Narrator: Jean Morrison (JM)

Company Affiliations: Author: *Labour Pains: Thunder Bay's Working Class during the Wheat Boom Era*

Interview Date: 8 January 2014

Interviewer: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Recorder: Monika McNabb (MM)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich

Summary: Local historian Jean Morrison discusses her research into early 20th century Thunder Bay labour movements, including those industries related to the grain trade. Morrison briefly discusses her own career path as a master's student studying labour movements, working for Fort William, and publishing books on Thunder Bay history in her retirement. In her interview, Morrison discusses the content of her book *Labour Pains*, and the major labour movements and labour conditions of the pre-World-War-I period. She describes the rough living and working conditions for the lowest class immigrant workers from non-speaking countries, as well as the common labour grievances that led to major, sometimes violent, strikes in the early 1900s. She uses the example of the CPR as a major employer that had a reputation for poor labour relations prior to being unionized. She recounts major political divides amongst economic classes and ethnic groups—often resulting from language barriers—and the atmosphere of tension during the era. Morrison briefly discusses her attention to more modern labour issues connected to the grain trade and her project in the 1970s to interview local labour organizers, and she ends the interview by reading lyrics from an early pioneer song about the opportunities of Northern Ontario.

Keywords: Thunder Bay—History (1880-1915); Labour movements; Labour unions; Labour strikes; Labour relations; Labour disputes; Grain handlers; Grain trimmers; Longshoremen; Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR); International Longshoremen's Association (ILA); Immigrant workers; Finnish immigrants; Italian immigrants; British immigrants; Thunder Bay—East End; Port Arthur—History; Fort William—History

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It's Nancy Perozzo conducting an interview today, which is January 8, 2014. The interview is being conducted in Thunder Bay, and I'm going to have our narrator for today introduce herself and her connection to the grain trade.

JM: Well, my name is Jean Morrison, and I don't have that much of a connection to the grain trade, except that I studied at Lakehead University and chose as my MA thesis working class history before World War I. So, how the grain trade naturally fitted into that since the grain trade was the major business in Port Arthur and Fort William at that time. So, I got to look at grain workers, and one thing that really interested me was the grain trimming process. I had the opportunity to interview many people at the time, and one man was a grain trimmer whose father had been a grain trimmer. So, he explained to me the whole process of grain trimmer, which was quite a fascinating one to me.

NP: What do you recall about his description?

JM: Well, I recall him talking about being in the holds of ships and sweeping and shovelling grain. The idea for that was to make sure that ships were properly loaded or balanced so that the ship wouldn't tip over when it got afloat. It was quite hazardous for one thing—grain dust was very strong. Many grain trimmers became ill with lung diseases as a result of that. Another thing he told me, his name was—forgotten the first name—Otway was the last name, and that most of the grain trimmers at that time were from Ireland. They were Irish. Most of the grain handlers—the people who worked in the grain elevators—at that time were from Scotland. That's how you got a job. The foremen were all Scots, and they not only hired Scots, but they hired people from their own locality in Scotland—preferably their own clan. So, it was very close knit. This is before the war—the First World—I'm talking about.

Now, when the war began, many of these Scots signed up and were in the army. There was a shortage, so they had to hire foreigners. Now, many foreigners, depending on what part of Europe they came from, were considered to be enemy aliens. So, I don't think they would hire someone from Austro-Hungarian Empire. So, they had a hard time getting jobs. If they were unemployed and an enemy alien, they were either—well, they couldn't have been deported at that time—but they were put in camps. That's a sidetrack, sorry.

NP: The sidetracks are interesting! Now, going back to--. You're not from Thunder Bay originally?

JM: No, I moved here in 1966. I'd taken one credit towards my master's at Carleton. Then after a couple of years of living here, Lakehead University began its MA program, and I was in the first year of it. I also had three children at home, so I did one course a year before I started launching into my thesis. The reason I chose the thesis had nothing to do with the grain trade. It had to do with the fact that on Bay Street, there were two Finnish Halls—both considered as labour halls—side by side, and obviously hostile to one another and how this came about. So, that's what I started off with was the history of the Finns in town.

[0:05:48]

So, I thought I would do that—at that time going to focus in the post-World War I era. Well, then I thought I should maybe start at the beginning of the labour movement. There was a bookstore on Algoma and Einar Nordstrum. A retired milkman was Thunder Bay's labour historian. He was a Swede Finn, and he had done all kinds of research on the local labour movement. So, he told me about Harry Bryan, the first organizer of unions outside the railway unions, who, in 1903, organized the Bridge and Structural Ironworkers Union. They were building elevator number—A, B, C—I think C or D. Yeah, Elevator D. The first non-railway union was Local 43. He organized them, and then he went on to organize the workers on Elevator E, and they had a strike.

He had worked with the American Federation of Labour in Cleveland. I think he was born in the United Kingdom, but he was raised in Ontario but had moved to the States for work. He came back here when he was blacklisted for leading a street railwaymen's strike. His parents had already moved to the Dorian-Hurkett area where they had a little log cabin that they lived in. He lived with them. Then he got work himself on this first Elevator D. So, he organized several unions in town. Another one he organized, which stayed in existence for a long time, was Local 479 of the grain trimmers union in the International Longshoremen's Association [ILA]. That union lasted for a long time. It's still in the longshoremen's union, but it has a different number now.

NP: I have a question about longshoremen. Do you know the origin of that name?

JM: No, I don't. That's an interesting question because in some places they're called dockers, dock workers, or naves. N-A-V-E. Most longshoremen, at the time, they were sort of the lowliest of the low doing the heaviest of labour. Lifting all these packages and freight out of ships into freight yards or onto carts pulled by horses, I guess, that would go to freight sheds, or moving goods out of freight sheds onto trains. I don't know who did that. But anyway. In Thunder Bay, most of these freight handlers were from Europe. They weren't the British types. The British types were more in the elevators and the grain business. So, that was very hard work.

[0:10:29]

NP: You went on from your master's thesis to actually publish a book.

JM: Yes.

NP: But before I ask you to comment on that, I'd like to come back—just in case I forget—I'd like to come back and talk about just in general those foreigners that you were talking about. But following your master's thesis, how did that expand into Labour Pains?

JM: Well, I took my thesis on the working class, which was “The Working Class and Its Relationships in Thunder Bay before World War I”. Well, right after that, I ended up getting a job at the newly founded Old Fort William, which had to do with the fur trade. You’d think there was no connection, but there was a big connection because of the location. The location of Fort William was the exact site where the freight sheds were built. All the street names in Fort William’s East End are named after the early fur traders.

So, at the time of the Northwest Company, Fort William was an inland headquarters. It wasn’t just a post, it was an inland headquarters of the Northwest Company, from which Canada was explored all the way to the West Coast. It made possible the establishment of the future dominion of Canada. When the railways came and the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] took over that place, it was the link which made Canada the dominion of Canada from east to west. So, there was a continuity in the purpose of that site that was really the centre of Canada’s transportation and the force that made Canada a united entity.

So, after I retired in 1990—seems like a long time ago—I did this and that. Then I would often give little papers on some aspect of the fur trade. At one conference—it was a genealogical conference—a publisher asked me if I would publish a book about the fur trade. So, I did some publications on that. Then the Historical Society asked me if I would think of putting my thesis together as a book. So, that turned out to be *Labour Pains: Thunder Bay’s Working Class during the Wheat Boom Era.* That was 2010, yes.

NP: How did the title come about? By the way, it’s a great title!

JM: Well, we kept thinking of titles. I don’t know if it came to me in the dead of night, but I thought it needed some kind of jazzy title. I found out, of course, through Google it’s not original. Some other people have used this title in books about the labour movement, but I think they were in the States.

NP: I don’t know if you want to answer the question the way I’m going to ask you to, so we can get at the information in another fashion. But reading your book, I had a real sense of what it was like back in those days. Just as a personal aside, my husband’s grandfather came over and lived on McNaughton and worked in the freight sheds.

[0:15:14]

JM: Oh, for heaven’s sakes!

NP: So, some of the photographs in the book—this is a plug for the book, anybody who's listening to this [laughs]—are actually of McNaughton Street! I was looking to see if any of the people in the pictures looked like my husband's family. But how do you think about answering this question? Can you put yourself back to the 1880s, into the early 1900s, and assume that you've come to visit Thunder Bay and you started to come into--? Let's use the coal dock area because you were mentioning it as being sort of the East End and where the Fort was. Describe what it was like for somebody from out of town coming. What would they see? What would they smell? What would the buildings be, the people?

JM: I'm going to cough.

[Audio pauses]

NP: No, you have to press the lever.

JM: Have you asked the question online? Online.

MM: Yeah. Okay, here we go.

JM: Well, if I were coming to Fort William back before the First World War, I personally would probably never go into the East End because I am of Anglo-Saxon Scottish descent. Ladies like that would never venture forth. This is where the foreigners lived—immigrants from Italy, Slovakia, Poland, some Greeks. The people were living in what we would call shacks. It was low, swampy ground, and probably quite smelly. The people were living in these small houses, but they were crowded houses because most of the freight handlers were single men. So, one house might have 12 to 13 boarders. The woman of the house would be looking after feeding them. The houses all had bake ovens in the backyard. That's where they did the baking. I don't know where they did the laundry, how they managed.

Also, it would have been too shocking for me to see evidences of drinking because there is a picture, I think, in the book showing beer kegs actually thrown out on the street. Actually, the whole of downtown Port Arthur and Fort William, there were taverns almost in the downtowns on every corner. Drinking was rife. Of course, being a good Protestant, I would never approve of that under any circumstance. So, there was really little or no mixing of the Anglo, upper-middle class types socially and these foreigners.

NP: You mentioned that that was the freight shed area, but it was also the area where the CPR was building their elevators, and Ogilvie would be—at the turn of the century—and the Empire.

JM: I think they would have been farther up the river. I think the coal docks were close to the mouth. Now, there was an elevator at the very mouth, I think.

NP: Yes, the Empire.

JM: But most of them were built in--. If you see a picture of the river at that time, the river would be clogged with ships all the way up as far as that swing bridge that has recently met a disaster. Clogged with ships and elevators of all sizes because the ships were very small in that time.

[0:20:15]

NP: The people living in the East End, then, a lot of them would be the freight shed workers that you mentioned. Where would the people constructing the elevators live?

JM: Well, the part of the East End, I guess I should have said the coal docks area. That's the area that we now consider across the bridge. But along Simpson Street not across the bridge—like Bethune Street and those streets—that's where the more Scottish, English types of workers lived. I don't know if there was much mixing of the two, but they didn't live in that little pocket on the other side of the tracks.

NP: Who would have been constructing the elevators?

JM: Well, people like Harry Bryan and these would be people eligible to be members of the carpenters workers, the bridge and structural ironworkers, painters. They would be either from the British Isles or from Canada, and maybe a few Americans. They would be English speaking and eligible for members in what was known at craft unions. Similarly with the railway worker unions, an engineer or a conductor, these were considered to be aristocracy of the working class. Many of the railway workers people became either aldermen or even the mayor. This Pelletier I mentioned—L. L. Pelletier—had been head of the Order of Railway Conductors for all of Canada at one time. They were very prestigious and very literate. They may not have gone far in school, but they were well-read people and very political.

NP: First of all, how would the immigrants from, well I guess, from either northern Europe—including the British Isles—and southern Europe, how would they end up in Thunder Bay at that time?

JM: With the people from, say, Italy—I've forgotten them—there would be kinds of employment agencies who would round up these workers and bring them in by train in groups. Whole groups of people, they would hire them. This was certainly evident during some of the big strikes in the freight sheds, when they were on strikes. The railways would just go to one of these agents and say, "We need several hundred strike breakers," and ship them up. They would come by train and be met not very favourably when they arrived.

NP: So, would those agents then—because I'm thinking of the waves of, well, Finnish and Italian immigrants that came over—would they actually, would their tentacles reach into Europe, as well, to get people?

JM: I think with the Italian, they would. I'm not so sure about the Finnish, whether they came out on their own. Many of the more educated Finns came as political refugees because there'd been, in 1905, there'd been a sort of mini revolution. But many Finns did come out during the 10 years or so before. Then conditions were so bad, a lot of Finns first settled in northern States—Wisconsin and Minnesota—and then found their way up here. The border was nonexistent. They came by boat. There was no road in those days, so you'd come from Duluth to Port Arthur.

[0:26:03]

NP: So, when someone arrived--. And let's say this is before, we'll move onto labour strife, the pain part of it. You had five people coming off a boat, let's say, of different nationalities. How did they get settled? Where did they get jobs? Did they mesh together or were they quite separate?

JM: That's an interesting question. They would obviously come by ship either to Quebec City or Montreal. If they were coming through Canada, they'd get on a train. These trains, how that was organized, I don't know. I know the benches were wooden, and you'd have to have enough money to get your own food because there were cooking facilities on the trains for the lowest, lowest class, not the others. The middle class would travel and be served in the dining car, but the immigrants didn't have that. Now, many people had the intention of going right across Canada or ending up in the Prairies. When they got out at Thunder Bay—Port Arthur or Fort William—for some reason just decided to stay, depending on the job market. At certain times in the Wheat Boom period, it was quite prosperous. Jobs were there. Now whether there was somebody at the train station offering jobs, I have no idea. It's an interesting logistical question and somebody might know the answer.

NP: My grandfather came from Britain at about the same time with an intention of going to Vernon, BC.

JM: Oh, really?

NP: He got to Thunder Bay, and he was sick of travelling on the train, and there was a job. So, there's one person's story! [Laughs]

JM: Yes, I heard a story—this was in the Depression later—of two guys riding the rails. I think they were from Britain, and they were hungry, and they got out at Fort William on a Sunday. "Well, if we go to a church, maybe someone will take pity on us." One of them had a fantastic voice, so the choirmaster went to him after and said, "Join our choir." He said, "I can't. I haven't got a job." "We'll get you a job if you'll stay and sing in the choir." So, the family is still here.

NP: Hm! So, we've got our five people coming off the train, and where did they link up? Where would their nationality have taken them?

JM: Well, if they were Italian—or depending on the nationality, they would probably have connections—but maybe if they were Italian, they were with a whole group. Their agent would have made connections. They'd end up in some boarding house. The Finns too. There were lots of Finnish boarding houses, more in the current area around Bay Street. There was quite a big Finnish community in Fort William too. There was a Finn Hall in the East End, I think on Robertson Street. I don't know if that building is still there. I doubt it.

[0:30:24]

NP: If you were Finnish, where would you usually get your job?

JM: Some of the Finns were carpenters, so they would, I guess, go to some construction company or they would--. Many of them found their way into the wilderness where they were--. Port Arthur was surrounded by these little wee communities of Finns living in the bush, and they would be bush workers. They'd have a little plot of land and do some small farming as well. In the winter, they would go and cut wood off their own lots to begin with. So, they were bush workers.

NP: Now, even the bush workers would have a connection with the grain industry because one of the other books I looked at just recently was the *Timber Wolves*.

JM: Oh, yes!

NP: On the front cover of that is a picture of a grain elevator. In the foreground are tens of thousands of wooden piles.

JM: Of what?

NP: Wooden piles.

JM: Oh, of course!

NP: That would have been--.

JM: The wood would go to the sawmills, of course, and then be turned into lumber, right?

NP: For the elevators, or for the piles which formed the foundation.

JM: And also, though, for export because lumbering became a major business more after the First World War. I mean, there was lumbering, of course, people cutting wood for railway ties. That was really a big job, and transporting them, and moving them, and building. Railways were always being built. Not just railway links from here to there, but in and around the docks. The railway lines going into the elevators, into the freight sheds, and so on. So, there's lots of railway building.

NP: The Italians, the Slovaks, the Baltic peoples, where would--? They would end up in the freight yards mainly?

JM: The Italians would end up in the freight yards, and maybe the other central or southern Europeans. There were a lot of Greeks in the freight yards before the First World War. They were the most inflammatory of all when it came to the strikes. Then there were these Balkan wars. A lot of them went off to fight in the Balkan wars, 1913, and didn't come back. At one point, the CPR decided they weren't going to hire anymore Greeks anyway because they were often at the centre of some labour dispute.

NP: Do you have any thought for why? Whether that was actually a fair reputation and, if so, what about Greek workers that made them that much more volatile?

JM: Well, the Greeks were, I don't know if it's something to do with their--. You hate to categorize people by characteristics—you know, passionate Italians, and dour Scots and that kind of thing—but there were certainly many real issues by the way work was done and managed in the freight yards. So, I think they had very much right to be angered.

[0:35:13]

NP: Tell us about the working conditions of various labourers. And would it be fair to say that you could extrapolate those conditions to, you know, if somebody was doing bull labour in the construction of elevators, that the conditions would be pretty much the same?

JM: Well, after the unions or the construction on the elevators was unionized, there was so many hours of work, and you could get overtime after so much. So, there was a bit more control. I did have an interview with someone who'd been a freight handler later, and evidently work depended on when a ship came in. So, when the ship came in, there was no union hall as there is today where you go in, and you know there's a proper line up. Then, the workers would all rush down to the dock, and they would fight one another to get into the line. This one person still had his injuries from such a fight. So, you might work 15 hours straight in the summer when daylight hours were long. So, it was pretty rough going. Then all the lifting—heavy, heavy lifting. They started at a very young age—probably 15, 14—and then you have to fight little twerps fighting big hulking men. So, it was sort of a violent kind of thing. People were divided, of course, by nationality too. Nationalities tended to cling together and be out. Probably the Greeks and Italians didn't get along. I don't know.

NP: So, in modern day language then, would we have the equivalent of gangs?

JM: No. All that work is done through the unions. It's all organized.

NP: No, but I'm thinking of socially in the dislike of one group from another. Would it be sort of equivalent of urban gangs?

JM: I don't think so.

NP: Violence and--.

JM: Urban gangs, those people seem to be unemployed youth today with nothing to do. These people had lots to do! At night, they'd either be too tired to do much, or if they had any energy, they'd go off to the local bar. The bootlegging was quite prevalent too. There are two wonderful documents that someone gave me when I started my research. The Methodist and Presbyterian churches did social surveys. They meant to do them of all towns in Ontario, and whether they did any others, but they did one of Port Arthur and one of Fort William. So, one of the things they have is a list of all the reasons people were arrested and charged. All the different crimes. It's really sad to look--. One of them, a crime was to attempt suicide. That was a crime. A crime was being insane. A crime was driving furiously—that was after the car came in, in 1912 or so. Driving furiously or recklessly, probably going up to 10 or 15 miles an hour. [Laughing]

[0:40:15]

NP: What years were those do you recall?

JM: '13/14.

NP: Oh, okay. Well, that would be interesting reading!

JM: Yeah! I have copies and the Museum has copies.

NP: Okay.

JM: They're fascinating actually.

NP: I bet they would be.

JM: Lots on the social history and the social history in the immigrant areas, and how the sort of upper-middle class lives. One place that divides Port Arthur into three classes. One is sort of the middle class, then the upper levels of the working class—the aristocrats of labour—and then the unskilled immigrant working class.

NP: Who were the major employers at the time?

JM: Well, the railways, the grain elevators. I don't know when the shipyards came in, they were big. That would be in these books.

NP: Did corporations, businesses, employers, did they themselves have reputations for being good socially conscious employers versus ones that were they sort of you worked for them, but you didn't want to?

JM: The CPR certainly had a bad reputation, and not only with the immigrants but with the ordinary railway worker. There were lots of terrible strikes. Their ambition was, of course, to make more money, and they didn't treat their workers very well. They had a habit, maybe somebody working for the railway and then be approaching retirement, they'd let them go a couple of months before retirement, make them not eligible for their pensions. That was not unusual.

NP: That would have been into the mid-century?

JM: Into the mid ‘40s. Oh, yeah.

NP: There were three railways—at least connected to the grain trade—operating: the Canadian Northern, the Grand Trunk, and the CPR.

JM: CPR.

NP: Were they all pretty much the same in the way they treated their employees?

JM: I’m not sure about the Grand Trunk, it came in a bit later. I think in the early days, the CPR was probably the worst. There were a couple of strikes on the Canadian Northern down here at the waterfront, and they tried to organize them into a union. The name of the person who did that was Lockland Torrie. T-O-R-R-I-E. I didn’t know until even after I finished my thesis that he was the uncle of one of my friends. He ended up being the reeve of the township out near South Gillies. They lived out in that area–very respected veteran of the First World War. But he certainly was hated by the Canadian Northern. Yeah, the British in that strike, they mostly complained, “We were always led to believe that Britons are all free no matter where the Union Jack flag flies, but that is not the case with the CPR.”

NP: Do you have any speculation or even more solid reasons for why the CPR was the way it was?

[0:45:08]

JM: Well, they were typical. If you look at labour history in the US with the railways, the Carnegies, big fights. They call these people the robber barons. If you look at their lifestyles, it was just over the top the way these people lived. They wanted money, and they had no regards. They were all respectable churchgoers, of course, but the--. Even I was brought up in sort of a middle-middle class family that the foreigners weren’t really British. Something to be frowned upon.

NP: I find that interesting because of all of the government assistance that an organization like the CPR got from taxpayers’ dollars that it would have allowed to be sort of responsible.

JM: Yes, it did. That’s right. But the government represented the railways. They were there to serve the railways really. Many of them were made senators or had big positions in government. Now, William Lyon Mackenzie King came along—although he’d

worked for the Rockefellers in the States—he tried to bring in sort of mediation in labour disputes. He brought that in. He had a bit more of a social conscience.

NP: How are we doing for time here? Oh, jeez. Can we take a little bit of a break?

JM: Would you like more coffee?

[Audio pauses]

NP: Are we ready to continue?

MM: Okay, ready to rock and roll?

NP: Yeah!

MM: Here we go. 1, 2, 3, go!

NP: There are a few things that I wanted to pull out from *Labour Pains*. You've referred to the conditions that people were working under, but we really didn't get into the labour strife. So, what do you think pushed people over the edge into being unhappy enough to strike? And in certain instances, those strikes did not go very well. So, tell us a bit about the highlights of the labour unrest.

JM: Well, with the freight handlers, I think it had to do with wages. There was something called the bonus system where if some freight handlers started working at the beginning of the shipping season and stayed to the very end, he'd get an extra bonus. Now, many of these freight handlers who were not married would go back to Italy for the winter. You know, the shipping third-class or whatever passenger fares were dirt cheap, and they could afford it. So, they didn't like the bonus system. They wanted that money incorporated into their wages. I think they wanted to be treated with a sense of dignity. In the case of the street handlers—street railwaymen's strike—all of the street railwaymen, of course, were Anglo types. It was largely a case of unfairness where one of their workers had been forced to drive his streetcar overtime during another strike of the coal handlers, and he was just so tired he didn't think he could do it. So, he was fired outright. With the coal handlers, again, it was a question of wages.

[0:50:05]

I think also they were human beings, and they wanted to be treated like human beings with a sense of dignity. So, the ability to organize and feel the strength of unity with others gave them that sense of dignity and the fact that they could stand up to the big boss. Now, at the beginning of *Labour Pains*, as you mentioned, there were many in the middle classes who empathize with the workers and their strikes, partly because the workers were their customers and partly because many of them had working class origins themselves. But towards the end of that, when certain segments of the working class were becoming very radicalized politically, I think the lingo of the Left sort of frightened them, the Finns especially. Then some labour leaders who came in from outside and would give inflammatory speeches, so they certainly wanted to get rid of--. It was sort of like a Red Scare before there were Reds. So, that ended up with a big division in Thunder Bay's society, where at one time it was sort of all of Thunder Bay against the CPR. But that changed.

NP: How would the typical early strike situation play out?

JM: Well, when Harry Bryan came, he had been well-trained in how strikes are conducted in the US. He knew. He set up an office. He had an agenda. He had people appointed to do things. One of the things he said in advice to the strikers, "Don't indulge in rabid language. Your aim is to make allies in the rest of society." I haven't got his right words, but that was the essence of what he said. But by the end, the rest of society got rather hostile. I don't think–. When the street railway was shut down and the cars were driven by scabs it was so tense, I think this alienated those people because hardly anyone went anywhere by car in those days. Everybody had to use the street railway.

NP: How did the CPR—because it was likely the biggest employer, initially anyway—how did they deal with strikes?

JM: Well, the CPR, first of all, had its own—and they still do—railways still have their own police forces. So, they brought in the CPR police. But they also, since they had the trains, they could bring in strike breakers by train either from Winnipeg or from Montreal. So, in one strike, they brought in all these Italians to go into the freight sheds, but all the strikers met the train and told them what was going on. So, they decided not to work for the CPR. But the next time they were able to take the train right into the freight shed area without meeting anyone and was able to set them to work. So, they had power in that sense.

[0:55:01]

In 1909, there was a shootout right where the monument is to the original Fort at the foot of McNaughton. It's McTavish. It's now called McNaughton Street, but it used to be McIntyre Street. Right where the monument is there was a shootout. One CPR policeman later died of his wounds. It's amazing that no one else did. So, then that's when--. Yes, it now comes back to me. Here we are. Colonel Steele, founder of the RCMP and hero of the Boer War, just happened to be in town to inspect the local militia. So,

he called in the Royal Canadian Mounted Rifles to the East End, and they quickly were able to bring about law and order. And the CPR—I think this is right—the CPR sent the military a bill for transportation of men to quell their own strike!

NP: So, if you were a judgemental person, [laughs] who were the good guys and who were the bad guys in these labour--? What could either side have done to make things a little less volatile?

JM: Well, there were many people in the middle who were really good guys who tried to mediate. One was Frederick Urry, who was an architect from Britain, member of the carpenter's union, who founded the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council, active member at St. Paul's then Presbyterian Church, founded the Brotherhood movement. He acted as a mediator. He also ran once for the Socialist Party and then for the Independent Labour Party, founded a labour paper called The Wage Earner. So, the people on the far-left didn't like him, of course, because he was in the middle, and he was certainly hated by 1913 by the mayor of Port Arthur because he was trying to do right by the workers.

NP: And the mayor of Port Arthur wasn't keen on the workers being done right by?

JM: Well, no. Not at that time after the street railwaymen's--. He thought of Urry as an agitator. Then in Fort William there was L. L. Peltier, as I mentioned. He'd been in the Order of Railway Conductors, became a councillor, and then mayor for two sessions. He was mayor during this 1909 strike where the firing took place. So, he was hated by the labour because he did read the Riot Act, which enabled the militia to be called out, but he also wanted to bring about peace. He was in a bind. People like that are always in a bind. So, he was quite remark--. Was really a big-L Liberal, although he certainly sided with the workers.

But the bad guys, I don't know if you can put it that way. It was a social situation which was, I think, repeated all throughout the world at that time. I mean, Europe was on the brink of World War I and the Soviet Revolution, so things were far more inflammatory. In the United States, there was some terrible labour disputes going on. So, I think really the big corporations–in fact, most of society, society being non-immigrant—were not that sympathetic to the plight of these strange people.

You had the social gospel movement taking place where they thought the solution was they'd Canadianize all these people. So, the Methodist church set up something in the East End called a place for schooling, giving manual training lessons and English lessons to immigrant children, trying to help them out. According to somebody I interviewed, you interviewed, the priest did not approve of their good Catholic children going off to something run by these Protestants.

[1:01:46]

NP: So, what was the role of the churches in the whole thing, other than what you just mentioned?

JM: I think it was varied. The Finns, of course, many of them, as I said, came out as revolutionaries and not religious. They were the non-church Finns, so the two Finn Halls--. The big Finn Hall was founded by the socialist Finns, and the little Finn Hall beside it originally was the publishing house of the socialist Finns. So, it was only after the Soviet Revolution that the split amongst the socialists took place and the Red Finns got the little Finn Hall, and the non-Red Finns got the big Finn Hall. But the rest of the Finns, the religious Finns, were all Lutheran. The animosity between these church Finns and non-church Finns before the war was quite intense.

NP: Was that reflected in any way in where they worked?

JM: In what?

NP: In where they worked. Did the religious Finns work in one place and the non-religious Finns work in another?

JM: I wouldn't think so.

NP: No, okay. And the Protestant churches, you mentioned the social study that had been done by the Methodist, was it?

JM: These were the national bodies of the churches. So, the originals of these documents are in the United Church Archives right now. Then St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, because of Frederick Urry and a minister they had, Reverend Murray, there was something called the Brotherhood Movement where the idea was to bring in the Brotherhood. "Don't wait until you get to heaven for social justice." Their idea was to bring the kingdom of God to earth. "Don't wait until you get to heaven." So, they had a lot of meetings and gatherings. In fact, the founding meeting of the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council—the big celebration—took place at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church. Then that meeting—it's in here—was disrupted by a printer named Leo T. English, who was a socialist, who got up and bawled them all out for being a bunch of hypocrites. Now, I don't know that much about the role of the Catholic Church in the East End, but as you probably know Roy Piovesana has written a lot on the East End and the role of the church.

[1:05:18]

NP: A couple of things came out, I felt, that struck me in here, in your book *Labour Pains*. One was although a lot of those central European, southern European immigrants were illiterate in English--.

JM: Were what?

NP: Illiterate in English.

JM: Yeah.

NP: The quality of the speakers, the debates, the conversations that went on, the people who showed up at various meetings seemed to be quite beyond what you would think.

JM: Now, you would get that with the Finns. The Finns in Finland were brought up as Protestant and literate. Over in North America they had a lively printing press. That's why they built the little Finn Hall. They had a daily for a while that went right across the country. They imported left-wing publications from the States. They were well-read and so was the British working class. You wouldn't get that too much amongst the Italians or Greeks. There was one person who became a spokesman of the Italian freight handlers, but I don't think he was ever a freight handler.

NP: He was the fellow from Winnipeg or got training in Manitoba?

JM: Yes, and then he ended up in Detroit or Chicago. Gosh, his name--.

NP: And he was brought in because he could speak Italian?

JM: Yeah, he was representing, and he was Italian.

NP: If that had been done earlier, do you think that would have helped?

JM: No, I don't think so. He would often, when Italians were in court for something like disorderly conduct or something, he would often represent them in court. That's why the political--. Italians in the East End type tended to vote Liberal, whereas the Finnish, of course, voted either for the Independent Labour Party when it came on the scene—which was the forerunner of the CCF/NDP—or for the socialists. The socialists had a little flurry here, but they could never beat the Conservative J. J. Carrick who founded Mariday Park, was the mayor, the member of Parliament, and ran one of the daily newspapers.

NP: You're talking about newspapers, that was another thing I found fascinating in the period that your book covers is just how much labour was covered in the newspapers.

JM: Incredible! It's unfortunate that the liberal paper, the *Chronicle*, there's hardly a copy of it left, whereas there's a complete run I think of the *Daily News*, when the conservative--. But they were so pithy, all their comments. I think it sold papers for one thing, and at one time they would want to court the labour vote. It was quite interesting.

NP: Did that change when the attitude started to change too? When people started to get a little bit more afraid?

JM: Yeah, I think so.

NP: Yeah. We're running near the end of our time, so I'm not sure how much--. This, your *Labour Pains*, ended before the First World War, right?

JM: Yes, right.

NP: Just out of interest, did you follow what happened with labour related to railway and grain trade?

[1:10:01]

JM: Well, I tried to find out from the grain handlers, and I talked to Frank Mazur, who was head of the grain handlers' union in the 1880s and so--?

NP: '70s and '80s. [Note: 1970s and 1980s]

JM: '70s and '80s, about their documents. I think they may have donated some of their documents to the museum. But certainly, as I recall even when I came here, the grain handlers were big. Of course, I don't know if it was on the Port Arthur side or what, they were 1,500 employees. How many are there now? Hardly any.

NP: 200.

JM: Yeah. The union was strong. They were always going—not always—but had many strikes. Frank Mazur was the most hated man on the Prairies because when on strike, farmers would lose $10 million a day from a strike. So, then when I found this article

about automation in Cargill, that's what it's about, is all these strikes encouraged automation in the grain elevators, so you wouldn't need as many workers.

NP: One thing I'll just mention, because in the course of doing our interviews we've interviewed a lot of management people who were involved in negotiations with Frank Mazur. They all spoke extremely highly of him.

JM: Oh, did they? Good.

NP: And said that he was very fair.

JM: Oh, that's wonderful.

NP: They said direct and fair. "He had a job to do, and we had a job to do."

JM: That's right?

NP: But I don't, from what you've said, that certainly didn't translate into what the ordinary farmer may have thought of the--.

JM: No because they felt the effects.

NP: Yes. They also mentioned that, in comparison to carrying on negotiations with the West Coast, dealing with Thunder Bay was a much easier task.

JM: Oh, isn't that interesting?

NP: It is very interesting, yes, I thought! So, for those of you listening in, if you want to talk to some of the elevator manager people or listen to those tapes of the elevator management people, it's interesting to see the difference in perception. Anything you'd like to add to what we've talked about?

JM: I don't think so. I'm so far removed from this. The book came out in 2009, but most of my research was done in the 1970s. I would like to say that in 1972, I think it was, yes, I organized something called the Thunder Bay Labour History Interview Project. Even though I wasn't a youth, it was funded by the Opportunities for Youth Program—a federal government program to give employment to young people. So, I hired. We had a team of interviewers, and we would go around and interview people who had

worked, or even some of the people who had been managerial types. So, there are three interviews here which I think would be really important for your project to take a look at. One is Gilbert Otway, who is a grain trimmer and son of a grain trimmer. One is James Dylan, who talks about in 1934 an attempt to organize an independent union in the grain elevators. The other is John Mazur, father of Frank, who has worked in 1925 in a grain elevator. Another was Ken Mackenzie, a Scottish stonemason, who actually worked on the construction of the Port Arthur Collegiate—it's all stone—but evidently, he worked for 31 years as a weighman in the elevators. So, I don't have copies of those, but those tapes are available either at the University or Con. College. So, if somebody--.

[1:15:47]

NP: I tried to track them down at Con. College, because we had talked about this before when I chatted with you.

JM: Yeah, did they have them?

NP: Nobody could find them, but I'm hoping that--. But I think that Tory Tronrud might have them at the Museum.

JM: He might have them, the Museum. The University does--.

NP: The University, Northern Studies? Okay.

JM: And there's a whole set of them in the National Archives in Ottawa.

NP: Perfect.

JM: If they have anyone left on their staff.

MM: You said, Jean, that you interviewed a number of grain trimmers earlier in the interview here. Are those the people that you were speaking of?

JM: Yes, this Otway in particular.

NP: You also mentioned that you interviewed Frank Mazur, but you didn't tape that interview?

JM: No, he was--. I talked to him many times, and I would see him here and there.

NP: And what would you say defined him in your mind?

JM: He was strong. He was principled. In some ways, he was a typical labour boss. Big man. Commanding. You knew he was in the room when he came in. He was not only tall, but quite big. He was a genuine person, I would say. Yeah.

NP: And what was his--? Mazur, what nationality would have been his?

JM: I think they're Ukrainian, maybe it was Mazurski or something originally. [Laughing]

NP: Yeah, right.

JM: I'm pretty sure. That would come out in this.

NP: Anything else, Monika?

MM: Harry Bryan, you brought up his name.

JM: Yes.

MM: Is that Bryan or Bryant?

JM: B-R-Y-A-N.

MM: Oh, thank you. That's what I thought, okay.

JM: Yes, he was a big personality at the time.

MM: He was a strike organizer, or union organizer?

JM: Union organizer. He was big after the First World War in the lumber workers' strikes. One of the founding members of the Communist Party of Canada. He has descendants in Thunder Bay.

NP: The article that you sent me this morning--.

JM: On Cargill.

NP: On Cargill, outlined the sort of case study of labour management relations in early 2000s. No, no, it would have been farther back.

JM: A bit before.

NP: Yeah.

JM: I just scanned it quickly. I came across it by accident on Google.

NP: Did you scan it well enough to say how it fits in or compares to early labour relations to that rather civilized, sounded like, interaction of the--? Civilized perhaps, but no less—to my mind anyway—no less important to how things were unfolding and changing.

JM: Well, the reason it came up because I googled Frank Mazur's name, and he's in it. The negotiations, it was at the time when there was a lot of labour dispute and a big workforce. So, Cargill is in the business of making money, so anything to lower labour costs was good. So, I think it's about why they went ahead with automation, and it's a lot of technical stuff in it about how they did that which, as I said, I think I spent about five minutes scanning the article. So, I really can't speak on it authoritatively.

[1:20:10]

NP: I think that's it! It's been a wonderful interview, as I knew it would be. Thank you so much!

JM: I'm glad you thought so!

NP: I've listened to you speak, and it's amazing to me what your mind manages to hold and how you're able to speak about it so nice and clearly.

JM: Well, thank you.

NP: What I took from the *Labour Pains* book was what a special place Thunder Bay was.

JM: It's amazing, isn't it? It really is.

NP: Yep.

JM: Now, whether this kind of thing was going on all over--.

NP: Well, not to the same extent because two things that you mentioned in your book. One is the person who made the comment—and I can't remember who it was—or was it a Toronto newspaper?—that said it was the most cosmopolitan city in North America.

JM: That's right! That's right.

NP: So, would you like to say something about that? Why was it the most cosmopolitan city?

JM: Well, I think it's because of the great diversity of ethnic groups. That was probably it.

NP: The other thing that I found interesting was their comment about how all the undesirables or ethnics, as terms were used at the time, had been moved out of the port cities on the US side, and may have come to settle in Thunder Bay. [Laughs] Except for they kept a few, they kept a couple. I don't know if it's the Finnish or the--. They didn't sort of blackball the--. Out of Duluth they would--.

JM: That's right. That's right. They would bring them up and dump them. This annoyed the labour unions because they were there to provide cheaper labour than they were willing to provide.

NP: Yes, it was ever so. Thanks very much!

JM: You're welcome! I hope that--. I just felt I wasn't, with this cold.

NP: Oh, no, before you do, you were going to read the words of a song to us?

JM: Do you want me--?

NP: Yes, please! Now what is this in?

JM: Now, this is in a song called "The Northern Ontario Pioneer Marching Song: An Invitation." "Words and music by Charles Alexander Mac, 50 cents." Someone gave it to me.

NP: Who published it, does it say?

JM: "Whaley Boyer & Company Limited, 237 Younge Street, Toronto. Printed for the composer."

NP: And on the front is a picture of--. Oh, my goodness! A grain elevator. [Laughs]

JM: Of a grain elevator! So, here's some of the words:

"There is a part of fair Canada, by the gateway from east to west. And citizens living in it loudly proclaim, advantages there are the best. On great Lake Superior's northern coast, this fortunate land does lay. And stretches far to the distant inland shores, of old historic Hudson Bay. New Ontario! The land around the gateway to the great Canadian West. New Ontario! Where producers for the Prairies find location is the best. New Ontario! Between Lake Superior and Hudson Bay. Do not hesitate, hesitate, hesitate. Thoroughly investigate, investigate, investigate. For dear welcome stranger, many who have done so have decided to stay." And it goes on and on. Oh, here's the music! Here's--.

MM: More elevators! [Laughing]

JM: Some of the grain elevators. "Storage capacity: 55 million bushels and constantly being increased."

NP: Does it say what date? Did we get that?

JM: That's what I'm trying to find out.

NP: Well, at least, you know, we can go back to the capacity of that time and--. Nice.

JM: Yeah. So, do you want to take this?

NP: Oh, do birds fly? [Laughing]

JM: I'm just wondering if I give you anything if I can have a receipt for it sometime?

NP: Oh, yeah. Who knows when, but--.

JM: Ah!

NP: Actually, what you could do is--.

JM: Could I put a sticker on the back?

NP: I'd like you to put a sticker on and tell me to return it, and then when you're downsizing--. Because what I'd like to do is scan them in, but we don't have our--. Monika you might as well turn this off now.

MM: Just press here.

JM: Oh, Hugh McMillan gave me this.

End of interview.