--. Computerization, automation might be covering the whole thing in one word. How much of the inspection work could be automated in any way?

TM: I mentioned before about the sheets, and Sask Pool had to have different paperwork. Before I left, every inspection office had a computer, had a couple of computers—well, at each grading area—and it was into the computer and up to the office. I remember them saying that technically the cheque can be made out half an hour after the car has been unloaded and in the hands of whoever wants it out west. Now whether that even happened or not, I don't know. And I remember at the time, they were Apple, small Apple computers.

EE: Oh, quality, quality.

TM: And I said--. [Laughing] And right away, all the majority of the inspection said, "You're not going to put one of those things in a government grain office in an elevator because there's so much dust and stuff like that." They're still working. [Laughing] They might have upgraded them a couple of times, but I just could not believe. They put them in. Yeah.

EE: Well, if the Grain Commission was putting in Apple computers before you retired in '89, they really were on the cutting edge of getting PCs because these--. The lease on the first Apple '84 through '86, isn't it, a little later, I think, when this equipment was actually available.

TM: Yeah, well, they had--.

EE: So someone really jumped to it.

TM: I don't know if anybody was--. If it was benefiting the problem or not, but I remember the day they hauled them in. They said, "Oh."

EE: It would make things much more efficient, but it didn't necessarily at the time, I suppose, reduce the number of--. Because the work of inspection simply required a great deal of hands-on activity.

TM: Hands on, yeah. Oh, yes.

EE: And that couldn't be changed.

TM: No, no, no.

EE: I mean one could conceivably have if you have equipment making up--. Although, you'd want to watch the equipment to make sure you were getting a real sample, I guess. That was part of the system.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: I was thinking you could conceivably have it sucked up to one central place and one person with equipment and doing it all and so on, but you would lose the assurance that the inspection was actually taking place.

TM: Yes. Yeah.

EE: So it did require--. Through your working life, through the 1980s then, the complement of inspectors in the city didn't decline, I suppose.

TM: Well, it went down because all the elevators along the river, they were closing.

EE: When there were fewer elevators that was the real determinant. The number of places to be inspected.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Were there any other changes that took place through these years that might be significant?

TM: Not that I--.

EE: For yourself, moving up In the Grain Commission. Changes didn't particularly--.

TM: Well, it gave me a little more money. [Laughing] I noticed when I looked at my list, when I got to be a P-1, which was '65, I finally made \$7,000 a year.

EE: In '65?

TM: '65. Just over the yearly salary, which was--.

EE: Yeah. The numbers were small in those days. [Laughing] Yeah, the first time one went to a five-digit annual income, oh yeah. Great things.

TM: Yes. Yes.

EE: Well, this--. I dropped past a couple of questions about the way in which your work contributed to Canada's success as an international grain trader. I think we've really covered that along the way in terms of the importance of quality in the market and so on and so forth. And the connections between your work and the work of farmers growing the grain which you were handling, well, you've mentioned that and several connections in terms of the--. In fact, the literal connection when they showed up to take a look at things and so on.

[1:25:19]

TM: Yeah. [Laughing]

EE: What about challenges? Leaving aside the matter of changes, would you say there were challenges that you faced on the job?

TM: I really can't think of anything that I would really say were a challenge.

EE: I guess there were challenges the industry faced.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: But not necessarily you yourself.

TM: No. I think the, like I say, the time element. The time that it takes to do this, and everybody wanted it--. They don't want it done today, they wanted it done yesterday type of thing. But really, I can't think of anything that I would really classify as a challenge. Like I say, I was fortunate at a time that I was involved with the Grain Commission. There was a number of vacancies and an opportunity for promotion, and I was very fortunate to move up as I did. Like I say, it was good time for the inspection and for the grain industry here in Thunder Bay.

EE: And through the early '80s, despite that international depression that Paul Volcker and Federal Reserve Board almost caused in the early '80s, the grain business was really booming along. And when I ran in the summer of 1984, Frank Mazur—who was one of my supporters of the campaign—was heading 1,800 men.

TM: Yes. Oh, yes.

EE: The grain handlers up and down the waterfront. And these days, I mean, if there are 250 or 300 out there, they're doing very well. It's enormous change since then. Yeah, you may have had the pleasure of being there through the heyday of the trade through the Lakehead.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: The changes as elevators were closed and the business was concentrated in the largest and most efficient elevators would be a change that would have an impact, as you were saying. Fewer grain inspectors were needed.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

EE: But otherwise, I suppose, it continued as the--.

TM: The basic operation has stayed. I remember it was at Grain Growers—Grain Growers M Elevator—they put in new cleaners. And cleaning and getting the grain ready for the vessels was the big thing, you know? It took time to clean it. They put in new cleaners in that particular elevator. And anything that was unloaded up until midnight was ready for a boat by 8:00 in the morning. And when that happened, that was unheard of. There was no way you could put grain--. And the thing is, it was all done with about three guys walking around the cleaner deck. The machines did it. [Laughing] The manpower didn't. They just set them up, and they could--. So that was one of the big improvements, elevator wise, was the speed at which they could--. The speed of unloading cars because of the tankers, the speed of the cleaning, and the fact that the size of the loading spouts being mechanically operated, you know, all led to a faster more efficient operation.

EE: Enormous changes in the transportation of the grain.

TM: Mmhmm. Yes.

EE: But the nature of the work that you had to do just didn't change all that much.

TM: Still basic, yeah.

EE: Still basic. Terribly simple in one way, but absolutely essential.

TM: And like I say, now they're talking about getting rid of the Grain Commission, you know?

**[1:30:04]**

EE: Yes. Yes, quite.

TM: But the question has also been raised that, “Okay, if the inspection isn’t done--.” I don’t know if they weighing’s done. “If the inspection isn’t done, and two companies load onto a boat, and at unloading the buyer isn’t satisfied, who does it belong to?”

EE: Yes. [Laughing] I found myself wondering whether we aren’t at this point sort of at the latter end of a mania that’s been going on for maybe a quarter century or more of deregulation, of removing government. Letting industry self-administer and all the rest of it. Because the food inspectors have these same concerns about the packing plants and what not, self-inspecting and ensuring of quality and so on and so forth. I wonder whether what’s happened in the financial sector in the US in the past year or so isn’t going to produce a turnaround in other areas as well. But it may take a while. And the Harper Conservative Government is likely to be slow to move on these things. Some of this is quite, quite political in the government, the Parliament of Canada.

TM: Yeah.

EE: Well, what--. We’ve come down to--. We’re aiming to generate vivid stuff for our virtual grain trade centre, you know. So one of the questions is in fact what are your most vivid memories about your job?

TM: I remember walking the deck of boats in the beginning of December and never realizing that it could possibly get that cold. And you know something, they got skidoo suits and everything today. I remember the first thing I bought was a pair of felts and buckle overshoes, Cars Mackinaw pants—I still got a pair—and I can’t remember what kind of a parka. I think it was a Mackinaw parka. And the only good thing about the whole system was that the boats at that time had steam winches. And everybody that was on the boat would have their bum up against the big piston on the winches trying to keep warm. Today they haven’t got steam. I don’t know how they keep warm now because its all-electric winches and whatever. [Laughs] But I remember that. “Oh, please don’t have a boat tomorrow because its going to be so--.” But that’s one of the things. And yet, it affected lots of people that way, and yet the trimmers were a different breed. Because where we would have a boat today and maybe one in three- or four-days’ time, they would be on boats everyday. And I remember the last boat pulling out of here, and those guys would still have the top two buttons on their shirt undone!

EE: Well, they’d been working inside the ship so.

TM: No, no. Up on deck. They were the hardest, hardy people. They’d have a pair of mitts, and they’d be stuck in their back pocket. They’d be pulling the rope with bare hands.

EE: Tough, tough, tough.



TM: Oh, tough, tough. [Laughing]

EE: Wow!

TM: Yes, yes. Those are the two differences, the two things that I definitely remember. The cold, cold weather. [Laughing]

EE: Any other vivid memories? [Laughs]

TM: I'm not--. I remember when, I guess, it was the ocean boats when they first came up. I remember coming into Pool 7 and pumping the bilges out on the dock, which automatically ran into the basement. And the stench. And I think it was George McMackin, I think, was the boss there at the time. Boy, when they found out what was going on, they just hit the roof. Of course, after that--. Because they were pumping out above the dock. It was one of the things that everybody was watching after that to make sure that if you're going to pump them, pump them--. Because the bilge water was picked up in the river down in the States, so it was a terrible, terrible smell to it. So that was--.

**[1:35:23]**

EE: Yeah, well, I guess if it's inland water that's picked up, it could well be sewage-laden and whatnot. Yeah, you're quite right.

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Another question is in your mind, what were the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career? Do you have anything to add to what we've said about--? Because there's the danger of unnecessary repetition in some of these questions, given the fascinating things we've already talked about. Most important events, anything to add?

TM: Well, locally, it was we went from the Grain Exchange to the post office building, new post office building in the South Ward, which better facilitated the entire operation because they had a--. When it was built, it was built for an entomology lab and for a moisture lab and storage facilities for samples on rolling shelves. It just made everything so much easier for all the departments.

EE: We should do a tour! That's the building where the Grain Commission still is now?

TM: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

EE: We should do a tour of that building.

TM: So that was one of the big changes from the old building for those that had worked up there. Everybody didn't work up there, but for those of us that worked up there on different times, I know it was such a difference from the Chapple's Building.

EE: A real improvement?

TM: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

EE: And designed, of course, to be that.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Completely different.

EE: Well, I might ask if you think it's important that we preserve and share the history of Thunder Bay's grain trade?

TM: I think it's most important. It's like everything else. "We should do this, or this should be done," and it's in a lot of minds, but to get it going, to get the wheels in motion, I think that, yeah, it definitely is a step in the right direction. Along the same thing, I've been connected with the Sea Cadets in Thunder Bay since 1945. So they're celebrating 90 years next month. And whenever—the same as the grain business—whenever grain inspectors get together, we start reminiscing of names and stuff like that. Whenever three or four of the ex-cadets get together, we start reminiscing, and it always ends up with, "Somebody should be writing this down!" [Laughing] Well, I think it's about 12 years ago, I started writing the cadets' story. I'm still working on it, so it doesn't happen overnight. But like I say, if the people that are involved in it now don't do it, it'll be lost. We're a throwaway society in more ways than one.

EE: Yes. Thunder Bay's had a great record—I'm thinking of buildings now—of knocking down and replacing over the years too as a sad reality.

TM: Oh, yes. Yeah.

EE: But in this area. Well, that's what we're about. And we might get some names from you before we conclude.

**[... audio pauses]**

OM: I'll just turn the machine back on and Ernie, you can pick up.

EE: Let's see. I've got notes here from--. I'll just put Tal Morgan at the top of this one and have my pen ready as well as having the machine going. Names of people who you worked with? Not just grain inspectors for that matter, trimmers would be of interest as well.

TM: Jim Monroe—I think it was Jim—was the inspector-in-charge of Thunder Bay. Burt Prescott.

EE: And these are people that are still with us?

TM: No, these are long gone. You want--?

EE: Carry on with those.

**[1:40:02]**

TM: Ok.

EE: And then we'll--.

TM: Charlie Shepherd. Frank Varle, inspectors-in-charge. I'm trying to--. Johnny McIvor. Norman McIvor. Ken Jennings. These are fellows basically up in the sample room that I was involved with early on the job. Jimmy Glen. Hm. There's a number of fellows that meet now the last Thursday of the month at the curling club. There's Moe Harris, Ernie Duda, Cecil Thompson, Bill Roukkula, Peter Warmbold.

EE: Peter--?

TM: Warmbold. W-A-R-M-B-O-L-D. Frank Serediuk.

EE: Sar, S-A?

TM: Uh. Serediuk.

EE: Spelled it with a C-E-R-E, just guessing. [Laughs]

TM: Jack Lourie.

EE: We've already interviewed good old Mr. Lourie.

TM: Is that right?

EE: Yeah.

TM: Ok! [Laughs]

EE: So this is a last Thursday of the month curling club, eh?

TM: Yeah.

EE: Which curling club?

TM: The Port Arthur.

EE: The Port Arthur one, down there, eh?

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Do you know any grain trimmers who might be with us still, retired?

TM: Tommy McKinnon, from the church.

EE: Oh, Tom McKinnon was a grain trimmer?

TM: Oh, yeah. He was.

EE: Ken Graham, was he a grain trimmer too? Ken and Helen Graham?

TM: Might've. Might've been. But Tom--.

EE: Tom.

TM: The McKinnon family are--. His dad was a way, way back, and Tommy ended up being the one up in Chapple's that laid all the work on for everybody--that assigned the jobs. Tommy Jacobson.

EE: These are trimmers now?

TM: Yeah, yeah.

EE: Yeah. Not related to the dentist by any chance, Jacobson?

TM: Can't think.

EE: Well, that's a couple of names on the--. I'll certainly have a word with Tom. He's back from medical treatment and in good shape, I trust.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

OM: I'll just turn this off.

EE: Sure. I think--.

**End of interview.**