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Company Affiliations: Lake Shippers' Clearance Association (Canadian Ports Clearance Association/CPCA)

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Summary: Former general manager of the Lake Shippers' Clearance Association (Canadian Ports Clearance Association) Dan O'Connor discusses his ascent through the organization and the association's role in the port of Thunder Bay. He first describes his father's work in the Thunder Bay grain elevators during World War II and his own entrance into the grain industry at 15 with Lake Shippers as a ledger keeper. He shares details of the Lake Shippers' office in the Chapple's Building, the different divisions and their responsibilities, and the governing body of members from the grain industry. He explains Lake Shippers' main function in ship coordination and keeping track of elevator inventories. O'Connor lists his various other jobs within the organization, like telecommunicator, assistant to the loading desk, manager of the Thunder Bay office, and general manager of the entire organization. He describes the major changes in the industry, including advancements in ship-to-shore communications, computerization, downsizing, shifts in grain movement from east to west, and ship size increases. O'Connor also surveys the waterfront and shares the unique qualities of loading ships at each elevator. Other topics discussed include railcar and ship allocation by percentages, the separation of cargo holds for smaller orders, interactions with ship agents and ship inspectors, the growing decline in cooperation and trust among grain players, and Lake Shippers' imminent closure.

Keywords: Lake Shippers' Clearance Association; Canadian Ports Clearance Association; Grain transportation—ships; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Lakers; Salties; Ocean-going vessels; Canallers; St. Lawrence Seaway; Grain transportation—rail; Lake shipping logistics; Warehouse receipts; Bills of lading; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Grain pooling; Railcar allocation; The Great Lakes; Grain Exchange Building—Thunder Bay; Chapple's Building; Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain trimmers; Ship loading; Lakehead Terminal Elevators Association; Grain grades; Teletype; Telex; Ship-to-shore communication; Grain elevator inventories; Grain accounting; Computerization; Downsizing; Ship inspection; Ship's agents; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Elevator 5; Electric Elevator; Northwestern Elevator; Paterson Elevator; Fort William Elevator F; Manitoba Pool 6 Elevator; Canada Malt Elevator; Searle Elevator; United Grain Growers Elevator A; Churchill; Prince Rupert

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It's August 13. 2012, and I am interviewing a gentleman who I will have introduce himself, who worked for Lake Shippers' Clearance Association. So, we'll start with an easy question: your name. [Laughing] DO: My name is Dan O'Connor. NP: And we'd like to start--. We have sort of a standard set of questions, like changes and challenges and your work life and so on. I find that when I ask people to start talking about their work life, they end up dealing with a lot of those questions without us having to talk specifically about them. DO: Right. NP: But I also like to start with your earlier connection with the grain trade. I understand your father had some involvement in the grain trade. So, if you would just tell us a bit about his story. DO: Yes. NP: And his name. DO: My father was Mark O'Connor, and he and about four or five other farmers out in Saskatchewan got together and came here during the war to help the elevators who were short of men. The idea was that they would work at the elevators until freeze up, and Saskatchewan Pool—the elevators that they were working at—would pay their way back home and would also pay their way here if they agreed to come. So, my father along with these others came here and worked in the elevators. He came, I believe, it was in 1943, and once he got established a bit and was able to find a suitable home for the family, he made a down payment on a small little home in what was Stanley Park right near the airport. About a year after he was here, he brought the rest of the family—my mother, myself, my brother, and two sisters—and we moved into Stanley Park, and they spent the rest of their lives there. NP: Now you had mentioned that he had come with a group of people. What were some of the names of the other people who came along with him? And whereabouts in Saskatchewan did they come from? DO: Well, some of them came from Gull Lake, some came from Swift Current, some came from Shaunavon, and I think there were--. The ones that I know, the bunch that my father was with, worked eventually at Saskatchewan Pool 5, which at that time was

Western Grain Terminal in the Kam River just downriver from Paterson's and the swing bridge. And some of the people that were with him was a fellow by the name of Roy Lyttle, who eventually became a foreman at Pool 5. There were some Chamberlain brothers, Ben and Gene, and I think there were three or four more too, but the names just escape me at the moment. But they all came, and they all stayed, and once the term was up when the freeze up came, they were all offered employment with Saskatchewan Pool, and they stayed and made a life here in Thunder Bay. Most of them lived in the Westfort area. My father is living out closer to the airport.

NP: They came here during the war. When the war ended, then, were their jobs impacted at all? Because my father was in that group that came back from the war and went to work in the elevators.

DO: I think there was a lot of work for these people who were coming back. I think at that time, everybody was short of work, and I know the five or six that I'm talking about all were able to hold their jobs even though the fellows coming back, some of them, went back to the elevators as well.

NP: What did your dad do at the elevators?

DO: He was on the distributing floor. He was responsible for distributing the grain to different bins in the elevator.

NP: So, as a kid, did you visit the elevator?

DO: Not very much. I did visit the elevator just to see what it was like and what he was doing and so on, but I never spent much time around the elevator. I was more fascinated with the ships and what was going on in the river with the tugs and so on, and the elevators were just--. I knew they were a very integral part of the operation, but at the same time, they didn't have the same appeal to me as the ships had.

[0:05:17]

NP: Mmhmm. How long did your dad end up working for the elevator?

DO: Well, my dad worked from probably late 1943, and he worked right up until he retired, and that would have been in 1976. Unfortunately, he passed away two years after that.

NP: Do you know who owned the Western Elevator at the time he was working with them?

DO: It was a company called Western Grain, I think, that owned what was Saskatchewan Pool 5, and I don't know just when Saskatchewan Pool took it over, but they were certainly operating it shortly after my father started working there. My dad had sent us pictures and had marked in the elevator where he was working on this picture. And so, we had no idea what a grain elevator was, but he sent this picture, and it was Western Grain right up until Saskatchewan Pool took it over. I'm not too sure what year it was.

NP: So how did your own career in the industry get started?

DO: Well, it's quite a funny way that I got into the--. Actually, I finished working—I started working, I should say—on June 23rd, '52. I was out of high school, right out of high school, and I had been looking for work for the summer holidays. A friend of mine and I would go down to the employment office and try and get some employment for a month or two. I bumped into him one Friday and asked him how he was making out, and he said, "Well, I got a job, but I don't really want this job." He said, "I've joined the Airforce." And I said, "Well, where is this?" So he told me it's at a place called Lake Shippers up in the Grain Exchange Building, which was Chapple's. So I said, "Well." His name was Bob Walker. I said, "Well, Bob, if you don't want the job, maybe I'll go there, and they'll hire me for two months."

So I went there, and I met a Mr. Marshall, who was the office manager at the time, and he said, "Oh, come right in Mr. Walker." [Laughing] So I went into the office, and he checked me out and says, "Can you add?" "Oh, yeah, sure. I can do this." So he gave me the job for two months, and just about the time the two months was over, the manager at the time came to me and said that if I wanted a fulltime job, I can have it. So I thought about it for quite a while, and then I decided, yes, I really enjoyed the busy office. I enjoyed what was going on. I enjoyed the people there, and I thought, "Well, I can do this, so I'll spend the rest of my life here." As it turned out, I spent three quarters of my life. I started when I was 15, and I worked until I was 60. Three quarters of my life at that time.

NP: So, from 1952 to--.

DO: To '96. June 23rd, '52, to the end of August 1996.

NP: We had a member of the Chapple family come into the display the other day, and I said, "You really should join our People Wall because the Chapple's Building was where the Grain Commission first was, the Grain Exchange, and Lake Shippers." What was it like in that building when you started? What other organizations were there?

DO: Well, when I started, Chapple's were still there, of course.

NP: On the ground floor as the retail.

DO: On the ground floor, right. But there were lawyers on the third or fourth floor, and on the fifth floor where our office was, was where most of the grain people were. The grain trimmers were there. There was a railway office. I think the CNR [Canadian National Railway] had a little office there. Hellet & Carey, which was a grain firm, had an office there, and we had almost the top floor. We had the top floor, and it went on the east side and the north side. Because we had so many employees, we had, oh, about two thirds of the top floor.

[0:10:43]

NP: The Grain Commission was in that building too at the time, or had they moved?

DO: They were in that building too. I believe they were on the fourth floor.

NP: Okay.

DO: Yeah. Either third or fourth floor.

NP: So a lot of things happening in those days.

DO: A lot of things happening in those days.

NP: And what about the office itself? Can you describe what it was like, and what it was like when you started? Like what you thought when you finally--?

DO: Okay. When I started there, we had, first of all, in the north end of that top floor of the Chapple's Building, we had sort of like a separate office, which was for all of the girls, and there were at that time about nine girls doing nothing but typing all day long. Then we had, along with that, we had the main office, and we had people looking after the rail shipments, people looking after the vessel shipments, and people dealing with the elevators, getting all this different information that we needed. And then the boss had a private office on the corner of Victoria and Syndicate.

NP: And who was the boss at that time?

DO: At that time, the boss was Robert Davidson Milligan. He was the boss, and Jack Hendel was right under him, and then there was Bill Sinclair and several other fellows who had been there for a long, long time when I started. I really got along well with all of the staff up there, these older fellows. I got a real charge out of it. [Laughs] They did their job, but they liked to kibitz a little bit too, and it was a wonderful atmosphere. Very, very nice.

NP: I mentioned to you that we did interview a couple of people from the Winnipeg operation, so they were able to say from their end what they did. Maybe it would be great for us to have on tape just exactly what Lake Shippers did because we know that we're experiencing that they're no longer existing by the end of this month. And I imagine it changed over time because, certainly, the size of the office did. So, you mentioned the gentlemen that were dealing with the different compartments of the operation. So maybe just go through the various tasks.

DO: Okay. Well, the reason Lake Shippers was formed was because, in the early days of shipping grain out of Thunder Bay, ships would come into the port and would have to go to maybe half a dozen elevators to pick up their cargos. And the reason for that was that even up until I retired, every bit of grain that comes into the port when it's dumped, it's weighed and graded and so on, and there's a receipt issued for that grain. That's called a warehouse receipt. That warehouse receipt is turned over to the Lake Shippers, and we in fact own that grain until the grain is loaded. We arrange the payment on everything to do with the loading, unloading, and everything to do with the ships. In other words, if a car of grain comes in here and is dumped, we pay the elevators for cleaning, we pay them for storing the grain, we pay them for weighing the grain, loading the grain. We don't pay the grain trimmers, although we inform the grain trimmers where the ships are going to go so that they can have adequate crews to make the loading that much easier. So like I'm saying, we would hold these warehouse receipts, and then once the shipment was completed, we would make out the bills of lading and turn them over.

[0:15:08]

We looked after all the grain going out by rail in the same fashion. We'd make up bills of lading. And back in the early days, you had a bill of lading for every car of grain, even though we were shipping 100-car loads down to Montreal and places like that for the Wheat Board. There was a separate certificate for every car. [Laughs] What we did in later years was work closely with the government weighing department and the government inspection department to combine all those certificates into one to take care of that one trainload. We did much the same with the ships. So my job was, as far as the ships are concerned, my job was to find out when the ships were going to come into the port, see what grain had been ordered for them, had been bought. And since we held the warehouse receipts, we could, if there was enough grain of one kind, send a ship into one elevator to get a load and get--. He'd get out of port as quickly as he possibly could. It was the same with the railcars coming in. We wanted to make sure--.

Another very important part of the job was to make sure that every elevator had enough space in the elevator to keep these cars coming, get the cars dumped and back out to the Prairies. That was another very important part.

I don't know whether I'm missing something here, something else that I should be saying, but we also had to keep the government weighmen—weighing department, inspecting department—informed as to where the ships were going to be. I had to contact the ships and tell them what elevators to go to. I had to work out a stowage plan to decide where the grain was going to go that was ordered for the ship, what holds it was going to go into, and give the order to the elevator asking them to load. We would fax this order over to them, phone it to them, and so on, and tell them what we wanted them to load. We knew what grain was in the elevators because they would be reporting figures to us everyday of grain that was available for shipping. Not necessarily grain that was in the elevator because some of it wasn't ready to ship yet, but once we got a list--. Every morning we had people phoning the elevators. They were reporting to us what grain they had available for shipping, and we didn't care who owned the grain. We knew, but we didn't care. It didn't matter to us. If we had grain, and the ship could get a two-house load, we would go to two houses.

We were paid in Thunder Bay for the service that we provided for the shipowners in getting their vessels turned around quickly. Before we were formed, they were in port sometimes for a week—better than a week a lot of times—going and picking up small parcels that were ordered from this elevator, a little bit from the next elevator, and so on. So, with us being in there and being in control of all that, we worked along the line of a bank clearing house. Once the ships were finished loading, then we sorted the paper out and paid everybody. And our Winnipeg office operated on a charge that we made to the shippers because we were also doing them a big service by getting the grain down quicker. We were a nonprofit organization, and everybody was quite happy with the way things were going.

NP: Now, you were run by a board, I understand.

DO: We had a board of directors that was elected each year from the members of Lake Shippers.

NP: And how did you become a member of Lake Shippers?

DO: No one could ship grain out of the port unless they were a member of the Lake Shippers because we have all these warehouse receipts. So, nobody could ship grain out of the port unless they were a member of the Lake Shippers. So consequently, almost every shipper was a member of the Lake Shippers, and some of the vessel owners were also members of the Lake Shippers.

NP: And why would the vessels owners--?

[0:19:50]

DO: Well, because they saw that things were working out pretty well, and at the end of the year, being nonprofit, whatever profit we had was turned back to the shippers. Originally, it was felt that we would lose money every year, and we would be subsidized by the members. That only happened twice. Once it happened while I was manager or general manager, and we were about three ships short of breaking even for the year, and we had a bad freeze up. Ships couldn't get through, and then they eventually closed the Soo Locks. They warned the vessel owners that the ships couldn't get through for the last three or four, and it was a small loss that we incurred. Another time, somebody—it was long before I got into management—somebody was kiting the bills of lading, you know, upping them. When it came time to ship the grain, it wasn't available. I don't know who took the loss, but that's the only two times. And every other year, we would turn back a substantial amount of money to--. On the basis of what they had shipped through the port, they would get a cheque.

NP: Prorated.

DO: Prorated on the basis of what they had shipped out of the port.

NP: Now, did you have to be careful, then, that you were fair to all the elevators?

DO: Definitely.

NP: And how did you ensure that?

DO: Every elevator was entitled to a certain percentage of shipping depending on what their company originated in the Prairies and sent down to Thunder Bay. We got these figures every, oh, every week, I think, we got figures from the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association showing what these elevators are entitled to, what they actually got on the basis of the figures we had reported to them, and we could see where we were at. We tried, if nothing else, we tried to be as fair to every single elevator company and every single vessel. If it was ever any argument, we wanted to know about it, and we could explain it.

NP: Because there might be one captain saying, "You send me to six elevators, but Frank only gets sent to two every time he comes in."

DO: Right, right. You know, that happened. I know a specific case where that happened, and it was with one of Bruce Hayles' ships, and he was president of the board at the time. It was an Upper Lakes Shipping vessel, two vessels. One of them was the

Seaway Queen. I can't remember what the other one was, and the captain of this other ship phoned up and said, "Well, they've got a full load for me right here at this elevator. I shouldn't have to move." And I said, "I know, but that isn't the problem. We're trying to get not just you out. We're trying to help everybody." So he went to his vessel, to his owners, and told them. And they phoned me back, and it was Captain Jim Hartford who had been with them for years. I knew him well. And he said, "Ah, I got a call." He said, "I'm just wondering what's the real story?" And I told him, I said, "Well, we could get him out. He'll be finished by 9:00 tonight if we leave him there, but if we shift him, he might get out at 10:00, but he'll still get out, and on top of it, because he's vacating that berth, this other ship of yours is going to get in there, and he'll also get out." He said, "That's all I want to know." And that was the end of that. [Laughs]

And it only happened once in the 44 years that I was there. Well, I wasn't in charge for 44 years, but in the last while when I was in charge, it only happened one time. We wanted to hear about that sort of stuff so that we could prove that. And at the end of the year, we would have to show exactly what--. Everything was out there for everybody to see, and we put out a vessel report every single day which showed the—I think you have a copy of it—it showed the ships that were loading in port, the ships that were new, and what the ships took and where they took it and all this sort of stuff. So it was quite an operation, and we were very, very busy. I know that they talked about—I was looking back in some of the records here—and I know they talked about the shipping, I think it was in 2011, about shipping over 800,000 tonnes in one month. That's quite a feat! But in 1986, in one weekend--. It was the weekend after the elevator workers had been on strike, and they came back to work on Friday and worked Friday, Saturday. The ships were in the bay waiting, and the elevators were gung-ho to go 12 hours a day if they had to or more. We loaded 700,000 tonnes on 30-32 ships just in that one weekend.

[0:25:39]

In 1983, the big year—I know I was working day and night—but in 1983, we loaded 17,700,000 tonnes in 885 ships. You can just imagine, you know, the coordination that was needed for that. [Laughs] It was hair-raising, I'm telling you, but we got through it. You know, I had tremendous help from an awful lot of people, like Roy Ward. In later years, Roy Ward was a tremendous help to me. There were other fellows in the office in the later years, like Gino Therrien who knew the business inside out, and, oh, Nick Hardy knew the rails, the rail end of it pretty good. Oh, there was a number of them, number of them, but they were all very, very good employees. You also had a number of girls who were excellent employees. If you had something that had to be done—and in those days we worked from 9:00 to 5:00 with an hour and a half off for lunch—and if we had some work that had to be done after 5:00, they always did it. Never, ever complained. It was an exceptional crew to work with.

NP: You gave an explanation of the different things that were involved in the whole process. I had a little difficulty with putting it in order. So if we start a grain shipment coming from the west, where did Lake Shippers start to fit into the situation? And then you've already explained quite nicely how the ships got out.

DO: Yeah, we fit into the situation. We had nothing to do with the grain coming into the port, but once it got to the port and was dumped, inspected, and weighed, that's when we took over, you know. Then our responsibility to the elevators, of course, and when that grain left the elevator spout, we still had an obligation to the vessel owners and the shippers, which ended once the grain was unloaded and all the accounts were settled and everything.

NP: So you would have to follow it right through to the customer?

DO: Exactly. Not necessarily to the customer, but to the unloading elevator.

NP: Okay. down in the St. Lawrence and whatever--.

DO: In the St. Lawrence, yeah. Right. If it went to Montreal or Quebec City or wherever it went.

NP: So the positions, then, that existed. We had the clerk typists. I know from looking at some of your records that there was a receptionist, and then the more administrative issues, you referred to them but not directly. So, the lady I was interviewing earlier today, Carman Smillie is her married name, she was one of the clerk typists, and she referred to the back room that you were talking about where the clerk typists worked.

DO: Right.

NP: And she said, "And the managers were at the front." So who were the desks at the front? What were those positions, and what position did you take when you first started?

DO: When I first started, I started as a bookkeeper. They called them ledger keepers. And what I was doing was keeping track of the grain as it came into the elevators and was turned over to us. We had to make entries into books to keep a record of what every elevator had of every grade. Originally, the grades, like for wheat for example, it was called Northern. Like [No.] 1 Northern, [No.] 2 Northern, [No.] 3 Northern, [No.] 4 Northern, [No.] 5 Wheat, [No.] 6 Wheat, and Feed Wheat. Now, you've got protein levels, so there's all these different grades, it's Canada--. Like [No.] 1 CW, [No.1] Canada Western Red Spring 12.5, 13.5. We're the only country in the world, as far as I know—I think we're still the only country in the world—that can guarantee the protein level, which

is very, very important to bakers, for one. [Laughs] They have to know that they're going to get a loaf of bread that's so long and so high that's going to fit into those little cellophane packages that they have. [Laughs] And if it doesn't, there's trouble. If you get a poorer grade of grain that you don't know what the protein level is, you're going to have big air bubbles in it and stuff like that.

[0:30:55]

So when we came along figuring that—it was the government really—switching over to these protein levels would give them a real in, when it came to selling grain, exported grain particularly. So that made a big change. So, I was in charge of--. Not in charge. There were three or four of us doing that job. Each of us had so many elevators, and back in those days, there were, what, 24 elevators or something when I started. So we each had so many elevators that we had to keep track of grain coming in, and every time there was a shipment, we'd have to subtract it from that, so we knew right up to the minute what was in there.

NP: A running total, essentially.

DO: A running total.

NP: Of several--.

DO: Of several different grades, wheat, oats, barley, flax.

NP: That must have been quite the ledger!

DO: Oh, yes. It was quite a job.

NP: So each elevator had its own page or its own book?

DO: Well, each elevator--. We had one great big book for maybe four elevators, and there were four of us at one time doing that job when I started. And we started on a high desk that sloped, and we were sitting on stools and keeping track of that. Then I did that for I don't know how many years, and then they promoted me to telecommunications, and I worked on the teletype and telex for, oh, about ten or 12 years.

NP: So what did that involve?

DO: That involved sending messages between the two offices so that our Winnipeg office knew what was going on too. Even though we were doing the loading, we wanted them to be able to answer any questions that the shippers had, and even the vessel brokers in Winnipeg could go to them and get information. We kept sending messages up to them, telling them--. First thing in the morning, we'd give them a line up where the ships are, and then we'd tell them, "This one's going to get out, this one won't. This one will get out tomorrow," and all the way through. We'd review that and maybe update it at noon. The next day, we'd have another one. And every bit of grain that was loaded, there was a form made out by somebody in the office in a different department that contained all this information. I had to wire all that stuff up to Winnipeg too. So I would, in a day, I might send, oh, it was nothing to send 100 messages a day up to--.

NP: And you were sending messages by--? Initially?

DO: Started off, it was with a teletype.

NP: And what was that? [Laughs] We're back to the old technology!

DO: It was like an electric typewriter really. Then they came out with Telex. Or it was Telex first, I guess, which was like an electric typewriter that went--. They had the same machine in Winnipeg, and everything that I was putting in there was coming out on the machine in Winnipeg. We were sending messages back and forth. Then from there, I went to another position. It was the assistant loading desk, and the loading desk was where the big decisions were made as to where the ship--. Like the manager, general manager, whoever it was would decide what was going to happen, and that was all done right there. And the assistant would be the one that would actually make out the order. Somebody else would phone it to the elevator, and then when the elevator loaded the ship, they would call the information back into us, and then we would wire it up to Winnipeg, so they knew what was going on. Then from there, I was promoted onto the loading desk, and a short time later, I was the assistant manager, and then the manager, and then manager of Thunder Bay and general manager, and then I got to be the head of the whole association.

[0:35:24]

NP: Still out of Thunder Bay?

DO: Still out of Thunder Bay, yeah. Even though our board of directors were in Winnipeg, and they considered that the head office, I was responsible for Winnipeg as well. But we had good people there. Like Beverly is good. A wealth of knowledge. She's been in the business a long time too. Yeah.

NP: So did everything always go smoothly between here and Winnipeg? Because it seems sort of, from an outsider anyway, a bit of a chance of duplication of effort. Was that ever an issue?

DO: No. We never had any problem at all with Winnipeg. What they were doing--. We were, in some respects, there was a little bit of duplication, but they were dealing more with the shippers, whereas we were dealing more with the vessel owners. We had work to do for the shippers and the railways as well because I was also an agent for the railways.

NP: So how was that, agent for the railways?

DO: Well, we would have to order out. Again, we would have the list of available grain, and if the Wheat Board, for example, was short of grain in Montreal in the wintertime, we would have to send 100-car unit trains down and get the grain down there in a hurry because there were ocean ships waiting to take it. So we'd have to make out bills of lading for every, like I was saying before, for every bit of grain that was loaded, we had to make out the bills, and then they had to be signed. So we acted as the agent for the railways, and they would come up and pick up the bills of lading in our office, whereas with the ships, I was the agent, and my signature was on the bottom of every bill. Before we computerized, we had to get somebody to sign their name on every piece of paper, and there were a lot of papers. So these girls in the back, if they weren't busy typing, the ones I had authorized to sign on my behalf were signing bills. So we had one girl, her name was Mary Wos, W-O-S. Such a short name, M. Wos. So she used to get the big thick files and sign her name so--. [Laughs] And she could do that in no time, but the other girls with longer names, they were doing a lot more typing. Yeah. So it was--.

NP: Well, maybe we'll talk about--. I know we talked about this on the telephone. Nothing to do with you. I don't think you went out and stood near the Empire Elevator with the signalling flags but--.

DO: No.

NP: Tell me about the--. There was a person who was hired, who their job was at the signalling shack. So tell us a little bit about what he would do about that.

DO: That was at the Empire Elevator, and they had the flags, and they could spell out to the ships where they wanted them to go with these flags. And they chose that because it was sort of a point--. At that time, there were quite a few elevators up the Kam River, so first of all, they wanted them to go up the Kam River, and when they got closer, they could tell them exactly which elevator. And the same as the Mission and the North End, they would signal to them with these flags. That guy must have been very busy, whoever it was. That was quite a while before my time.

NP: How did you communicate with the ships after the flags were no longer needed?

DO: Then after that, I used to talk to them. They'd phone when they--. Well, when they get to the Soo, usually what they would do is send a telegram saying that they were at the Soo, and we knew they were coming, but we just didn't know when they were going to get there. So when they got to the Soo, they'd send us a message and let us know they arrived at the Soo at such-and-such a time. I knew from that information when they would be here, and so, like, in other words, if a ship got through the Soo at 4:00 in the afternoon, he would be here for 8:00 the next morning. They'd just make it. It's about 16 hours to get from the Soo to Thunder Bay, most of them. Some were a little bit slower, but we knew what they were.

[0:40:30]

And so, we would send them--. If we couldn't contact them on our radio phone—I had a ship-to-shore radio right on my desk—if I couldn't contact them on that, we would send a message through the Coast Guard, which we are not going to have anymore. But anyway, I would send a message to the Coast Guard, and they would contact the ship through the night whenever they could to make sure that he got the information that I had on the message for him. And then after that, I think Roy now, in the last little while, was doing it all by probably teletype or computer or probably on the cellphones when they get close enough. But that's how I used to do it through the telegraph office.

NP: So if a ship came in at midnight in those very busy days--.

DO: It depended on how busy we were. Like at certain times a year, they could staff, put extra crews on, and a lot of them would put on two crews if they knew that there were going to be a lot of ships around because, if they weren't using them for loading, they still needed extra men at night maybe to unload cars. So they'd want to know from us what are their prospects. So, we'd have a weekly meeting, you know, with the railways, the Lake Shippers, the Grain Transportation Agency [GTA]. We'd have this meeting once a week. I think it was on Thursdays, and it lasted for an hour or so, and they wanted to know, really, "What does it look like for next week?" Of course, we had all the information from the vessel brokers, so we knew what was supposed to be in port. So, we could give them a pretty good idea. The railways could tell the elevators what they had in the way of cars to send, loaded cars to send here, so with that information, they would gear up to get busy, and we kept them busy. If they weren't loading ships, they were dumping cars. It worked out pretty well.

NP: Where were those meetings held?

DO: They were held over, usually, in the old post office building in Port Arthur.

NP: At the Grain Transportation office?

DO: GTA office, yeah. Yeah. We did have them a few times in the post office building right by the Gardens because we had our office in there for a while.

NP: Oh, did you?

DO: Yeah. Just for a short while. We were there for maybe seven years or something like that. But then we went back to the Chapple's Building. But we had them there quite a few times as well.

NP: Now, when I visited Roy Ward today, I was looking at the safe in the hallway. Did you guys ever use that safe for anything?

DO: In the hallway? We had a big walk-in safe that was right in our office. No, I didn't--. Oh, I think, yeah, partway down the hall there is another one. We had nothing to do with that one, but we did have the same thing in the office. It had a big door on the front, and then another door inside, and we kept these records that I'm talking about. A lot of them we kept right in that all the time. Even our books at night with all figures from the elevators and so on would go into the vault. We'd bring them out in the morning.

NP: Pretty disastrous if fire or whatever--.

DO: Oh, yes. That's for sure. We did lose–The people you interviewed in Winnipeg may have mentioned to you–we did lose a lot of stuff in a flood in Winnipeg years ago, but that too, that was maybe in the late '40s or early '50s. Way before us.

NP: The Winnipeg flood, 1950.

DO: '50, yeah. So it was before I started. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. Hm! So what would happen to the books as they filled up? Did you ever toss things out or are they--?

DO: We never tossed anything out. The stuff we kept there for years and years and years. And I think at the last there, they were keeping stuff for about five years because you can back it up and put it on these little tapes or whatever. But back in those days, we had files that went back to the 1900s. Actually, the company was formed in September of 2009.

[0:45:24]

NP: Uh, 1909.

DO: [Laughs] 1909, yeah. Yeah, 2009 we celebrated the 100th anniversary. Yeah.

NP: So when you think back on your career, what were your major challenges in the positions that you had?

DO: My major challenge once I got into management was trying to keep everybody happy and to be fair, as fair as possible, to everybody because we were actually trying to help the elevators, we were trying to help the grain trimmers, we were trying to help the railways, we were trying to help the GTA. We were trying to help everybody—the shippers and the owners and the brokers and everything. [Laughs] We were trying to please so many different people. I'm not bragging, but I think we did a pretty good job. We had a real dedicated staff, and I think I don't know how things are going to run now that--.

NP: Well, it's interesting. When I first heard of the Lake Shippers, I thought I knew nothing of them. I think I probably had heard the name. But after I talked to the Winnipeg people, and they were talking not in as much detail as you did about what they did, I said, "What's going to--? Who's going to do that work when you're no longer around?" [Laughs] So, there have been changes over the years that I would think led to, certainly, a decrease in staff. So, if you think back to 1952 and when you left 44 years later, what changes had taken place in the operation?

DO: Well, we computerized everything.

NP: When did that occur approximately?

DO: Oh. As soon as the computer came out. I can't remember what year that was, maybe in the '70s, early '70s. Something like that. So as soon as that came about, we knew we had to change, so we computerized all the bills of lading. Pretty near everything that we possibly could was computerized, and that meant, of course, that all these girls typing bills in the back office, unfortunately, we didn't need them anymore. Instead of putting a stamp on with my signature on the bottom of every piece of paper, actually, I got the government, two or three people in the government, and myself, and we worked to combine the weight and grade certificate, first of all. We got that sorted out. Then we computerized the old bill of lading, which I think you may have a copy of. We computerized that, and everything that was on that bill of lading—and there was a date on the top of it—everything that was incorporated in that bill of lading was also incorporated--. Even though it wasn't on there, it was understood that all the terms and

conditions and acceptance pertained to this new bill as well. Instead of having me sign it or whoever was the agent at the time, it was in the computer, and it was on there. So that cut a lot of the work out.

NP: When you started, how many people were operating at the--?

DO: I think there was 24. 24 in Thunder Bay, and there may have been 23 or something like that in Winnipeg. Roughly the same number.

NP: And when you left?

DO: When I left there were, I think, four in Winnipeg and—one, two, three—maybe about the same number in Thunder Bay.

NP: And at the same time, there was a big change in the amount of grain that was leaving here.

DO: Right.

NP: So did that have an impact on numbers as well? Or computerization was the main--.

[0:50:02]

DO: The main thing was the computerization. They talk about grain going out of Churchill hurting us too, but for the amount they shipped, we could handle that in a week or two. That wasn't really a problem. What it did, really, the way it hurt us was that it took a bunch of particularly Wheat Board grain—because that's all that went out of Churchill—it took a bunch of cars that would have come to Thunder Bay with wheat, and they went to Churchill. That was really at a time when we needed it. Maybe I shouldn't be saying this, but it was not at all economical to be shipping grain out of Churchill, and I think the only reason that port was kept open was Lloyd Axworthy. I'm sure that he was responsible for it. You can't blame him for looking after his province. [Laughs] And it didn't really hurt us that much. And the West Coast? Well, that's another story.

But what really hurt us as much as anything was the fact that Russia, the USSR, couldn't afford to buy grain anymore. That was the big thing. They got to the point where they were trading tractors for grain and everything else, and finally, the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB] says, "No, that's it. We've got to cut them off." That's what really hurt because the bulk of the grain then and years later was Wheat Board grain.

NP: Market shifted to the West Coast.

DO: Right. And the Pacific Rim countries were the countries that were picking up the slack, and it makes sense that the grain should be going out of a Pacific Rim elevator. So it was just one of those things over which we had no control at all.

NP: So at one point, then, almost all grain shipments were going out of Thunder Bay, and then, well, I think Churchill was built pretty early on, right, and the West Coast elevators were built too but not shipping much. But at some point, the Lake Shippers' Clearance Association became Canadian Ports Clearance Association [CPCA].

DO: Right.

NP: How did that occur and why?

DO: That occurred, of course, after I was retired, and why it occurred, I have no idea. I've talked to several people. I haven't talked to the directors, but I did talk to several other people, and I was kind of stunned to hear that they were changing the name. But I thought, "Well, maybe it better reflects what we're doing." Because we're not just looking after, you know--. We're doing work for the West Coast as well, so this was maybe more--. It encompassed a little more than what they thought they were doing with just Lake Shippers.

NP: And with the shift in the tonnage, balancing out and then over-balancing to the west, it seemed it would make a bit more sense too.

DO: Yeah, I suppose. But I--.

NP: Well, there's not that many elevators there. It's not like coordinating 20 elevators.

DO: No. Prince Rupert is the one, really, that was doing all the--. It was the one that was really hurting us. Yeah.

NP: Any other challenges or changes, then, that you haven't spoken of? What about ship size? Does that have any impact on your--?

DO: Oh, yes. Well, before the Seaway opened, we had all the small canallers, little, small--. A number of small ships. We'd have 22 or 23 ships in port on any given day, but they were all these little, small ships. And now, we've got the bigger ones that load

27,000 metric tonnes of wheat, for example, which is about the equivalent of 300 hopper cars. So it keeps a lot of cars to keep them going.

NP: But it would have made it easier from Lake Shippers' perspective because they didn't have to coordinate 22 ships. They might be able to do three.

[0:54:55]

DO: Yeah. And it also meant that the people--. Because of the Seaway, the rates for hauling grain reduced quite a bit. And it was in the planning stage, I think, for I don't know how many years. I think it was 15 years or something before the Americans finally said, "Yes, we'll help out in this venture.' So they built, I don't know--. There's going to be seven new locks, I think. Something like that. I believe five of them were Canadian. But it allowed the ships to go from the gulf of St. Lawrence right to the Lakehead nonstop. Whereas before, the bigger ships were taking it down to Port Colborne, for example, and dumping it, and then the other ships would come into those ports and take it from there. Yeah.

NP: Take it away from there.

DO: Now they can come and go. The saltwater ships can come in and load here and go right down to wherever.

NP: I have a special interest in elevators, so when you think of all the elevators that were operating, were there any idiosyncrasies of the elevators that you had to consider yourself with matching them up to ships?

DO: There were a lot. In fact, when the ocean ships started to come here, there were only one or two elevators that could load, could finish them. That could start them, I should say, because their spouts were high enough. Once they got them down a bit, then you could--. [Laughs] And also, there were only one or two elevators that could finish them because they loaded quite a bit deeper. Well, they were still governed by the Soo Locks. But there were a lot of different idiosyncrasies about the elevators, and one of them was, like, up the Kam River up by the Great Lakes--.

NP: The Electric and the Northwestern.

DO: Yeah. Well, it was Lakehead. Lakehead.

NP: That was a term I heard today that I had never heard it called the Lakehead before. *[Note: Originally Mutual, then Electric, Phoenix, Lakehead Terminal, and Searle B: Editor Bill Reist]*

DO: Oh, yeah. It was Lakehead Elevator, and it had one loading spout out over the dock. And in the corner was Northwestern, the big one, and they handled a lot of barley. Then there was the bridge, of course, the swing bridge, and Paterson's right below the bridge. If the dam had been opened up above and the water was swift, the ships couldn't dock at Paterson's because they would be at Pool 5 before they could get stopped. [Laughs] So we had to keep that in mind. Then there was Paterson's, like I'm saying, and Pool 5, and Elevator F and E.

NP; Now, you're mentioning--. And I don't think it was on tape. I think it was when we were talking previously about E and F.

DO: No, Pool 5 and F.

NP: Pool 5 and F or Western and F.

DO: Yeah, Western Grain and F at that time. Yeah. We could load one ship from both elevators, and we did that whenever we could. If we had some grain out of Pool 5 that had to come, we'd check right away with F and see if we couldn't get them to load if the ship was headed down, to load in the forward end, and Pool 5 would load in the stern. Every once in a while, they'd have to talk to the other elevator and say, "Well, the ship is going to shift now so we can get up into Number 2 hold. We'll let you know when we're going to shift again, then you can go out." [Laughs] So they had to give them some warning so they could get everything shut off to let the ship move. So that was another. Then there were elevators too that had things that we knew that maybe the ships didn't know. Some of the ships didn't know, depending on whether the crew was new or not. Like over in the Mission, Cargill Elevator, for example, a ship backing out of there had to remember that there was a pile of rocks so far back, and he had to make sure to turn at the right time and all this sort of stuff. And if it was real windy, we had to keep that in mind because if we were having a ship loading at Pool 6, and he had to load up forward, the stern, there was nothing to hold the stern of the ship on the dock. So sometimes you had to order a tug to hold the ship stern over enough so it didn't get away on them. [Laughing]

[1:00:05]

NP: Head out with the grain pouring into the lake!

DO: Right. And we had one small one, a small Paterson ship at one time, loading at Canada Malt, and I don't know what happened, but anyway, the ship listed badly, and it looked like it was going to go down. But they got it shut off in time and got her

straightened up, but that's the only time. One time too a ship hit the--. One of the Paterson ships. Not the Paterson ships. It might have been a CSL [Canada Steamship Lines]. CSL. I think it was that one right there. The *Baie St. Paul* hit the lighthouse out on the entrance there. [Laughs] Yeah.

NP: Sort of throws your schedule off.

DO: Oh, yeah. And some elevators, too, didn't have too much--. Like P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker], when I was working there, working on the job, didn't have too much water up in the forward end. And I noticed the other day there was a great big ship in there, so I don't know whether they've dredged the slip or what. But they all had their own little idiosyncrasies, and actually, the grain trimmers, there was a head trimmer for each elevator, and he usually knew exactly what the elevator could do. And he knew if there was any problem with the water, where it was, and all this sort of stuff. So they were a tremendous help to the ships. And I know I've had, well, people that I was working for telling me that, "We don't need these guys. We can get the crews on the ship to load." We've had to state our opinion rather forcefully because they did do a very good job. [Laughing] And they still do. They've been in business longer than we were, and they're still going. So there's a need for them, and I hope they're able to continue in this changing environment.

NP: So which elevator had sort of the nice combination of depth and spouts that made it pretty versatile?

DO: Well, later on, most of them had high spouts, and most of them didn't have water problems either. But Searle Elevator over at the Mission was one that had good water, and another one was Grain Growers, what was Grain Growers A at that time. The big one over in the North End, it had good water. But they all had their own loading speeds, and we knew this. So you had to take that into consideration because you were quite often shifting boats at noon hour when they were going for lunch to cut down on the delay to the ship. Sometimes you'd be moving him to a faster elevator to get them out a little sooner than they would have if they stayed there, but still giving the elevator its percentage maybe on another ship the next day or something, you know?

NP: Quite complex when you think about it.

DO: Oh, very, very complex. It's like somebody said, it was a big jigsaw puzzle, and it all had to come together. Yeah.

NP: So then you had to know your ships too.

DO: You had to know every ship. You had to have a pretty good idea of the size of every hold of every ship, and you had to know

not only that the hold is a certain size, but you've got to remember that oats would fill the hold up before you're loading any good amount in, whereas wheat, there'd be a lot of wheat.

NP: Settle in nicely.

DO: Because of the difference in the weight. The more weight and volume was something you had to keep your eye on all the time. And you also had to--. I spent a lot of time on the stowage for the ships.

NP: What is that?

DO: Well, it's keeping the ship in the proper order, the proper shape to shift. In other words, you couldn't put a ship into an elevator and load the first hold with nothing in the stern at all. So we'd have to try and keep the ship so they're not putting ballast in and pumping it out and putting it in, and maybe you have to stop and wait while they get more ballast out and this sort of thing. So we had to keep the ships on a keel the way they wanted it pretty well all the time. When the ship was finished, the mates would make sure they weren't any more than whatever the draft was at the time, whether it was 27 feet or whatever it was.

[1:05:17]

NP: Now, how would that actually be controlled? You were in an office in the Chapple's Building.

DO: Right.

NP: And this was being loaded. So did you have a loading plan?

DO: No, I made up the plan myself. For the ship to load?

NP: Yeah.

DO: Yes, I made up those.

NP: And who did that go to?

DO: That went to the elevators. That plan that I--. I didn't give them a drawing of the plan. I just told them, "We'd like you to load this grain on this ship into this hold, this grain into this hold, and so on."

NP: Sort of, "First this, then this, then this."

DO: Not necessarily in order, but this is your order. If there's a preference, we would point out, "Now, this is a lot of grain. You might not get it all on by noon. This is what we want for sure. The other is just to keep you going so that they knew." And we had to spot that in a place that the ship could take it without any of the others if it came to that.

NP: Hm. Did ships regularly have different grains in them?

DO: Different--?

NP: Grains.

DO: Oh, yes. You could have--.

NP: That was usual?

DO: Oh, yeah. Quite common. With the Wheat Board shipping so much wheat, quite often in Wheat Board shipments you'd get maybe three or four ships a day with one grade of grain. But normally—well, quite often I'll say—you would have maybe a couple of holds of barley, maybe a hold of oats, maybe even a hold of wheat, something like that. They usually have six compartments. Some of them have five. But the majority of the bigger ones now have six compartments, but the odd one has five.

NP: Did you have to fill a hold?

DO: With flax. With flax it was mandatory that we fill the hold up to a certain distance up into the hatch combing.

NP: Why was that?

DO: So that the grain--. Flax particularly is very, very slippery, and if you get any on the deck, they have to clean it up right away so somebody doesn't fall and hurt themselves. But with flax, and in fact, on ocean ships that sometimes don't take a full hold of flax, they put in what they call—they used to—put in what they call shifting boards. Right down the centre of the hold, they would

put great big timbers from the floor level right to the between deck or to the deck, and then they would maybe sometimes even go the other way just to keep that parcel of grain from shifting. Because all that weight could play havoc with the ship if the ship started to shift.

NP: So if you were loading two different products into one hold, it was normal that it was separated vertically as opposed to horizontally. There's no way of separating it horizontally?

DO: Well, they could do it horizontally too, but they wouldn't do that with--. Because, I think, then the flax would still move. But what they did on some of the smaller ships that loaded, they would make a separation out of canvas, and then they came up later on with what they call the Kobe separation which was canvas and lumber, and it was a pretty--.

NP: Like a system.

DO: Yeah. A real good separation. That was used on ocean ships quite often. They'd have little parcels of this, a little bit of canola, and a little bit of mustard seed, and then something else. And there could be as many as three or four separations in a hold. Sometimes it was a separation across a corner because it was just a very small--. But then, they would supply a finished plan showing where this stuff is so that if anybody that was going to be unloading it could see it and make sure they didn't have a mix with something that was under it. [Laughs]

[1:10:02]

NP: When a new ship came on stream, then, how would you get to know about it?

DO: About the size and that?

NP: Well, about the size, the configuration.

DO: Yeah, well, we would get--. I've got books around here like this—here's one here—that show those. Any time a new one comes out, it's got all the dimensions and all the different ship sizes. This just happens to be laying here. But we would have all the information. Sometimes we'd even be going to the christenings, you know.

NP: So did you go to some christenings?

DO: Yeah. I went to the odd one. In fact, I went to--. Yeah, I think I went to two of them. It was quite an interesting thing! [Laughs] And all the time I worked, I never actually went all the way down the Seaway on a ship either because it was always at a time when I was so busy that I couldn't get away. [Laughs] But I did go one year on the *Algocen*, the Algoma Central ship, and we went down as far as Montreal. The ship didn't have orders, so he was going to have to go to anchor, so we got a little tug and went ashore and went into the Chateau Champlain or one of those places, spent the night, and flew home again. That gave you a different perspective too, the other part of the operation, that going aboard the ship and going down the Seaway. I wished I'd had the opportunity to take another one, but I never did. I had lots of chances to do it, but I just couldn't swing it! [Laughs]

NP: Couldn't get the time off.

DO: Right.

NP: So what relationship, if any, then, or coordination did you have with the bug guys?

DO: We ordered--. Actually, the ocean ships had to be inspected because they weren't regular callers here and nobody knew what shape they were in. So the entomologists had to go down and check the holds to make sure. That was ordered by the ocean agents. And on the ocean ships, we were the charterer's representatives, and somebody like Bill Hryb or Sandy Henderson or somebody like that acted on behalf of the ocean. We had the opportunity to take that over as well, but we decided, no, we had our hands full. [Laughs] This was years and years before they started coming up here on a regular basis, before the Seaway opened. So we did a do a few small ones that loaded some barley, and then they topped the holds off with some flour from Robin Hood. Yeah. The *Homestead* was the name of one of the ships that did that, and we were the agent for that.

NP: Yes, I noticed, again, in the employee records that I was looking at that a couple of people had left to work for an organization that dealt with the ocean-going ships. But that wasn't the agents, was it, that they worked for? Was it a separate group?

DO: I don't know who you're referring to. The ocean agents were a different group altogether. We had nothing to do with their operation except if it was Bill Hryb, for example, if he had a ship that he was the agent for, an ocean ship, he would be the actual agent for the ship. He would still have to get his information from us as to when--.

NP: For the loading and all of that.

DO: To when he could bring the ship in, where to go, and you know--. And he would be the one that would be checking to see if the ship was going to work overtime. He'd be talking to the owners or the shippers, whichever one would benefit by getting a ship out quicker. Whereas on the lakers, I determined whether the ship was going to work. So the vessel owners had given me the authority to just go ahead and work whenever, pay whatever overtime you have to.

NP: Still cheaper than the time losing--.

DO: Yes. Cheaper than having a ship sitting around doing nothing.

NP: Now with the inspectors, then, for the lake ships, they still had to--. The entomology--. The Department of Agriculture, I guess, as opposed to the Canadian Grain Commission, they still had to be involved. So when would you get them involved in the picture so that the schedule didn't get shot?

[1:15:10]

DO: No. The inspectors, there were inspectors in the elevator. There were inspectors at the elevator when the ships were being loaded, and they would take samples. They used to take them right out on the deck, and I think they do it all in the elevator now. But at one time, they used to take them all right on the deck, and they'd be walking up and down the deck as the grain was being loaded just to make sure that the grain was--.

NP: But the ones who did the inspection of the holds, then, before they even loaded?

DO: Well, the only time we had them do that was if the vessel was going to have the grain in it over the winter, and it was called winter storage. In other words, the ship would go somewhere—Montreal, whatever—and the grain would stay aboard the vessel. So it had to be inspected and--. Of course, any other time too, if a ship was in at an elevator and there was a problem before they started loading, whoever took the hatch covers off might see a problem and report it to the captain, and he's right away on the phone. Then you would have to get somebody to go down, and they wouldn't load until it was checked.

NP: Until they had their phyto-certificate or whatever.

DO: Yeah. Phytosanitary. But most of the time, these ships were hauling nothing but grain, and they were regular callers back and forth all the time, so we had very little trouble with them. The only time was the odd saltwater ship—Greek vessels and stuff like that—that were a problem.

NP: We had interviewed Victor Bel, who worked for Agriculture Canada, and he said that the old ships were really awful. They had all kinds of places for things to grow and--.

DO: Oh, yeah, and hung up. Yeah, right.

NP: But he said with the new ships, with the nice clean holds with not all the cross pieces, they were pretty good.

DO: Oh, yeah. Every little piece of angle iron there was a little plant growing in it. [Laughing] I've seen that myself. Yeah.

NP: Now, a lot of the changes in the company ownership occurred after you left, but there would have been some during your time. Did that create any kind of--?

DO: That didn't really bother us at all. Like Upper Lakes and Algoma Central combined, and it really didn't have any--. It's still the same ships and maybe a different name.

NP: Same with the elevators?

DO: Yeah. Same thing.

NP: When an elevator was decommissioned, would you have an involvement there, or the elevator company just made sure to take all the product out?

DO: Oh, yeah. They'd have to clear it out all right. They would make sure that everything that we had a receipt for had to be accounted for one way or another, whether it went into a car and back into another elevator or something, everything had to be accounted for. So, but it--.

NP: But it would be extra bookkeeping for you, then, to change the--.

DO: Oh, yeah. Just a little bit. Yeah.

NP: That would be nothing compared to what you did on a regular basis. [Laughing]

DO: No.

NP: So I'm going to ask you a few rapid-fire questions here just because I would like to have them on record. And one that I like to ask is when you think back on your career, what would you like people to know most about the work that you did, because that's what you're doing here. You're telling people for historical purposes what you did. What would you like them most to know? A synopsis, I guess, of all of the things you've talked about.

DO: Well, I guess, I'd like the people to know that we had a very important part to play in the overall picture, and we did it as well as we could. We helped feed the world, if you will, and we were fair with everybody, I think.

NP: Interesting when I talked to Mr. Kelso, that word fair was high on his list of, "We tried to be fair."

DO: And you know, everything was done on your word when I was working. If you said, "We ordered an elevator crew out," they were there. If the elevator said they had a certain amount of grain, and they would have the rest ready for you in the morning, you took them at your word, and you sent the ship in there. I don't know how many times I sent a ship into an elevator, and I had my doubts, but not once did they not keep their word.

[1:20:35]

NP: Mmhmm. They didn't let you down.

DO: Never. Never. Yeah. And everything, like I say, everything was done on your word. You didn't have to sign a piece of paper or anything. You said something, and your word was your bond.

NP: Did that change at all in the time of your career?

DO: It was changing just as I decided to pack it up when I got to be 60. A year or so before that, it started to get, for lack of a better word, a little cutthroat. At one time, one elevator would go out of its way to help another and this sort of thing, but as those older people retired and younger fellows came in with different ideas and everything, it got to be a different ballgame. It was kind of, you know, a lot of it remained the same, but it was starting to go the way I didn't like. [Laughs]

NP: Yeah. Well, I'm an outsider looking in, and you get a real sense when you talk to the various players that there was a change.

DO: There was.

NP: Yeah.

DO: Yeah. I noticed.

NP: And as you said, it was the start when you left in ’96. Think of what it’s like now.

DO: Yes, yeah.

NP: What are you most proud of in the work that you did?

DO: Well, for a guy with no education--.

NP: Well, I wouldn’t say that! [Laughs]

DO: You know, I started working when I was 15 years old. I didn’t even finish high school, so I think--. I did go back and take courses. I took typing, and I took bookkeeping, and I guess this all helped in the long run. I took accounting through York University. I spent a lot of time trying to upgrade a little bit. I think, you know, I enjoyed what I was doing immensely, and it was a lot of responsibility. I think that the one thing I’m proud of is that everything went as well as it did, you know? That’s about it.

NP: Well, when you think of all the things that could have gone wrong--.

DO: Oh, yes.

NP: And the cost of those things going wrong.

DO: Yes.

NP: Now, what did happen? I mean, you can’t possibly run an operation that dealt with the kinds of numbers that you did over so many years and a mistake never been made. So what happens when mistakes were made?

DO: Well, I guess everybody, if you think hard enough, I guess everybody makes mistakes.

NP: Mmhmm. [Laughs]

DO: You know, I'm not saying I never made a mistake because I'm not infallible, that's for sure.

NP: But even the staff that you managed would. You know, you've got a lot of people working there.

DO: Right. Everybody was bonded, and we never once had to say we're glad we were bonded. [Laughs] So things went pretty well. Mind you, we put in an awful lot of time. Like 12-, 13-hour days were common during the navigation season, and that navigation season seemed to be pretty long sometimes. [Laughing]

NP: And getting longer. So if there was a mistake made in numbers or whatever or accounts were--. It was just a matter of, well, you straighten them out?

DO: That's right.

NP: Yeah.

DO: And elevators made mistakes in reporting figures to us too, and if they found out that the figure wasn't correct, they'd phone us, and we would thank them for letting us know and take it from there. I can't think offhand of any real screw ups.

NP: You've talked about changes and challenges, and you may have answered this next question as a result of what you said, but in your mind, what were the most important events that happened in the workplace during your career? The most important events.

[1:25:09]

DO: The most important event as far as I'm concerned, and one of the things I'm proudest of, is 1983's loading. Like I mentioned before, 17,700,000 tonnes in 885 ships. That's quite an accomplishment. I think--. I don't know if that record will ever be beat by anybody.

NP: Hm!

DO: And it's because of the trimmers doing an excellent job and available all the time, the elevators going out of their way to work extra hours, the ships were in the bay waiting to load. Everything was just right. But we cleared--. [Laughs] That was a weekend I'll never forget. Yeah. That's the one thing that I'm really proudest of.

NP: Good. Do you feel it's important to preserve and share Thunder Bay's grain trade history? And if so, what aspects of the history do you feel we should concentrate on preserving, especially as it relates to Lake Shippers?

DO: Well, naturally, grain shipping out of the port was the big thing years ago before lumber, whatever. And I think the more we can preserve, the better. Down the road, it's going to help an awful lot of people, and it's too bad that some of the younger people don't have classes where they can learn about this sort of stuff, so that they know what their grandfathers and so on had to go through to make things good for the family and for the world, really. [Laughs] Like I said before, I think it's a shame that we're losing so much of this history, and it's a shame that we're losing the Lake Shippers, that we lost the Lake Shippers, and I'm just hoping that the grain trimmers is not the next one to go. I really, I'd hate to see that.

NP: Big changes.

DO: Yeah. Big changes.

NP: So when you think of the Lake Shippers then, we're, as a group, Friends of Grain Elevators, we came together with the hope of some day establishing a national historic activity centre here because we felt this was—the grain trade that you talked about—was a national story, not just a local story.

DO: Right.

NP: If we were to ever get a place to strut our stuff, to put it--. [Laughs] What about Lake Shippers would you like featured?

DO: Well, I guess we can go right back to the early days and explain how Lake Shippers was formed. I didn't even touch on that, but it was--.

NP Well, maybe you should because--.

DO: It was because of the length of time it was taking to load ships in the port, and everybody was dissatisfied with the way things were going. And because of that, the shippers and the exporters and the vessel owners, the brokers, they all got together—and

bankers and lawyers and everything, all different types of people got involved—and they had this meeting, which was held in Winnipeg. And out of that meeting, one of the bankers I think it was decided that, "Why can't we form some sort of a company that operates along the lines of a bank clearing house? It certainly, you know, could be done, and wouldn't that help the situation?" Then it went on from there, and that's basically how it started.

NP: So was it--.

DO: And that was in 1909.

NP: Did they base it on something that was done in other ports, or this was sort of a Canadian solution?

DO: See, we aren't government, of course. Like I said, we were a private, nonprofit organization. But no, it wasn't based on anything other than that, and it seemed to work very well. Very well for a long, long time.

[1:30:18]

NP: It must have been interesting to be in on those meetings that set it up because they would look at the problems and--.

DO: Mmhmm. "How do we get around this? How do we do this? Now, we're going to have to get the Grain Commission involved, the inspections and the weighing at the elevator end, and so on." Yeah. It must have been quite an accomplishment. I don't know how long it took to complete this whole, but I know they met in--. Well, the company was formed on the 16th of September, I think it was, 1909. So we had a 103-year run. It went pretty well. It's too bad it's gone now, or it will be at the end of this month. I still don't know. I'm talking to Roy about what's going on, and he doesn't know, and I'm out of the loop now because I've been gone for 16 years. I have no idea what's going to happen here, but I hope it's not something that's going to hurt the overall movement.

NP: The port.

DO: Yeah. Something that's not going to hurt anybody, really, I'm hoping. But I'm apprehensive about this.

NP: Yes. A lot of changes, not just in Lake Shippers, which has gone the way of the Canadian Wheat Board, which also had a major impact on the port here. And the only thing that people can seem to agree upon is it will be interesting to watch, and some people are very, very bullish about it, and others are less so.

DO: Well, there's pros and cons, both ways. You know, there's both pros and cons to it. I know that. I know that a lot of the farmers in, let's say, in Manitoba, for example, would love the opportunity to ship their durum across the border into North Dakota because anything they can grow that they can ship there, it'll go, and they know that. But at the same time, when the Board was formed, they were formed with the idea of helping all farmers. In other words, the farmer that happened to have his grain ripen much quicker than somebody in another area couldn't deliver it all to the elevator. He had to wait his--. He had a commitment, but he could only deliver a certain amount of that until everybody else had gotten their first quota in.

NP: The fairness again.

DO: Yeah, fairness again. Right. That's what it was based on, and, well, I thought it was working pretty good. I'm not going to get any farther into this. [Laughing]

NP: Into that one. Normally I don't ask any questions about that for that reason. Do you have any memorabilia including pictures that you would like to share with the project? We do have a scanner as part of our funding from the Paterson Foundation, so we could, with your permission--.

DO: You know, I've got some. Yeah, you might be interested in some of this stuff here.

NP: Now, before we look at that, I do have to ask you another question.

DO: Yeah.

NP: My grandfather, who worked for Lake Shippers, he was hired on as a caretaker. I understand that job. But he was also a messenger and caretaker. So what would a messenger do?

DO: Okay. A messenger. We--. Yeah. Messenger. What did--? We did have a messenger at one time. Oh. What were they doing?

NP: Would they be delivering stuff to the elevators?

DO: No, because the elevators, even when I first started, the elevator companies were all sending people to the office to pick up stuff. But I've heard that term messenger in connection with Lake Shippers, but--.

NP: Just running around the office delivering things to different people? It's not that big office. [Laughs]

DO: Well, it was a fair size. It was the whole top of Chapple's Building.

NP: Well, if you ever find out, let me know.

DO: Yeah, I will.

NP: Now, I think we'll sign off here.

DO: Sure.

NP: And maybe just discuss what you have, and I may want to go back on to discuss certain pictures, but I'll--.

DO: Yeah. I have a lot of older pictures here and some recent ones.

NP: Okay. Well, let's sign off, and then we'll see if we come back in.

DO: Sure.

End of interview.