Narrator: Renald Parent (RP)

Company Affiliations: Parent Seed Farms Ltd., Saskcan Pulse Trading, Alliance Grain Trading Inc.

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Summary: Seed farmer Renald Parent discusses his family's farming beginnings in Manitoba through the Great Depression and the development of the farm into a seed growing operation that serviced nearby farmers and eventually 34 countries around the world. He details the process of getting seeds inspected and certified for sale by the Canadian Seed Growers Association, the common issues and challenges with growing certain varieties of grain for seed, and the seasonal nature of the work. He describes the changes to crops grown depending on the introduction of new varieties, the growing demands in niche markets, and the physical conditions of the farmland. Other topics discussed include dealing with SeCan as a distributor, growing his company to a major local employer and global distributor, joining Alliance Grain Trading Inc., the threat of megafarms to small communities, and building the St. Joseph Museum.

Keywords: Parent Seed Farms Ltd.; Grain producers; Manitoba farmers; Manitoba; Red River Valley; Seed growing; Grain seeds; Seed production; Seed processing; Seed certification; Seed inspection; Seed marketing; Wheat varieties; Grain varieties; Farm management; Manitoba Agriculture; University of Manitoba; Canadian Seed Growers Association; The Great Depression; Canada Seeds Act; Plant breeding; SeCan; Farm equipment; Farm grain storage; Pulse crops; Legumes; Edible beans; Alliance Grain Traders Inc.; Saskcan Pulse Trading; Food suppliers; Canadian Grain Commission; Grain exports; St. Joseph Museum

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: The interview is being conducted by Nancy Perozzo, and Carole Carlson will be doing the follow-up interview in French. It is November 21, 2011, and we are in Classroom C of the Canadian International Grains Institute [CIGI]. And I will have our narrator introduce himself and just make a couple of comments about his involvement in the grain industry.

RP: My name is Renald Parent, and I'm actually a third-generation farmer, I guess, in Manitoba, like from our family's standpoint. So I'm from the Saint Joseph district, which happens to be in the rural municipality of Montcalm and considered to be part of the Red River Valley.

NP: Great. And three generations, tell us a little bit about the earlier two generations. How did they come to Manitoba, and what kind of farming did they do?

RP: Well, my grandparents came from Quebec originally and were in, actually, in the US in Vermont and Massachusetts area. And they got repatriated, I guess, to Canada to take up some homestead farmland back at the end of the 1800s. So that's when they started out on the small farm track in the Saint Joseph district. Then my parents took over some of that farmland that they had sort of farmed for a number of years, and I came in in the 1962 as a third-generation active farmer.

NP: So does your family, then, have the designation of the century farmers that you see?

RP: Uh, no. Not really. We didn't quite achieve that somehow. But yeah, they were here, and they took up some virgin farmland. And yeah, it's an interesting history.

NP: So your family has seen a lot of changes in the industry over its time in Manitoba?

RP: Yes, definitely. Quite an evolution, actually, within a lifetime.

NP: Are there any stories in particular that sort of stick in your mind about their early pioneering days that you take special pride in, given your family's history?

RP: Well, basically, it was the ability to survive. The early generations sure didn't have the tools and the knowledge. Because they came in as—originally when they were in Quebec—they were just very small-scale farmers, like when we look at three, four generations back. So there wasn't that much education and expertise into farming land, but I guess it was the glorious opportunity that was presented to immigrants that enticed them to come to Manitoba. And it was, I'm sure, quite the learning process for the family. And they had to live through the Depression and a whole bunch of challenging times over the years on the Prairies because they had anywhere from the rat infestation to the grasshopper infestations and whatever else. There was a lot of challenges actually. And availability of water also was also a challenge because there was animal husbandry on all the early farms and water was not necessarily readily available, especially during the Depression and the dry cycles. So water had to be hauled from the Red River and ice had to be cut at the Red River and hauled to the farm sites and put into these different buildings to try to store it and wood

shavings so they would meet the needs of the family for the year. So when you look at that, basically people were not busy doing the type of things we're busy doing today, but it was survival.

NP: Yeah. Quite a story.

RP: Yeah.

NP: I wonder—you may not know this—but when they came, did they have horses? I mean there were early days where the people were pulling the plows.

RP: Most of them came and that had either an ox or one horse and maybe a small number of cattle. Either they bought them here from other or previous or earlier settlers, and that's the information we got that came down the pipe there just to us. But definitely it was a slow progression, I guess, on most farms because things didn't happen overnight.

[0:05:18]

NP: Your family business expanded into a different area in the seed growing area, so how did that come about?

RP: My father—back before he got married in, I believe, it was 1939—he and a number of other French farmers in the Red River Valley were offered a course at the local Trappist there in St. Norbert. So the Trappist fathers were offering this farming course, and it included animal husbandry, bookkeeping, machinery repairs. So it was an all-encompassing training for farmers who were moving ahead or wanted to move ahead. So that was a--. And we still have some records from my parents, a small book that he kept of revenues and expenses there back in the early '40s that evolved from that course that he had taken. But it opened up the prospect that there were better things to be achieved in farming.

And if we go to the 1950s—early 1950s—we had what they called crop-improvement clubs that were formed in the area. So St Joseph had such a crop-improvement club, and my father was part of that group. And that was sponsored by Manitoba Agriculture, and I distinctly remember a Mr. Dave Derksen-very fine gentlemen who assisted the group of farmers to operate and be able to glean the information from these plots that they were planning. So those were not necessarily trial plots, but they were actually small parcels of new varieties that could be introduced into the farming operation. So it was more or less to compare existing varieties that they were using—whether it was wheat, oats, or barley—and look at some new varieties that would be more resistant either to rust, had better lodging qualities, because all the early varieties of durum wheat and oats were extremely weak-strawed and

ended up with what looked like a fantastic crop coming, and then almost at maturity time, you'd get a wind at the wrong time, and you'd lose your crop because of lodging.

NP: Now that's a new term for me, "lodging." What does lodging mean?

RP: Lodging would be breaking of the straw. And when the straw breaks and it's at the, let's say, the green stage of the developing grain, it cuts off the nutrients that come to do the filling of the heads and the kernels. So you end up with what we call chicken feed as far as the seed quality. And if it happens at the other stage in the crop when it's almost mature, then you end up with all the heads sort of breaking off and falling to the ground and not being able to harvest. So that was quite a problem with a lot of earlier varieties until they came out with shorter strawed varieties, stiffer strawed varieties. The other big problem was rust, especially in the hard Red Spring wheats. So you could have an excellent crop coming, and then rust would come in—rust spores—and then it would actually decimate the crop. So it was quite a positive thing to have these newer varieties that were resistant to certain strains of rust. So in this they could see--. The farmers could come in and observe these parcels of these new varieties that were supplied by the University of Manitoba and give them a good comparison that there were better varieties on the horizon and better ways to grow crops.

NP: Now you mentioned Mr. Derksen was the name, correct?

RP: Correct.

NP: Was he with the university or with the Manitoba Agriculture?

RP: He was with Manitoba Agriculture at the time, and then he moved on to work for private companies. I believe he worked for Cargill for quite a few years. But he was a younger man off the block at the time, and so were my parents. And I remember him as being a very, very nice man to deal with, and he was very good with the farmers as far as communicating with them and bringing them the information that they needed to make better choices.

[0:10:22]

NP: And respectful of the farmers, I would think, from what you've said.

RP: Correct. Correct. Definitely.

NP: Yeah. Now when you were talking about all of the wonderful things that could happen to crops, the question comes to my mind, why is your family still in the business? What was it that appealed to you in spite of the hardship and uncertainty in so many situations?

RP: That's a tough question to answer in a sense, and in another sense, when you're brought up, farming is a way of life. There was a certain, I guess, freedom if you were a farmer. There was always the hope and expectancy that there would be better years, and that we'd see better prices. We'd see better varieties and better crops. And that's a farmer's story, you know? Like we live on the hope basically. You do all the work, but nothing's guaranteed.

NP: No. I always thought it was sort of a legitimate form of gambling.

RP: It could be turned that way. [Laughing] Yeah.

NP: You started out talking about working with Mr. Derksen and the test plots as part of leading into how your family went into the more specialized area of producing seeds. So continue with that strain. How did that come about?

RP: Yeah. The fact that new varieties were being available from the University of Manitoba on a gradual basis, and they were becoming easier to procure. There was also the Canadian Seed Growers Association that was formed. I don't remember which year, but farmers also had the opportunity to become members of the Canadian Seed Growers Association. And by that, new varieties of cereals were available to farmers to multiply and put on the market to either neighbours or farmers from other districts. So my dad actually was involved with a number of farmers in the St Joseph area in such a manner—getting the new varieties, planting them, getting them inspected to meet the standards of the seed industry. We just grew these seeds, and we actually marketed them through other seed cleaning plants. So in other words, after you had harvested the crop, you had to get it cleaned to a seed standards—in other words, eliminate undesirable seeds and mixtures and weed seeds—and it had to meet certain standards. So then the resulting cleaned product had to be inspected and then was given, actually, a certificate number where it was qualified as either certified, registered, or foundation seeds. So those were the tiers.

When you got the seed originally, it was the higher pedigree of the seed, and then you would multiply it, and then you end up with foundation seed. The year after you'd have registered. The year after you'd have certified. So a new variety could be grown three or four years in a row within the seed regulations to be tagged and sold as a certified seed, a grain under a variety name. Because if it's not certified, registered, or foundation, it's a grain. You'd have a wheat. But if it falls within these classes, then you have a variety to sell, and that's where a variety is important from the consumer standpoint. So if you're buying something, you want something

that's rust resistant or better straw strength, it's that variety that you want. But you can't just sell that by word, you need the certificates to do that as a proof that it's a legitimate variety with a certain name in history.

NP: I've got a couple of questions out of what you've said. First of all, the certification is done by--?

RP: Well, it's the Canadian Seed Growers Association. Actually, the central is in Ottawa, and then there's branches across the Prairies where you have the inspectors coming in to inspect the crop and then to inspect the resulting seed. But the Association is ran from Ottawa, which is the central.

[0:15:19]

NP: And does it have any connection with the Canadian Grain Commission's inspection area at all? Or is it just a voluntary association?

RP: Well, it's through--. It's an association, but to get the inspectors, we have to apply at the, we called it at the time "Plant Products," which is the next building here. And that's where it's administered, and that's where the inspectors come from. That's their base. So you called up the inspectors and--. When the crop is being grown, there's a field inspection being done, and that's all done basically through your crop inspection forms that you fill out. After you plant the seed, you fill out a crop inspection form, and then they delegate inspectors to come and inspect the crop just before mature stage, once it's headed out so they can identify off grades or other varieties—contaminants—that might keep that crop from being registered or qualified under the Seed Act.

NP: When you grow the product and you have it ready for inspection, does it mostly work, and it is accepted? Or is there varying results on a regular basis?

RP: In most instances it's been very successful. The big challenge was when we grew oats because wild oats is very similar in form and size to the oats and extremely hard to separate at cleaning time. Or some people call it processing, but it's not. Processing is when you change the nature of the product. But it's a word used in our industry. We processed the seed to be cleaned to standards, but--. Oats is the tough one, and there were high enough percentage of rejection of lots. There were some specialized equipment that we used in our plants, they called blanket cleaners. So it was sort of a flannelette cloth that operated on rollers, and then your product would flow on it. It would come in on an angle, and wild oats would have this little tail that would stick out, and it would stick to the blanket.

That was one way to separate it, but quite a few times, the wild oats that little tail would have broken off, so then there was no way of separating it except on sizing. Because a high percentage of the wild oats would have been thinner than the varieties, especially when we go back quite a few years, and we had the variety of oats that we called "Garry." Garry was an extremely plump oats that made it very easy to clean the wild oats out. And then after that, we came out with new varieties of course that had more straw strength because Garry had an inherent problem with straw strength. So we had all kinds of new varieties, but they were all thinner seeds, which made it that much more difficult to do the separations.

NP: It would seem to me there'd be fewer seed growers in oats than in the other less problematic--.

RP: Well, sometimes it related to the area because some areas didn't have a problem with wild oats for whatever reason, because of rotation. And you could always go into the crop and rogue them out. What you call "rogueing" is just after the crop has headed out, you can actually walk the fields and then you can pull out undesirable plants. And wild oats, normally the plants were higher and had a little bit of a yellowing tinge to the seeds. So you could identify it fairly well. And we did a lot of that when we were young, rogueing out the fields. So you'd do that in oats to get the wild oats out, and you'd do it in the hard Red Spring wheats to take out the bearded types, which were considered off-types. And in barley, well, it was sometimes the shorter or taller varieties also. Like predominantly tallers, you'd pull them out because they were off-types, basically. So that all related to the process of growing a crop.

[0:20:12]

NP: So why did your family decide to do this rather than just regular growing?

RP: There were over the years quite a few periods of time where it was extremely difficult to market your grain at an equitable price. There was very low quotas for whatever reason, and there was always carryover. If you were in seed productions and you had desirable seed varieties to put on the market, it was easier to promote and sell that product. And it also brought a premium because it was a lot of extra expense and effort. Then that brought sometimes—most of the time—a small extra margin, and it opened up the market not necessarily just in Manitoba. We were actually ourselves, once we built our cleaning plant, we were actually marketing into Minnesota, North Dakota because the Americans were looking always for new varieties also and the university here in Manitoba was always producing probably better varieties than what came onto the American market. So we had developed a fairly interesting wholesale market into the US with line grain companies out there.

Then we developed a market into the province of Quebec and Ontario into southern Ontario, like the Chatham area, and into Quebec. Well, that took quite a district also in the agricultural lands, and even going up into Lac St. Jean there, which was–. It's a

shorter season, but then you'd get into buckwheat there and certain other types that there were some specific markets. So over the years, I spent certain amount of time visiting merchants out there, dealers, and had established pretty interesting network of buyers. And we still kept plays on that, because we still do that today to the same buyers or the next generation of these family-operated businesses. And it's served us well, because it was an extra outlet that permitted us to cash in the crop on a yearly basis and not have to carry it over and make that extra loan from the bank or to keep moving ahead.

NP: This may seem like a rather basic question, but if we go back to the researchers developing the new seed. So they might have five seeds in their hands when they start, so where does it come in that it goes to people such as you? How does the product get to you, first?

RP: They would make these—and they still do that at the University of Manitoba or in Brandon or Saskatoon--. **[Coughs]** Excuse me. I'm going to take a shot of water here. **[… audio pauses]** Got a dry throat. They develop new varieties, and they're looking at traits. There's crossbreeding, and it's quite an intense process. And then once they've identified a variety that's desirable, they'll multiply it to a certain level, and then we will be able to get what they call breeder seed. So the breeder seed comes in in just a small bag, and you'll do a plot, which is not a large area. Normally it would be a quarter acre or half acre of this new breeder seed. So you'll multiply it, and then the year after you can go into foundation. So from that small plot, you'll probably derive enough product there to plant 40 acres or 80 acres depending on how good the crop was. And from there, you'll just keep multiplying and be able to sell larger and larger quantities of that variety.

NP: And on average—this might be a difficult question to answer—on average, when would they bring in a new variety? My understanding is that there's a constant need to develop new varieties because as the product grows and becomes popular, the pests learn how to attack, and so you need to have crops coming in behind. So from your experience, how frequently would you have to rotate out a new variety?

[0:25:00]

RP: If we go back to the '50s and '60s, it wasn't that terribly often because they had the, like in the hard Red Spring wheat, they had a variety that was called Marquis. And it existed for the longest time. Then Selkirk came along not that many years--. Well, the years that I remember. And that was an extremely popular variety. It was a high yielding wheat. It was resistant to most of the rust problems that we had with other varieties, and it was an extremely good market in the United States because the Americans really like the variety. It was a large-seeded type variety, extremely red if you had the right conditions–great plant and standability. It's a variety that really took over the marketplace for a number of years. So varieties didn't come about that often. You know, it would

take maybe five, ten years before a new variety would come in to replace. But now, we're getting a lot of new varieties, more new varieties.

There's an association called SeCan, like Seed Canada, that looks after the distribution of new seed varieties. So if you're a SeCan member, you can apply to SeCan to have the available new varieties. So SeCan would actually--. It's an entity that goes to the different universities to acquire the distribution rights to some of the new varieties because with private plant breeders' rights today, now it's a little bit of a different game than when everything was public. So there's royalties to be paid and there's certain fees on varieties that we have to pay now that we didn't. And that's at the seed marketing stage of the product, at the foundation--. At the certified stage, sorry. When we sell the seed, there's a per-bushel charge that goes back to SeCan and in turn goes back to either the university or the private plant breeder.

NP: Are there a lot of private plant breeders?

RP: There are some, but I'm a little bit removed from that now, so I don't know exactly. I can't talk numbers and percentages. I'm not knowledgeable to that point of being able to say that.

NP: I'm thinking of Monsanto as an example, would that be an example of a private plant breeder or are they something quite different?

RP: Well, they'd be more like--. They're a distribution company. They'll acquire rights to varieties. They'll have their own labs. They'll have their own people in there. They could be acquiring strains from a private plant breeder and put it into their multiplying program, and then they'll put it out on the market. But they own the variety. So that's what we call the private sector more than SeCan, which we consider that to be more like a public sector of distribution.

NP: That change—and we have general questions about changes, and you're dealing with them now. But that change to SeCan from the more public system, what kind of implications has that had for your business, either negatively or positively?

RP: I think it's been very positive because it opened the door to a lot of seed growers who might not have had access before SeCan came along. They have their meetings where growers go to the annual meetings and become aware of what's available from SeCan and as varieties today, what they might be working on for the future. I think it's a very positive progression, I think, in the distribution of seed varieties to have had it--.

NP: And previously it was more government- and university-controlled and less open in that sense?

RP: Well, maybe not as accessible to the average seed grower. Now it's like you go to a catalogue, and if you qualify, you can order. As long as you're a member of SeCan, of course. There's a membership fee, and there's a certain cost there, but it's minor in relevance to the benefits that you can derive from being a member.

[0:30:06]

NP: And do the fees that you pay to sell that product, does that go back into redesign of new varieties? Are SeCan involved in that too?

RP: Yeah, yeah. Well, SeCan, they would be collecting the royalties. So collecting the royalties, they'll pay that back to universities or private plant breeders. So they're sort of an intermediate arm basically.

NP: And who is SeCan. Like what kinds of people are on them? Is it a business or is it a board or--? Do you know what the make up of this is?

RP: It's a board. They have some people who are at the SeCan office in Ottawa that administer all the paperwork, but as far as how the members are elected on that, I'm not cognisant of that. I don't--.

NP: Perhaps you can give me a name later on and a contact, and it sounds like somebody we should be interviewing.

RP: Yeah, for sure. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. Is it possible for you to talk about a typical day for a plant breeder, or not a plant breeder, but a seed grower? Is there a typical day?

RP: I don't believe there's a typical day because it's all seasonal. Everything's seasonal. Like, you're going to do certain things in spring and certain things in summer during the growing season, and then there's—like I was talking about—roguing. I was talking about cleaning, having the seed cleaned to standards, and the marketing, and whatever else.

NP: Well, let's talk about seasonal because some people think that when you're growing crops, you just work during the spring, summer, and hope to get it off early in the fall.

RP: Well, in the wintertime we call that, I guess, the learning season where you have the opportunity to attend meetings to learn about new products, new varieties that are coming onto the marketplace. So that's a very important stage of growing crops. Then you make your choices, and you apply or try to get the new varieties either through SeCan or through other seed growers. And the different levels of registration, whether its foundation registered. And it's the planning of the crop. When you get into the pedigree seed production, you can't just grow a pedigree crop of wheat onto any stubble. There has to be a rotation. And you can't grow, let's say, a new variety of wheat on stubble crop that had a wheat variety different than the one you're going to grow because automatically that's a contamination. I guess a problem because you'll always have volunteer grain from the previous year growing, and then you're growing a new variety, so you've got a contaminated product off the bat that won't qualify for certification.

So you have to look at your whole land base, and you have to look at your rotation because there's certain crops that can't be grown back to back because of disease or whatever else. And then there's the fact of contamination because of same types. So that's part of the planning process in wintertime to figure out how you're going to rotate your crops on your given farm base.

When we get into spring, when you're growing these seed crops, that means that you have to keep all your equipment completely clean. So if you're doing, let's say, an oat crop or a wheat crop you're planting that, the next year you're going to plant that new variety or this registered variety of a different type or--. Even if it's the same type, you have to clean your equipment completely out. So everything has to be vacuumed and cleaned to prevent contamination. So then you plant your crop. Then you're looking basically at the roguing process a little bit later into the season. And when you come to harvest, it's the same process. You have to make sure your grain storage bins are completely clean so there's no contamination from the bins, from the augers, and also the combines. So you're swathing the crop or harvesting the crop, that equipment has to be completely cleaned inside and out. So that's a long process in the morning, especially if you did, let's say barley today. Tomorrow you're going into a wheat crop that's a pedigreed crop, that equipment has to be cleaned like so there's not potential contamination. So that's a long tedious project to do that—or operation I should say—but it's part of the seed production chores, I guess.

[0:35:43]

NP: And do you sell the seed that you grow in a year in that fall, or when do you market that seed to the farmers?

RP: Well, it's made available from fall right through springtime. Like presently, for the month of November—even at the end of October—our company started marketing some of this year's crop already to what we call that export markets or export into the different provinces. So buyers are actually purchasing now for delivery, let's say, in March or April of the 2011 crop. So you have to look at, number one, getting the seed cleaned up to standards and having the certification on it so you can market it on the variety

basis or variety name. And establishing your markets. Sometimes we establish the markets before we have the seed cleaned and certified because at harvest time all the seed gets sampled. Like as we unload the product from the trucks going into storage, everything gets sampled and analyzed so we know if there's add-mixtures or potential problems. It's a matter of experience over the years where you get comfortable pre-selling a crop before the final inspections.

NP: You were talking about marketing the products. Are you left on your own to market a new variety, or are there more people standing behind that variety to persuade the farmers that now's the time for a new variety?

RP: To me that's two questions, eh.

NP: Ok.

RP: On the first one, I would say no. We're completely free to market the variety to who we want and when we want to market it. And you can keep a seed lot, let's say, of seed wheat over into next year or the year after. So it doesn't have to be marketed on that same crop year. So there are no restrictions there. Once you have grown the crop and it's inspected and certified, you're on your own to do what you want with it.

NP: I guess where my question is coming from, is it hard to persuade farmers to switch from one variety to another, because if you have to change their preferences, that seems to be somewhat of a challenge.

RP: Well, new varieties will always offer an advantage, either in potential yield, bushel weight, seed size, standability, disease, insect resistance. And farmers are seeking this all the time. The less they would have to spray for insects, the less you have to spray for disease, it's something that you seek because you're limiting your expenses. So the farmers are always on the lookout for better varieties and more profitable varieties to grow. So it's--. And when new varieties come out, there's always an advantage. Usually, there will be a couple of outstanding traits to the new variety, but there might also be an undesirable trait which seems to always be a part of the equation. But you'll have more advantages than disadvantages, and it depends what a farm operator likes to work with and the type of equipment he has also to address specific problems in specific crops.

[0:40:12]

NP: When you were talking about everything that's involved with equipment and storage, to be a seed grower then, is there a bigger capital investment—I'm thinking on the things that you have to store—than if you were just regular farming?

RP: It mostly comes to the segregation of the products. So that might mean extra storage bins, it might mean some better storage bins, because when we look at the standard grains storage bins that are the wafer panels or bolted type, they're always very difficult and more difficult to clean than if you have hopper-bottom bins, which are just sheet-metal bins. They're extremely easy to clean. And ourselves, on our own operation, we prefer storing our seed production into hopper bins because it limits the potential of contamination and preparation time to do the operations.

NP: Do the farmers collect the seed from you, or do you have a delivery service?

RP: They will collect. That's basically--. Except when we wholesale or sell out of province. We look after the transportation. We line up the traffic from door to door. The farmers have traditionally booked their seed needs over the winter, and then they'll come in in spring and pick it up as they're seeding because most of them don't want to bring the seed back home and have to look at cleaning up their own storage bin to prevent contamination, or just the fact that they don't have enough storage segregation to be able to store it. So the preference is to come in with an empty truck, weigh it, load up, and then go to the fields. That's been a service that we've offered since day one when we started cleaning seed. And that became more and more important because at the start, farmers had a tendency to bring seed back home in the wintertime and all that, but now I'd say it's a large percentage pick up at seeding time.

NP: Is there a premium for—or a discount, let's say—for picking up in the fall?

RP: We normally do that, yeah, because that's an incentive, and for us it's also--. It gets to be quite a capital demand to set up all the storage capacity to address that type of marketing. But now, as we're seeing the larger and larger farms, like, going into the megafarms of today—we're talking 10,000 acres plus—these farmers are better equipped on the storage side, and they have a preference to having the product in their yards. So because of the variety or the area that they have to farm and the distances they have to travel, they prefer having product at their home base. So that's changing gradually now as we're seeing more and more of those megafarms. It's not a majority, but it's taking up a lot of acreage.

NP: Yeah. Speaking of megafarms, have you seen a change in your acreage over the time that you've been in the seed business? Has your operation grown? Are you still in the same geographical plot?

RP: Well, the farm has grown. When I started with my dad in 1962, we had right about 1,000 acres of farmland, and it was all real close to the home base. In the 1970s after my dad passed away and we incorporated the farm operation with brothers, we started renting land outside the district. So we would travel up to 20 miles to farm some rented land, and our operation grew to roughly 3,600 acres. It's not a large-scale farm, but the fact that we're also involved into the seed cleaning and seed production, and we

were also in sugar beets, sugar beet production. So if you want to be efficient, I guess, or profitable when you're handling too many hats, then you have to restrict your land base, otherwise you lose control. So it was always an onus for us to just operate what we could effectively digest.

[0:45:43]

NP: Just a little earlier on, you had talked about when you export grain either to other provinces or to the States that you arrange for the transportation. And we have a question that says, you know, does your company do work through Thunder Bay? What are your arrangements for transporting outside of the province?

RP: Well, Thunder Bay is not an issue for us. It's never been. Transportation out of province is done through--. We have our own trucks that will pick up the CN piggybacks or containers. So we'll pick that up from distribution points in Winnipeg here, bring it back to our plant, load them up, and then bring them back to the city here. Then they end up on the rail, and they go to Montreal or other ports—or other stations, I should say—they get unloaded and trucked to the final destination. So we arrange--. We have a person in our company that works the transportation issue, so it facilitates the task for the buyers because it's door-to-door. They don't have to worry about all the logistics of the transportation.

NP: Just give me a sense of size, in a typical good year, how many containers would be shipped out of province? Do you know that or is that--?

RP: When you're talking seed, planting seeds?

NP: Yeah. Mmhmm.

RP: It would vary from 25- to 60-odd piggyback loads. So it depends on what's available in other provinces too. Sometimes they have new varieties coming about, or sometimes there's a trend to slow down the production of hard Red Spring because soybeans and corn are a more profitable crop to grow. That makes up for the variation in the volume basically. And sometimes there's certain varieties that we have here that will be extremely desirable to other growing areas, so that facilitates our test markets. So it's not necessarily how good marketers are, it's also what we have in our basket available for the buyers.

NP: Have you found that you have lots of leftover seeds, or does it clear out pretty quickly?

RP: It clears out quite well. We normally don't have a carryover because you get to read the marketplace. You've got an idea of what you can effectively market. Most of the time we're short, but we also purchase from other plants because we have the whole network of plants who do that same type of work as we do in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. So we buy a fair amount of product from other plants in the two provinces to meet our needs. That gives us a lot of flexibility.

NP: How many plant seed operations are there in Manitoba, do you know? Is it in the hundreds or tens or there's a handful?

RP: That's a good question. There are a lot of very small farm-based operations, and then there's the larger operations that will be a 12-month of the year business.

NP: Let's talk about the larger ones then. Is it a large group or not many?

RP: The larger ones, there's—I'm making a guess here—but I'd say probably about 20. But some companies specialize in certain products. Like they'll be actively engaged in marketing corn or soybeans or canola, or you can be into cereals, winter wheat, and all the other small specialty crops like rapeseed and yellow mustard.

[0:50:20]

NP: Does your company specialize in certain crops? What have you chosen?

RP: We work the winter wheats quite well, and the peas for a certain variety of peas that have some specific markets, and then the cereals like the wheat. We still do some barley. We still do some oats, but very little. It used to be a big volume for us when we started, but gradually we've adapted to choosing certain crops that fit more into our marketing and also the growing possibilities of our farm, because when we look on our rotational basis, we grow what we normally can market. When we look at flax, we have a very high pH level in our soils, and flax doesn't do very good in high pH levels. So we sort of shied away from that crop. We have an incidence of mustard seed in the farmland on the Valley, so we don't grow pedigreed canola crops. We grow the commercial crops of canola. But we don't grow corn, and we don't grow soybeans, but we're into the edible beans though. We grow the edible beans, and we also have a plant that's dedicated to cleaning and marketing edible beans. So it depends how that all fits within the capabilities of your company and the farmland.

NP: You mentioned that you did a certain type of canola, but not another type. Why one and not the other?

RP: Well, what I mean is we don't do canola seed production. So we don't get the new varieties and multiply them, because as soon as you have wild mustard it just downgrades your--. You can't get a pedigree on it, and it's very stringent. But there are areas in Manitoba that don't have a problem with--. And I said wild oats, I mean wild mustard. So these areas actually concentrate on production of canola. And when we go back quite a few years, I guess, going into the early '60s when they had those first breeding programs there at the University of Manitoba under the plant breeder–I think it was Baldur Stefansson was his name–so he was the key person that started the--. He was the introduction. He introduced new varieties of what we called rapeseed at the time. So we looked into growing some pedigree seed of canola, and we had tried—or rapeseed at the time—and we tried for a couple of years, and we weren't successful even with the roguing because it's extremely difficult to rogue out. You can do it, but the incidence of mustard was too high in our crop. And you can't spray it out, so that sort of defines what you can do.

NP: When you talk about spraying, that was leading to another question I had. And I was thinking of you going through as a kid and picking out the rogue seeds. So is that done chemically now, or is it still you still go through your land and pull out those heads?

RP: There's quite a few people still doing the roguing. And roguing, you'll do more at the higher pedigree scale of the crop, like from the breeder to foundation to registered, because the tolerance is extremely small for off-types or add mixtures. When you get into certified class, then it's not as stringent, and that's what we specialize in. We used to do all the plots—breeder plots and high foundation—but because of where our company is going now, because of manpower use, we sort of got away from that. That's more left to smaller operators who can do that type of multiplication very well.

[0:55:14]

[… audio pauses]

NP: I will ask the question, yes. One question you've answered in little pieces as we've gone along—but I think there's more to add here—what are the ingredients of a successful seed grain company in your opinion?

RP: It's having the ability to communicate with your clients, I think, pass on the information that they're seeking and that they need to make their decisions. Honesty. Treating the customers right, and also being consistent because farmers will come back to you wanting the same type of information, and if you're consistent and you have the personnel also that are friendly and ready to assist, that's a big thing. We saw service as being extremely important when we started. There was just no hours. It was early in the morning, phone at night, a service middle, end of the day, Saturday, Sunday, because farming, it's a seasonal thing, and you're at the mercy of weather. And you might have five days of drizzly weather during the week, and then the Saturday and Sunday is

sunny. Then if you don't do them, you're back, let's say, in a bad cycle on Monday, well people after a while sort of say, "Well, when the weather is right, we have to go."

And it's this much more important, I think, with the large farming operations now. When it's time to go, they go, and there's just no hours. So we find that service has been extremely important, and it's served us well because we cater to that demand very effectively with providing the farmer with what they wanted when they wanted it at an equitable price. And we definitely weren't the cheapest product on the market. Because we had to offer all these extra things, it meant additional personnel, investment in equipment and in storage. But it's surprising. It's like purchasing cars or whatever. A person might go out and buy something on a deal, and then they find out the service is not there, and this is lacking and that is lacking. And after a while you get your customers back. And it's the same in the seed industry. So the overall package, I think, is very important on the continuity basis to be successful in that type of business, like in most other types of businesses.

NP: Interesting how often that comment comes out in every sector of the grain industry. I'm going to preface my next question with a big, long comment. The focus of our project has been Canada's export trade, and we ask the question of everyone from the producer right through to the president of various companies to think about how they feel what they did contributes to the success of Canada as a world leader in—one of the world leaders—in the grain trade.

RP: That's a tough question in a sense. See for us, our focus was never export grain trade when you look at that. We've been focused and oriented in seed and special crop marketing to canners and packagers and that type of business.

NP: Can I add just something here that might aid in that?

RP: Go ahead.

[1:00:02]

NP: So if you're selling wheat seed to a farmer, that farmer does have to eventually, in many instances, export it. Anything you do that you think makes it possible that that farmer, year after year after year, can have a product that is internationally demanded.

RP: Well, I guess when we look on the--. We could call ourselves an intermediate between the breeders of the new varieties and then the buyers at the other end of the scale. In that sense, yes, I think our industry is very important to that formula. And definitely as farmers grow those better varieties, you have a better product to market. And we see that with the hard Red Spring wheat and the

durums for pasta and the canola for the oils. We're definitely on the right track, and I believe Canada is very well regarded as a producer of high-quality products in the grain and oilseed sector.

NP: Yeah. If you look at the, let's say, the opposite, if there were no standards that you uphold in the varieties that you grow, what would happen to the system?

RP: Well, we might not have had the varieties and the success that we've had in the proliferation of even better varieties that necessarily end up with a better product to market.

NP: More standard as well? Yeah. I know it's a difficult question. Well, if you're marketing at an international level, it's easy to answer that question. But sometimes you don't realize how important what you do is, even though you're further removed from it, which I certainly see. The next question has to do with your interconnectedness with various players in that international grain trade. So we've already heard from you about your connection with the farmers. Anything to add there?

RP: In what sense?

NP: Well, just the service that you provide to farmers. I mean, it's obviously a direct connection.

RP: Yeah, it's a direct connection. We're there to provide what they need to make what we believe is a good profit and supply a better product for them to achieve that.

NP: You've mentioned a couple of government organizations or at least associated loosely with government. Do you have any connection with the Canadian Grain Commission at all?

RP: Well, with the Canadian Grain Commission basically it's what we market as an end product going into the edible markets or into the end-user markets. If we're shipping a product into Mexico or—let's say yellow peas, edible product—some buyers require us to have a certificate from the Canadian Grain Commission. You need phytosanitary certificates and all that, so there definitely is a link there, but it's not to all buyers and not to all markets. But there's a need there for that type of a service to our industry definitely to help into the marketing of the products.

NP: Before I forget to ask the question, you mentioned that you could market into Mexico. Are there other international markets that your company deals with?

RP: Well, we sell to 34 different countries.

NP: Oh! Do you have them all memorized?

RP: Not really. [Laughing]

NP: Which ones pop to mind? I'll get a list from you later, but which ones pop to mind?

RP: Well US is a big, big market for us, and then we have Mexico. We have a number of countries in South America. We're into Europe, UK. There's just a little bit all over.

NP: Middle East?

RP: Middle East, lentils.

NP: Asia? Any Asian markets?

RP: Some. Restricted though. Japan, some into China, the communist countries. So it's a little bit all over basically, but some markets are more. There's more volumes. With other markets it's sporadic and smaller quantities. Grocery loads instead of truckloads of same product. We have long-term contracts that we make with canners that will have us supply monthly shipments over a 12-month or 24-month period. So we have to back that up with the product. So there's different ways of marketing different products.

[1:05:41]

We have sold our company two years ago, but we're still running the company as we were running it before with no new blood. So we're still managing it with the same people at the helm and the same helpers, workers, and whatever else–quality control people. We're part of a larger conglomerate of companies now called Alliance Grain Traders, and this automatically opened up some additional markets into some new countries. They market in roughly 80 different countries. Basically, our quality control program was probably the important thing that brought us to the attention of the Alliance Grain Trading group, and the fact that we were also an edible bean production and cleaning and the markets associated with that. So we're also into a lot of niche markets that are more desirable to have instead of the formula of the large-volume type of markets. So it's been an interesting process now to work with Alliance Grain Trading, and it's a publicly owned company now traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange. There are plants--.

There's ourselves in Manitoba. There's a number of plants in Saskatchewan. They're into Australia, North Dakota, South Africa, the UK. So there's quite a few different type of products being produced and processed and marketed from all these different areas. There's a pretty complete basket of food products made available through this company.

NP: And where are they headquartered?

RP: Alliance Grain Trader, like us, we work with a Saskcan group that's headquartered out of Regina in Saskatchewan. So they take care of all the Prairie operations. So we work with them and so does the plants in Williston, North Dakota, and there's one in Minot, North Dakota. So we're all working through the Saskcan central.

NP: Has Alliance been around a long time, or are they recently formed, and then went around and found people and companies like yours that they liked?

RP: It's not an old company. It's a relatively new company. It's a new concept. They purchase companies, a lot of family-owned companies—multi-generational most of them. Like in Turkey, it's a three-generation family. They're into pasta products. They'll buy pasta products from Canada or different countries, and they'll make all the different types of noodles or whatever, package them, and put them on the market. So now, like, the Saskcan group just got a federal grant to build a pasta plant here in Saskatchewan, and those people there from Turkey will be coming down to look after building and organizing this new company, but it's going to be focused on purchasing the durum crops from Saskatchewan that are presently all being exported to other countries to end up as pasta products. So now we'll have the capability in Canada, I guess, through this plant to make the flour, number one, and then get into all the shelf-type products, which they're doing in Turkey, because they're also working with the bulgar wheat and semolina flours and all the specialty flours to make all the ethnic type breads. So eventually this might end up being a bit of a similar process here.

[1:10:12]

But it's definitely a company that's been moving ahead pretty rapidly catered to meeting food demands for today and tomorrow. It's a changing world out there so we--. We hesitated to sell the company, to be part of that group, but you also have to look at where we're headed in the food industry and suppliers to the food industry. Definitely for us, we feel it was a great move to be part of this larger entity.

NP: When you were operating outside of them before they formed the relationship with your company, had you international markets on your own then or was this--?

RP: Oh, yeah. Yes. We were actually marketing into 34 countries, and we have our own traders in the office. So each person--. We have four people trading. They're buying products and selling, and they specialize into different products. Like it's not a mix-match where everybody does everything, so they all have their specialty. And we have a complete transportation arm also. There's two people working in transportation. And then I have an agronomist on board and a quality control specialist and the two plants.

NP: Wow. Do those traders then travel a fair bit to those countries, or is this the electronic age of making connections?

RP: Well, it's the electronic age, but we also participate into some large international forums. Like there was one just this fall again in October in Germany called "Anuga," which is a large food show. So there's people from all the countries, all the buyers from A to Z come there, and it's a five-day show. It's 100 odd thousand people walking through it. We go to Paris. Like it's every second year. Like one year it's in—Anuga—Germany, the next year it's in Paris. So that's the same type of show. And they have one in Mexico. So there's different trade shows like where all the buyers and sellers will congregate to where you get to meet people face to face also. Because like you say, electronic age is great, but there's nothing like meeting people, shaking hands, and sitting down for a discussion or a glass of ale or whatever.

NP: [Laughs] A glass of ale made from Canadian barley? [Laughs]

RP: Possibly, possibly.

NP: You hope! [Laughing] Ok. As we said off-tape, this has been just wonderful information, and I'm not finished yet. You know, I don't want to get into Carole's time, so I'll try to go quickly here. Major changes other than the ones that you've talked about so far? Major changes that have occurred over your time or your memory in your particular niche of the grain trade.

RP: You mean as far as product or whatever?

NP: Product, methods, whatever. Just major changes. Things that stick in your mind as being, "Yeah, that was really a critical change from the past."

RP: Yeah, basically, it's the introduction, I guess, of new crops is the big thing. It used to be wheat, oats, barley. Period. Then you had flax come along. And then with Dr. Stefansson's program at the U of Manitoba, then rapeseed came along. So that created a whole new opportunity for farmers to grow a new crop. We've seen peas, you know. There used to be some yellow peas being grown, but now there's new and better varieties. There's yellow peas, there's the chickpeas—a big market worldwide for that—so

that's been a big change also. Lentils, lentils came to Canada from France originally, and it's not that many years ago. So there's a whole new basket of products when we look at as far as lentils. There's the Eston-type lentils, there's the large laird-type lentils, there's the red lentils. So there's a bunch of different lentil types that are targeted to the markets of different countries because of the ethnic demands or whatever. Dark speckled lentils.

[1:15:25]

So this brought about a variety of crops that farmers could try and grow effectively. A lot of these crops, though, when you talk about legume crops, it's been basically a hit and miss in Manitoba because of our wet climate and disease buildup–maybe not adequate rotation for a number of years by farmers because if they were very profitable crops to grow at one point in time, so farmers were growing them back-to-back instead of making their proper three- or four-year rotation. You get into dryland country like Saskatchewan, you don't have that same incidence of disease because it doesn't proliferate like it does in wet cycles. We have edible beans that came along. They were being produced on a limited basis, but when the sugar beet industry sort of fell apart in Manitoba and the plant closed out in Fort Gary in 1996, it brought the possibility of farmers growing edible beans because it was also a row-crop type crop. So they could use their row-crop tractor. They had to adjust their seeders and their sprayers, cultivators, and then they had to just modify the harvesting type of equipment, which is a different type of equipment. But that brought that possibility about, because we had 27,000 acres of sugar beets being grown in Manitoba that disappeared. And a large percentage of that farmland was adaptable to the production of edible beans.

It was a bit of a paradox with that crop, sugar beet crop. The Canadian government was always telling farmers, "Diversify. Don't grow just the wheat crops." because we had the [glut] there marketing problems for a lot of years. And then we had this industry here in Manitoba. We had it in Ontario. We had it in Quebec. But our problem here in Canada, you never put a tariff on the imported sugar. and we ended up being the dumping ground of the surplus of other countries. Contrary to the Americans, they have a tariff on imported sugar, and that created a lot of stability and profitability into that crop, and it's still very effective in the US as part of the growing choice that farmers have. And here we lost that. But we call that the evolution of time, I guess–short-sightedness of some people, I guess.

NP: Well, it takes into the whole issue of world trade agreements and tariffs and--.

RP: That's right.

NP: That other fascinating area of that.

RP: That's right. Pros and cons, eh?

NP: Yes, exactly. It seems to me from what I've heard that it only works if everybody plays nice. And that's not--.

RP: Yeah. And even then--. [Laughing]

NP: Significant events. So just things that pop into your mind about, "Wow. This I will always remember." And it could be something smaller, but significant at the same time.

RP: Significant? Yeah, something I will always remember is when I was younger—just within my generation—I remember almost every quarter section had a farm family on it. And we went through that process of, you know, going through by memory with a number of people not that long ago of who lived on which quarter section. And it's incredible. Like, the whole country was dotted with family farms, and gradually that disappeared. It became larger farms. Instead of quarter-section or half-section farms, then we started seeing 1,000-acre farms and then it's 3- and 5,000-acre farms. Now we're seeing these megafarms now. We have actually three in southern Manitoba, maybe four now. That's creating quite a challenge for small communities because you don't have the population for the schools, for the stores, and whatever else. It's definitely creating, I guess, the disappearance of a lot of smaller communities, and a lot of small businesses have disappeared over the years. You can see it with the line elevators. It's the same. That's just another example in a sense of how things change.

[1:20:20]

But those larger farms are effective, but the operators, the onus is profitability. They'll buy large volumes. They want it at a cheaper than cheap price so their budget works out. So it makes it very competitive also for the existing companies that are suppliers to these megafarms. But it definitely does not do much for the small community's business because operators of these megafarms are normally situated in the larger centres, and they'll purchase what they need there. As more and more of the small and medium size farms disappearing now. So it's changing the countryside, and it doesn't look like it's going to come back.

The Farm Credit now came out with a program, I think, that's going to be good, but it might be a bit late. Probably sponsored by the government in a sense where you can borrow money. If a son that's starting up, he can go out and borrow money from FCC [Farm Credit Canada] on a long-term basis—I think it's one percent interest—to purchase assets and land. So that's a bit of a help to acquire a starting base maybe off of a larger or medium sized farm. It doesn't solve the whole problem because it's still a tough game to get into, farming now, for the next generation. People who are selling, retiring because of age or disease or whatever else, they need their money to retire. They want their money to retire, so they just can't give the farm away anymore. Life expectancy is,

what 80, 85? So if you're going to retire for 20 years or 15 years, you have to sell your assets basically because that's your pension. It makes it tough for next generation now to come on board, and I think that is why we're seeing more of these megafarms, and we're probably going to see more of them being operated as strictly business. We're going to have to learn how to deal with them, I guess, and still be effective in competitive business.

NP: When you say "megafarm," what kind of acreage are we looking at there?

RP: Well, we normally refer to megafarms as 10, 12, 15,000 acres. There's a number of growing farms that are in the 6-8,000 also, and you can see people are constantly pursuing more land, rented land basically. A lot of that land is rented now, which is quite profitable to people exiting out of the farm operation because there's a demand, and the prices being paid are considered very good yet today. So it's a formula that's moving forward that's good for some people, but definitely not good for what we call the community base.

NP: And just going back to what you said about when you made the tough decision to join with Alliance. That seems to fit right into survival with reality.

RP: In a sense it is, because we see companies just getting larger in our sector, and then you have to be competitive. And if you're playing with the big boys, you have to play the rules otherwise--. The rules, in a sense, that you have to be competitive, and you still have to be able to offer your farmers what they need and want to stay alive.

NP: Plus, you've expanded your market.

RP: Plus, we've expanded the market, and we still have a job.

NP: Outside of the--. That's right. [Laughing] And from the sound of it, you'll have one for a long time because it sounds like a quality operation. One last question before a couple of general ones, take a minute or a few seconds to ponder what are you most proud of in your career to date?

[1:25:08]

RP: Ay-yai-yai. That's a very tough question.

NP: It usually is, yes. But.

RP: Well, I think it's to have been able over the years to start a company from zero, make it grow, create an opportunity for local people to work because we employ 34 employees, and they're mostly local. And there's a number of employees also that used to--. They were brought up in the area, and they went out to do some other type of work, and they came back to the area to work in the industry because it's their home roots. We're quite proud of that in a sense because we created an environment and jobs for people to be able to live. And the fact that we've always strived to be honest with our farmer clients and with our end-user clients over the years, and I think that's created a great inroad for us to grow to the point that we became a desirable target for a larger company.

NP: Well, and those two things are really, I think, worthy of being very proud of. General questions. Are there any questions that you think I should have asked you or you're hoping I would ask you, but I haven't asked?

RP: That's another tough question. Yeah, in a sense, there's the family sacrifice that you do with companies that you start up and grow. I was quite fortunate that my wife had a bit of a business background, accounting background, so she was, I guess, very instrumental at the start of our company to do the accounting, the basic accounting. And when we used to export to the US, you know, we had three kids at home, so she'd be at the kitchen table after the kids were in bed and take out the typewriter and type all those import manifest and those B-13s and all those documents that you'd need for every load that would go out the next day. There's definitely a certain amount of sacrifice and time that you give when you're growing a company, especially a family-type company. But we've talked about this quite a bit. It was a bit of a challenge sometimes, but today we're proud of that in a sense, but we hope we didn't have our kids miss too much of us in that process because it's definitely time consuming. And as we talked about those punch seasons of spring and fall, like, you have to be there, and its long hours and all days of the week. So there's definitely a family sacrifice that you have to put up with, you know, to accomplish this. But that's part of that game of being in business.

NP: Especially the farm business.

RP: Especially the farm business.

NP: I'm going to ask you if there are other people you think we should interview that you think would provide a nice piece to what I've been referring to as our jigsaw puzzle of all the pieces. Do you want to give that some thought?

RP: There's a gentleman from Morris, Manitoba called Lorne Hamblin**.** His wife actually works here, yet, I think. Chris, right?

[Woman]: I don't know.

RP: Yeah, because she was--.

NP: She used to be. She used to be the chief commissioner.

RP: Yeah. But does she still work here?

NP: No. It was a five-year term.

RP: Ok. Because I didn't know she had taken another post or--.

NP: Ok, that's Lauren?

RP: Lauren, yeah.

NP: Ok. And from which community did you say?

RP: He's from Morris, Manitoba.

NP: Ok. Morris. And why do you think he would be particularly good to--?

RP: Well, Lorne's been involved into a lot of challenges, I guess, in the farming industry over the years, trying to help organize different things. There was all the problems with crop insurance, what you call the "risk areas" not being all equitably covered. We're in the risk area No. 12 there. And I worked a bit with Lorne, and there was a committee set up there to put a lot of pressure on Manitoba crop insurance to have an equitable level of coverage in risk area 12 based on the kind of crops we grew and the risks involved. He's been into a lot of different organizations, and he would give you, I'm sure, some very important feedback on some other aspects of farming.

[1:30:55]

NP: Yes, you're quite right. And this is one area we have not interviewed anyone on. So that's an excellent suggestion. And if you think of any more, you have my email address or my phone number.

RP: Correct.

NP: Just let me know. And you can talk to Dennis. [Laughing]

RP: Yeah. I can talk to Dennis. Yeah.

NP: Now you mentioned earlier on that you had some memorabilia, like the early records of your family. So are there other things that you think might be of interest to the general Canadian public from a historical perspective? And we were talking earlier about your involvement with St. Joseph and what you were doing there. So you obviously have a passion for history.

RP: Yeah. I guess that's developed over the years. I don't know. I don't know how to address that one. We're going to be--. Like my wife and I are quite involved with the museum. I believe that's an important thing, especially for our community and the district of Montcalm because a lot of the early settlers came to that area, and there's a lot of history there. And there's a Mr. and Mrs. Parent who started the collections way back in the 1940s, and they collected for a lot of years, and they fell ill with cancer. So in 2001, a new committee was formed of, I guess, younger people—well, 20 or 30 years younger—because they were all seniors getting up into that 75-80 year bracket that were part of the St. Joseph Museum director committee. So we picked up where they left off. And he actually had a lot of private collections, and then some of it had been given to the museum, but he probably owned about 85 percent of the artifacts at the time in 2000.

NP: And you had mentioned how many that was, which I found amazing.

RP: Yeah. At the time, it was probably 30,000-35,000. He was a carpenter, and he used to go all over the countryside. And he'd see stuff, and he'd work, and he'd say, "Ok, well, instead of paying me so much, I'll take that, and I'll take that because--." And you know, like, farms were slowly disappearing, so there was an opportunity to pick up stuff, and he knew where everything was. He had a keen eye for antiques, eh? So anyways, we picked up from him, and we formed a new committee, and we just went to town. So we built the museum from two acres to 20 acres, and we added a whole bunch of buildings in the last ten years. Now we've got this tourism centre that's--.

NP: Do you have a website?

RP: The museum?

NP: Mmhmm.

RP: We're under the CHIN program, the Canadian Heritage Information Network.

NP: Ok. Yes, I've heard of them.

RP: We've got a website that we're working on. It's going to be elaborated once we have our tourism centre because then we can really promote the museum, because now we don't have any buildings that are heated. It's a very seasonal thing. Then it's going to be quite different when we have a four-season building to offer to visitors.

NP: Well, what a wonderful legacy.

RP: Yes. It'll be nice.

NP: And this is a legacy for our project. And I'd like to thank you very much. I have to draw it to an end because now we want to switch to our French version, and I want to leave you--. Although I understand that French takes a little bit longer than English so--. [Laughing]

RP: Yeah.

NP: You know what I'm going to do? Yes. We have about an hour, maybe, and 20 minutes left on this tape. So if I--.

RP: So are we speaking of the same thing in French?

NP: Mmhmm. Yes.

RP: Ok.

NP: So, I'll just officially sign off.

End of Interview.