

Narrator: Frank Rowan (FR)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), Canadian Maritime Commission

Interview Date: 4 March 2009

Interviewer: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Recorder: Nancy Perozzo (NP)

Transcriber: Sarah Lorenowich (SL)

Summary: In the fourth and final interview part, former senior advisor of marketing for the Canadian Wheat Board Frank Rowan expands on his career in the grain trade, in particular how it related to the industry in Thunder Bay. He describes his first experience travelling through and stopping in Thunder Bay on his way to and from military training, then he discusses his position in the Canadian Maritime Commission keeping records of ships built at the Port Arthur Shipyards during the war. He discusses the development of the Seaway, challenges that came with the Seaway's opening, how some Seaway elevators were built to take grain as a backhaul for the ore industry, and shipping grain by rail when the Seaway closed during winter months. Rowan shares stories of his interactions with C. D. Howe and his interactions with the Lake Shippers Clearance Association. He expands on the many changes to the industry over the years—like the shift from boxcars to hopper cars, the change to the metric system, and the movement of grain to West Coast ports—and how these changes affect Thunder Bay. Other topics discussed include his pride in working with people around the world, the Wheat Board's connection to the Canadian International Development Agency and World Food Program, the Wheat Board's early computer system, and some artifacts from his personal records.

Keywords: Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Canadian Maritime Commission; International trade; Grain marketing; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Shipbuilding; Port Arthur Shipyards; St. Lawrence Seaway; Terminal grain elevators—St. Lawrence Seaway; Great Lakes trade; Grain transportation—ships; Grain transportation—rail; Lakers; Ocean-going vessels; Canallers; Iron ore industry; Canada Steamship Lines; Paterson Steamship Lines; World War II veterans; Cargill Canada; C. D. Howe; Ogilvie Flour Mills; Stevedores; Longshoremen; Crows Nest Pass freight rate; Metric system; European Common Market; Lake Shippers Clearance Association (Canada Ports Clearance Association); Boxcars; Hopper cars; Churchill; Country grain elevators; Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA); World Food Program; Food aid; Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR); Canadian National Railway (CNR); Computerization

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Good morning, Mr. Rowan.

FR: Good morning.

NP: It's March 4th, 2009, and the last in our series of interviews. Today, I think, we're going to concentrate a little bit on your stories and memories about Thunder Bay and its connection to your work. So just feel free to chat.

FR: I'd done my high school in Kingston, Ontario, and certainly well grounded, and I knew about Port Arthur and Fort William, but I'd never been west of Kingston or Toronto. So I joined up during the war, the service, and we went by train—we were all people from eastern Canada—all the way from Quebec City all the way to southern Saskatchewan at Mossbank, Saskatchewan. [Laughs] Not even with the sleeper cars, the coaches in those days. But I recall the train stopping at Port Arthur and Fort William, and the first thing that surprised me was the difference in time. They were close together, and that's where the time changed in those days. I noticed from afar some of the elevators and all of those. I hadn't really been that familiar with them. I knew about grain elevators because for the previous two summers, I had worked on passenger vessels out of Montreal with Canada Steamship Lines [CSL] had passenger vessels. I saw the grain elevators in Montreal, then we stopped at Sorel, which had an elevator, at Three Rivers in Quebec. I would look at those and ask people, and they told me that it was for grain. I saw ships unloading and loading from a distance. So I had some familiarity.

But I really got a lesson in that because we served in southern Saskatchewan. When I saw the size of the grain fields at that time and the growing of grain, it was quite an experience there. Then shortly after I finished my course in Saskatchewan, I had two days before posting. I went up with a pilot that did aerobatics, and I ruptured my appendix, and I was sent home. So I went to Thunder Bay and Port Arthur twice—there and on the way back to going back to Winnipeg. I was then stationed at Stevenson Field here in Winnipeg, where I graduated in '42. But this one time, I had a longer stop of the train—I forget what it was for—and I talked to somebody that was local about the elevators. So he says, "Do you want to see some?" He took me by car. I remember having gone out and was very impressed that there were so many and so much grain< never realizing that years later that I would be associated with that. So that was my first experience with them.

Then in my work after the war, I was with the Maritime Commission the first time. I had reason to do a study of all the shipyards and the vessels that had been built in Canada. Really, there were questions that were asked in Parliament quite often about it, and the answers didn't all jive all the time. So I started investigating from wartime shipbuilding and others, and I have records about ships that had been built, the names that were given. But I recall towards the end, for the first time I recalled that was surprising that they built small coasters in Port Arthur at the Port Arthur Shipyard at the time. So that was a revelation I had. I have the names of those ships and the years that they were built and how much they cost. [Laughs]

NP: I'll try to get a copy of that from you, if I could.

[0:05:02]

FR: Yeah. So later, I advanced. I was seconded, my work, to the transport controller. There was a big demand. There had been no export trade or major imports from 1939 almost through to the '50s, and by this time, there was increasing export demand. And maybe the different exporters were exaggerating their needs to the railways so they had to appoint a transport controller to find out exactly which were the priorities and the need. I was seconded to the transport controller's office, and one of the major exports was grain. He, the transport controller, was very familiar with grain. He had been in that during his career in Manitoba, and he was also in Alberta as well.

NP: I think you mentioned his name before, but what was the fellow's name?

FR: Mr. R. W. Milner.

NP: Right.

FR: During that time, I familiarized myself. I came out west and spent maybe a week in a country elevator to see the work that they did—the grain dooring cars, and how the cars were loaded, and how they were assembled, and then trains would pick them up and take them to Thunder Bay to various terminals. I stopped in at Thunder Bay at that time to see the Grain Commission and people like those, getting records. That was the first. A few years later, the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB] hired me to open an office in Montreal. From this office, most of the shipping industry for eastern Canada was located in Montreal. So from there, the paperwork and the work was done about loading to export out of Churchill, out of the Atlantic ports, all the St. Lawrence ports. And there were even smaller vessels at that time, foreign vessels, that went through the Great Lakes and had got as far as Thunder Bay and were loading like flaxseed and other things. So we were familiar about it at that time.

So I did get to know some of the personnel and particular orders of companies involved, like Paterson Steamships. I met John Paterson quite well, and they had very good personnel that they had over the years, particularly the chaps in Montreal and Thunder Bay that worked for John. Other companies at that time, like Canada Steamship Lines and Upper Lakes and Algoma they had plants and everything else. So for Paterson to expand into it, it was rather difficult, but these personnel that they had really were very good and got as far down as the St. Lawrence with canallers in various trades, in pulpwood and various plants into Three

Rivers, intercoastal trade even in the St. Lawrence, and they had smaller vessels. They had a specialty trade starting at that time. So I knew those people, some of them quite well, and we'd meet the shipping people once a year.

[Audio pauses]

In mentioning that, the vessels of Paterson took particularly in the coastal trade—transporting potatoes at seasons that there were potatoes from the Maritimes and that. The coastal trade in shipping of other goods from one place Canada to the other has to be ships built in Canada and operating in Canada or the UK, the British [inaudible]. They could bring in foreign vessels if Canadian ships weren't available to move the cargo, you would apply to the Department of Transport. But in the United States, the ship must be built in the United States, must be owned by Americans, not people from outside the country, and having American crews. And that still goes on today, whether from Alaska or Hawaii or Puerto Rico or any place from California to the east of that. Any exceptions that they have, that have very rarely—has to be an act in Congress because they had a number of canallers when they got started. They didn't build new ships when they started, had been built in the United States, a whole series. I have a list of those and the names. They got permission to operate in Canada, naturally.

[0:11:17]

Then the Americans, shortly after the war, there was a big shortage of vessels, particularly moving ore and coal, for the steel companies that were along the Great Lakes. So at that emergency, it came to our attention that these vessels of Paterson's might be utilized. So they went through the procedure, and the Americans got the necessary legislation passed to permit those ships to come in. I was the one keeping track of the records of what grain they were moving either from Duluth going to Buffalo and to Toledo and everything else feed business from them, the Americans found, but also cargos that were readily—. Many were two-way cargos that they could get. So this was very helpful to them, and certainly helpful to the Americans, you can imagine, for them to pass legislation that it was a crisis at the time. So I can recall that. Another thing the way Canada came and helped out. [Laughs]

NP: Was that a short-term agreement, or did that apply—?

FR: Oh, a couple of seasons. Yeah. Until they started getting steel to build in the shipyards in the Great Lakes and that because the fleet that they had were older. They hadn't built during the war, everything was during—. Anyways, that was quite an opportunity, again, from Thunder Bay. Yeah. The personnel coming from Thunder Bay, there was Mr. Howe, the former minister, moved from Thunder Bay. When he went to Ottawa, he was in business by then, built elevators. He brought some personnel, one or two, from Thunder Bay for him. There was a Mr. Bennet, Bill Bennet, who was his executive assistant or somebody that was with him there. He was quite an individual, did fairly well. He was a good listener, I guess, from others at various meetings being with the minister.

I had occasion to get to know him like that. My dad was the secretary of the National Harbours Board of the various ports of Canada, and that was him under that tenure. I remember Mr. Bennet from those days and all those years.

But after that, once the Seaway was built, there was ore mines found and developed down on the Quebec north shore and Labrador. That was developed by the various American companies, and they wanted to transport the ore from there into the Great Lakes. The big lakers of CSL and others, where available. They would come and unload grain in Montreal and that, but then having to go all the way to get ore there. This was, I guess, never come out, but it would be they were suppliers for Stella Coal and for Dofasco and for Algoma, so I don't know how anxious that they were. They would have ships available to move this from there. So this Iron Ore Company of Canada, which was involved, built a ship, and Mr. Bennet by this time was the president of Iron Ore Company. He came from Thunder Bay. They had these two vessels built in Canada just like the others had with the special policy of the ocean vessels that had been built. So they could move ore, and by that time Cargill had built an elevator at Baie-Comeau, so these fellows could take one cargo of grain to Baie-Comeau—either American or Canadian—and not far to get the ore. And subsequently, an elevator was built at Port Cartier by Dreyfus, and that's where the ore was being loaded. By that time, other companies had followed up and were available moving the grain, and they were able to sell those ships. Cargill bought them in time. [Laughs]

[0:16:19]

NP: I didn't realize that Cargill had a fleet.

FR: To have two Canadian flag vessels, and they could get ownership and all the benefits of the others, eh? Yeah, so vessels. Other companies then were interested in going as far as Port Cartier with grain. Very good. It was additional. They could unload there. Anyways, this Mr. Bennet certainly had quite a career. And from then, after he ended that term, he was always interested in something new from then on. He then became a director of the Canadian Pacific Railway [CPR]. So I met with him and spoke to him. Met with him a few times after that, but he was from Thunder Bay. He was very bright, conscientious. So those people quietly made quite a contribution. When you see one individual as a young chap come into Ottawa and listening.

NP: Did you meet Mr. Howe as well?

FR: When I was working for Mr. Milner at the transport controller, there were demands in from the Canadian Wheat Board of how much transportation they would need to move grain to Thunder Bay. He turned this over to me and asked me if I would examine this. I looked at every statistic of what each individual elevator could unload, what the ships could carry, even if they take it all to Georgian Bay and the ship could come back quicker. I really reviewed because, to me, it didn't make sense that they could move that much grain or have sales. One day he asked me. He'd been away and came back and had a look at this. I said, "I don't think

they can do this.” He says, “Why?” So you have to know the—. So I then, by elevator, take the small ones, or the big ones. “The most cars they ever unloaded in a day was this, and if the lakers don't have the cars to load.” Anyways, he didn't say too much. “Well, keep looking at it.” So one morning or one afternoon, his secretary mentioned, “Would you go to the number one temporary building in Ottawa, temporary building, on Wellington tomorrow at 8:00. Mr. Milner will be there.”

So I was there plenty early, and no personnel or that but the gentleman at the desk, and he said, “They're down the hall.” There I went down the hall, and sure Mr. Milner was there, but then I noticed the minister, Mr. Howe. I don't know whether they were playing cribbage or whatever there. [Laughing] So I sat down, and then I recalled that Mr. Howe, I guess, mentioned that the Wheat Board had this big program and what was being done about this. Mr. Milner said he didn't have time too much to look at it, but turned it over to me, and he told me to get my [audio skips] the minister. So I said, “Well, how does he know about it?” Unkind words, but I kept on, I mean, that was the figures. So that was the first time that I met him. [Laughs] It was quite an episode.

NP: So did he say anything about your figures? Or he just listened?

FR: He just wanted it. I brought out more figures, the figures of what I had. So quietly they then went onto another subject. So subsequently, I met him a few times.

[0:20:23]

NP: What was—

FR: The next best episode is when he retired, and I was the manager of the Montreal office, and one weekend I read on the papers that he had been appointed as director, or senior director, of Ogilvie Flour Mills. He knew, I guess, that I was with the Board and asked if I would be available sometime to drop around. He says, “Is it convenient this afternoon?” I said, “Fine. It's not far.” It was from the Board of Trade, and you go up and around. And so, I went up and see him, and here he's in this big boardroom in the Sun Life Building with pictures of former presidents. So he then mentioned that at the meeting, the first board meeting that he was at that morning, they were mentioning about some problems that they were having with the Wheat Board about this. And he said, “I'm sure that that can't be a problem as bad as what they were—. And you're familiar about that.” So I'd been around quite a bit by that time, so all I says is, “If you've got—.”

What has happened prior to the Seaway, the grain was transferred at Prescott, Port Colborne, Kingston, from bigger lakers to small canallers. These carried about 2,500 tons, the biggest 100,000 bushels, but there were some 2,000 tons. Small vessels. They'd come down the Lachine Canal to Montreal. Just before the port, Ogilvie had a mill. Their mill was located right on the canal, so they

could unload directly from the small canallers into their elevator. Now, some grain was coming on larger lakers, and then they would have to unload in the Montreal elevator in the port, and they'd have to have a gallery built. Their previous chairman had been a former minister [audio skips]. [Laughs] To take the grain directly to Ogilvie's, but the extra handling through the elevator and that. So naturally, the pricing was if it came through the elevator, big elevator, and there was the extra cost. They would have to pay more than unloading from the canallers. So I didn't have to tell him anything. I just stopped the car. I said, "There's the elevator. And up until this year," I says, "it all came down in canallers, mainly transferring at Kingston or other things like that. And now," I says, "Since the Seaway, this is it." I didn't have to write it out for him. He knew. [Laughs]

NP: So how was Ogilvie thinking that this was a problem created by the Wheat Board?

FR: So yeah, they would have liked the grain. They were paying one price that was cheaper from canallers than paying the extra price. I didn't have to write anything out for him. So I waited about a week, and I called my associate over in Ogilvie that would call me about grain all the time, and I said, "I noticed you have a new chairman. Has he showed up in the office?" He said, "Jesus, don't talk about that." [Laughing] I said, "What?" Well, he said, "This question about the dual prices and everything, they brought that up." And he says, "You know, even the chaps working here, the senior people, they haven't even been down to see that elevator." So he knew more about it than-. [Laughs] Anyways, he made quite an impression at that. And then I saw him a few times other than that.

Oh, yeah. Then he called one day after about was I free for lunch? Joined one of those clubs. They'd been in Ottawa, but at the Rideau Club as a minister. He didn't have to sign in or anybody else do it for him, but this here now, you would have to sign in for lunch. So he assumed that I had been going to that club, which we didn't belong, but I had been there. So he asked me. I said, "I know the procedure." [Laughs] By that time at Robin Hood, I told him Mr. McIvor, who had been a chairman of the Wheat Board for many years, was the chairman of Robin Hood. The first time I went to the club was with him when he did it. So I told Mr. Howe, and he just thought that that was the greatest. He said, "I knew where to come to get the right thing done." So it's those things, the human side of them, that are-. Yeah.

[0:25:52]

NP: So what was your impression of him?

FR: Oh, yeah. He was very straightforward, knowledgeable, and very personable like Mr. Milner. So then he told me about when he first knew this Roy Milner. So Mr. Howe had told me he come from the States and into Canada, and he was engaged finally by the Board of Grain Commissioners to inspect elevators. They were responsible for licensing elevators and that. He eventually, since

there were many more out here, he moved out to Thunder Bay working for them, and then decided on his own about building elevators. He'd seen about the structures and everything else like that. So he undertook and he got a contract from a consortium from Alberta, he said, from the west. Those are the times that these were companies like Searle Grain, Federal Grain, and that, and they worked together to build up a terminal. So he got a contract, and he started. Rather than wait until the fall, the weather was good, so they started construction—not construction—but getting the docks ready to put up the elevator in the fall.

And then late in the season, terrible weather conditions, waves and everything else, which did a lot of harm to what they had done. So this cost him a lot of money. He had to go down east to see if he could get more money to build the elevator. Turns out Mrs. Howe was expecting, and their whole things involved. And so, then he was able to finish the elevator in the spring on time. In those days, you had to finish it at a certain date on a flat price, but he was convinced then that wasn't the business for him. He said there's people from western Canada that he met before. They toured the elevator and the facilities with their men. Everything was in order. He was asked if there had been cost overruns and everything else like that, and he said, yes, there was. Anyways, shortly after the meeting, he said this man came along, and it was Mr. Milner. And he says, "What were all those costs?" They went over figures and this and this. Then a few hours later, he said later that day he came, and he said they offered him so much in addition to what they had. He says, "That's how I got back into the business after that." He says, "That's when I first met Roy Milner."

NP: So their relationship went back a fair distance.

FR: A long, long time. Yeah. Yeah.

NP: I remember one time when we were chatting, you also talked about the people in Montreal who you met who were responsible for, was it, loading grain in Thunder Bay? The stevedores?

FR: Yes.

NP: Um?

FR: Well, the companies at Montreal, I knew all the various stevedoring companies, but certain ones came in, particularly when the Seaway opened, to load and ocean boats to load in the lakes. Studies had been made because when the Seaway was to open and ocean boats, none of the other than small 2,000 tonners, that any of those elevators either there or Duluth or anything had ever done. This was not like loading lakers all completely. There was a group that met. I was part of that group from the grain trade, that went down and met with all the vessel agents and companies in the east asking them what was necessary to load ocean boats in the Great Lakes. A study was made. I think I showed it to you. I guess the decision was made at that time that they didn't anticipate

seeing ocean boats coming in, and it was much easier pouring grain into a laker coming back and forth than making necessary adjustments. There were so many elevators. For whatever reason, they didn't.

[0:31:10]

But on the American side, they sure did make new facilities in Toledo and other places to get grain. Just prior to that, they weren't shipping through the St. Lawrence for export. They had to rail it all to New Orleans, to Baltimore, and all these other places. So yeah, really nothing was done at Thunder Bay of any major size. It would have been difficult with that many terminals. You weren't going to load them all. You'd have to select a certain few, which were already of a size that would mean some dredging, but particularly lifting the spouts and everything else to do. I can see why they didn't.

NP: And all of the elevators, or a lot of the elevators would have been owned by smaller companies where that cost would be rather large.

FR: Yeah, yeah. But physically, also, doing it to having ocean boats that come in at different sizes there up the Kam River and up in these places like that. And then when it came as for stevedoring, since stevedoring wouldn't open an office there because it was just minimal trade. They would have to hire people that were loading boats in there. They'd send people up because they weren't familiar about loading ocean vessels at the time. But they did open offices in Duluth, though, companies from Montreal, because they were unfamiliar with, in those ports, the longshoremen, about loading vessels. Then there was the big technicalities that they hadn't thought about yet. The Great Lakes were freshwater. These were used to saltwater, so the buoyancy when they load cargo is different. It's amazing that subject, that saltwater ended about 20 miles east of Three Rivers. So between Quebec and Three Rivers, there's tidal, that Three Rivers may be only under a foot, but at Quebec up to 12 feet tide. But at a place called Batiscan, you see the colour of the water changes at that point. It goes from saltwater to freshwater and no one can explain why. But the buoyancy of that made quite a difference of how big a cargo.

NP: What did that mean for loading in Thunder Bay, the difference in buoyancy?

FR: Oh, no, no. It meant a change in Montreal and everything else. The terminals were particularly interested in that trade. They figured that they do well enough. They did better in loading lakers, just pouring it into the others and that. But the basic advantage, or the potential, was in other grains, in rye and flax and rapeseed, which were private companies, not like with the Wheat Board. Anyways, but I can see with that many companies and which ones want to spend the money, and before they spend it, then they would have already got that.

NP: But they changed in any case over time.

FR: Oh, but they lost the business in the meantime, yeah. Grain from Saskatchewan is easily sent by rail to Duluth. Quite a bit over the years. But anyways, that would have been done, and you've seen what's happened.

[0:35:14]

NP: That's grain out of the chute. [Laughs]

FR: Yeah. But yeah, the problem was getting a unanimous decision among them all, with all the various companies and that—similarly on the all-rail. For exporting on eastern Canada, once the season closed at the end of the season because of the ice condition, we'd get demand, but the grain could only be shipped out of Maritime ports, and it was all rail from Georgian Bay, from Collingwood and Midland and Owen Sound, Goderich, and Sarnia. And so, that's the maximum that we could do business [inaudible].

Then in having met with the railways, I was in Montreal for years, I knew them, knew their problem. Once they unloaded in Thunder Bay at the end of the season, they filled the elevators. All the damn empty cars had to be sent all the way down to Georgian Bay to load grain from those elevators to go out to the Maritimes. So in my mind, why not load them at Thunder Bay? Go down to the Atlantic ports and come back to Georgian Bay. They're already—. We could export another couple million bushels or tons. The railways said that would be great. So they quoted a rate. Their problem was that there was an east rate that governed all the exports, grain from the Prairies to Vancouver and Thunder Bay, a fixed rate, which was a very contentious thing. If they gave a better rate about going from Thunder Bay to Halifax? Anyways, I negotiated with them and got the—. First, we took some down to Quebec City, which these ocean boats would get there. Some to the Maritimes, but then Quebec City installed equipment, and they're big time today. But it was extra grain out of the country. It was extra business for the railways in the delivery of it. But the contentious thing was with the out [inaudible].

NP: The Crow Rate?

FR: Huh?

NP: Is that the same as the Crow Rates?

FR: The Crow Rates, yeah. Yeah, the Crow Rate. The Crow Rate, yeah. That caused a big problem, and then subsequently, an agreement was made to change it, but by then the changes that were made subsequently—. It's amazing all in my time, when I started at the Wheat Board to [inaudible]. We went from boxcars to hopper cars, and all of these changes. The big one from the metric system came into effect. [Laughs] Dramatic changes.

NP: How did the metric system have a dramatic effect?

FR: Oh.

NP: You'd like to forget about it? [Laughs]

FR: No, no. Jeez, I was involved up to here, eh? How should I go?

NP: Now, for those who might be listening to this who are younger than we are, when was this, the metric system was brought in? '60s, '70s, early '70s?

FR: In the '60s, I guess, in the early '60s. I know I was in Winnipeg then.

NP: Started to be.

FR: '60s and the '70s. Oh, on that subject, once there was a meeting at the Wheat Board with a minister that came up and personnel, and we met in the boardroom. They had a list of questions, and the second or third question was asked, "What was the Board doing about the metric system?" So the chairman says, "It was government policy, and all our overseas clients are based in this system. So we adopted it." He says, "But Frank's got a story to that." And I'm not at the table. I'm sitting in the corner. "Go ahead." Anyways, I told them this past winter I spent some time down in San Diego on a holiday, golf holiday, and at the hotel we saw this licence plate that was from Saskatchewan.

[0:40:39]

NP: They had the farmers' tan? [Laughs]

FR: So I mentioned to them that. I went down, said hello, that I was at the Wheat Board. I said, "They didn't ask about quotas." Which quotas is how much they deliver grain or the initial price. And they said, "What about this G-D metric system?" So I gave

the answer that Mr. McNamara had, but I told them. I said that I can't avoid it because I was on the committee of how do we convert this to the metric system, this system that we have? So I had said, "Basically, in your case, all of you know. You're either trucking it or with horse and buggies to country elevators there with the truck, the grain. And when you did, they would weigh the truck and the grain when the grain was unloaded."

NP: Yeah.

FR: At the country elevator, they would weigh the grain and the truck, and then once the grain was unloaded, there was a weight in pounds, then they converted them to bushels because that's how they get paid in the elevator, so much a bushel and then the storage. Then when they loaded, the elevator took the brake and the beam. I'm not quite sure they covered themselves with better prices. Then when they loaded into a railcar, it went from bushels to short tons loading to the railway, so there was a conversion made. People making them in the offices involved in conversions. When it got to Thunder Bay, unload the railcar, it went from short tons back to bushels. Then when it loaded from the elevators, from bushels to long tons on lakers, the metric and then change it for bushels because part of it was paid to the Americans. It got to the St. Lawrence, and it unloaded then from long tons back to bushels in the elevator and to metric tonnes on the ocean boats. I would estimate on a year like last year, that that could be as high as 3 million bushels that's lost in the conversions. No elevator ever had a shortage, and overage, in that trade went to the local miller and feed and everything else. But don't blame them. That's the system that takes it on. And all they said, I shouldn't repeat it. [Laughs]

NP: You shouldn't repeat what he said? [Laughs]

FR: No. No, that was Mr. Mazankowski and these others that were involved in it. They couldn't get over it. They were pursuing it, which was true. Those that were employed in that, in the statistics. But, there was nothing wrong. That was the system that was in effect at the time.

NP: Then what?

FR: It's all on the metric.

NP: It's all on metric. So none of this except for the American—?

FR: What it's cost them is the reverse. It's amazing. On everything they export, the equipment and automobiles and aircraft and everything else. They signed the same agreement as Canada, but then they'd have the various States, I guess, would cause the trouble. But that's their problem.

NP: So they're still, then, dealing with the conversion, and we've got out of that.

FR: Oh, yeah. Yes.

NP: So did it run smoothly, then, with the conversion?

FR: Yes, it was done gradually when it was done. It's interesting. One of my sons works at the Grain Commission, been there 25 years, and he asked me one day, "Dad?" I won't say the words. [Laughs] "What's this about bushels?" He says, "What's that?" He was unfamiliar even with bushels.

[0:45:05]

NP: So back to Thunder Bay. The changes that you were talking about, the early days and talking to Mr. Howe, and then when you started work with the Wheat Board here, you must have seen some changes in the relationship between the Wheat Board and shipments out of Thunder Bay.

FR: Yeah. The shipments, the buyers. I mean, the big change by eastern Canada, our main client for many years was the United Kingdom, the UK. Up until 1936 at that time, authorities in Canada would go to London, tell us how much we produced, and the British would say how much they wanted. They were the major market at that time. But the big change as far as the eastern system, or one of the major changes, was the Common Market. They had started, after the war, the Common—. This is a whole story about Germany and Holland and that, but they formed a common market so that they could have no tariffs or moving in the facility. It was very successful in that field, and then they started looking into others and said, "Look. Another we have is we're importing so much grain in the facilities. People here never thought that they could do anything about it, but they certainly did over the years. Take France, produces more wheat than Canada. It's a very high yielding wheat. It's not the same quality that we have. Where we get bushels of 40 or 50 bushels an acre, they get 125, but it's not of the same quality that is here. But it sure changed the market dramatically.

Until then, they started exporting some of this even to the Far East. So then North America changed, particularly our neighbours to the south, to other grains going to Europe—soybeans and corn and other things like that. And Canada, particularly in the eastern

part of western Canada--. How would I say this? Here in Manitoba particularly, we have the Assiniboine River and the Red River. Each spring, there's flooding in both of these rivers that extends some distance depending on the other side. Grain was grown in those fields. Basically, it wasn't a top-quality type of wheat that could be used. But surveys were made in time that this land --sugar beets and potatoes and everything else like that. From that, you take from Portage la prairie out to Carberry, they now grow up to 5 million tonnes of potatoes. Major compared to PEI and New Brunswick, and plants have opened. So that is a change. Also, there's a lot of change of other varieties of peas and lentils and other feed that have replaced the wheat and grain that we know, and most of that is shipped out, bagged here. I guess some of them load at Thunder Bay on vessels, and other that ship to--.

NP: When you--?

FR: So a significant percentage of the--, particularly in this province, in that has changed. The province is just one example. There's others in Alberta. There were so many disruptions in their shipments in the winter out of the Pacific because of labour disputes. They have a major industry in cattle, so they grow a lot more feed barley than here. Even the feed barley here that is used comes from Alberta. So growing it themselves, looking at what you could do within the country.

NP: When you were with the Wheat Board, did you visit Thunder Bay regularly, or that was sort of the responsibility of others once you had worked on the sales?

[0:50:11]

FR: Yeah, but that was a part of my job was the movement from eastern Canada because I was involved in that. Let's see.

NP: Talked about before, I think. Just off the recording, we were doing some talking. A topic came up of the Lake Shippers. This is sort of our first discussion on tape of Lake Shippers. Who exactly are they. Or what is the Lake Shippers?

FR: It was the Lake Shippers Clearance Association. Only you can imagine with the number of elevators at Thunder Bay with different companies, when grain got unloaded and cleaned, they would get a certified certificate that they had so much in there. So like a bank, they had an account for these things. Once that was copied, the certificate, or the original certificates were issued in Winnipeg, the cost that came from the Prairies, and the certificate came in the Wheat Board's name as far as the wheat and barley are concerned, so when we came to order a laker came in-- Oh, it was quite a system. The lake company was Canada Steamship Lines or something would say that they'd offer the Board the boat. They had an overall contract and said, "We have the *Coverdale* coming in for 600,000 tonnes." It was presented that so much grain or to other grain companies. These grain companies would

come over to us, ask what grade is to be loaded, and they would get the certificates. They would then, with a note from us, file to the Lake Shippers in Winnipeg office to release so much [No.] 2 Northern to load the *Coverdale*. So all that grain came from a pool, and it would be loaded out.

NP: But it wouldn't come out of the same elevator, and that's what the Lake Shippers group did?

FR: It didn't name a particular elevator, yeah.

NP: No. A fair question?

FR: Yeah. Well, what do you mean the changes? It was after the Seaway when it went.

NP: So now we're talking about the changes.

FR: Well, just to tell you that the big change was really what started it all. You can imagine prior to this that they would load up as much—. Farmers would deliver to country elevators, and they would get paid an initial price. And the initial price was the Thunder Bay price, but deducting off that the cost of moving, elevation, and putting it in stores. Then when there was a lot of grain, there was a government policy there were more curling rinks built and other things in western Canada that would store grain. They would get paid. Even hangers for those airfields at the Commonwealth Air Training Plant was filled with grain. They would load Thunder Bay to capacity. So the big money was made of them borrowing from the banks because they paid all the farmers for that. So the banks, there was a klondike for them. And then the storage facilities. So today, my dear girl, the country elevators, the farmer paid. And today, the one big farmer that I know, for example, he books with Cargill and Richardson. They buy from him at a price, they send the truck, they pick it up at the country elevator, and handling. So overall, the return to individual farmers is tremendous, where in the past, a big cost. And don't blame the system. I mean, that's what it was at that time that they knew. But they just exaggerated it. So the changes came when these companies saw that the storage wasn't going to be available.

[0:55:22]

NP: Or needed.

FR: Or needed, yeah. There was no storage on the farm, but the farmers were subsidizing out of that price all of these things. But that was the system in those days. Today, I mean, a much better return, and once they saw that, the companies just got out of the elevator business.

NP: So that would be a reason for the decline in Prairie elevators?

FR: Then, yeah.

NP: And the terminal elevators as well?

FR: Hm?

NP: And the terminal elevators as well, a decline in the need for storage there?

FR: Interior terminals.

NP: No, the terminal elevators at Thunder Bay.

FR: Yeah. Well, the companies made the decisions, eh? That and they used to say that the municipal organization had raised the taxes up and up and up on the buildings more and more. They had warned them against that, so some of them had just sold the terminals. And then, they would have had to make big changes. When the hopper cars came, they all had dumpers for the boxcars and breaking up with the staff for those cars. Hopper cars were such a difference. It didn't need all of that equipment or men. Thirty-five hopper cars were the equivalent of 120 boxcars, 110-120. Every boxcar at country elevators would have to be grain doors in it up to six seven feet in the elevator to load. Those for oilseeds had to be papered inside in all of them. So you can imagine then when they got to Thunder Bay or whatever terminal, they broke those grain doors up to get the grain to turn out. All that wood that went, the amount of personnel that was involved, it was just-. But with hopper cars, I mean, here it just flows in. And as I say, 35 of them compared to 120, so you didn't have to shunt them from elevator to elevator.

NP: Quite a change there.

FR: Well, today, a trainload with 10,000 tonnes of wheat out of Brandon can go to Montreal or Quebec and be back out to Brandon in seven or eight days after having unloaded. No switching at Thunder Bay. They go all the way on weekends. So the cost, I mean, this is why CNR [Canadian National Railway], the money they're making, and CP and those.

NP: So a lot of efficiencies.

FR: Oh, yes. The hopper cars and the handling. The elevators like Quebec City and down there was the first all-rail grain. Now, they don't even need to switch engines to move the cars in if they're unloaded. It's a very modern system of unloading. They added facilities. And before, you'd have to—. What limited the exports too is that starting already in a month before the close of navigation, or two months, we'd have to reduce the stocks out of Montreal and many of the eastern elevators to protect the grain they brought in for the flour mills, for all the domestic feed for the whole winter. They went cheap by water, so the space was taken up. Where now, they only buy when they get it, when they need it. But it was put down with the wheat down to Montreal, and the mills only paid when they took the wheat out of the elevator in Montreal.

NP: And someone had to pay storage in the meantime.

FR: Well, some.

NP: Who would pay for that down there then?

FR: The Wheat Board.

NP: The Wheat Board. Ah, okay. So in this discussion, then, it seems we've talked about a few things that have changed the face of the Thunder Bay waterfront. Markets is a big one, that the change in markets shifting from the UK and Europe to the eastern—China, Japan, and so on—have shifted where the grain has gone. Another thing, the change in the need for storage because of more storage being done on the farms. Change in the speed with which things can be transferred into and out of the elevators with the changing in, essentially, the grain cars, and the fact that more product is shipped by rail past Thunder Bay straight down to the eastern ports.

[1:00:37]

FR: Less handling. All this handling is not there.

NP: Yeah. So the other item—and I know it's something that you've had involvement with—as a Thunder Bayer, there was always the gossip on the street about the impact of the port of Churchill as essentially a competitor for the Port of Thunder Bay. What do you have to say about that? Did or does the existence of Churchill make much difference to Thunder Bay?

FR: No more than it does the St. Lawrence.

NP: Say a bit more about that.

FR: Well, because any grain out of Thunder Bay– The Churchill season was a limited season. Most of the grain that went out of there, I would say almost all of it, none from Manitoba, came from northern Saskatchewan and northern Alberta. A very good return, as you can imagine, from that elevator to the farmers rather than the system through country elevators.

NP: And why is that? Straight into boxcars and up to the elevator?

FR: No, a much shorter distance. Much shorter distance. And really, the Board system gives all the producers an opportunity to deliver grain. You have to take it. If we open a quota, we have to take it from all the areas at some time to give those farmers an opportunity to deliver. I mean, to railways, to have them railed from the Peace River district or northern Saskatchewan all the way to Vancouver or Thunder Bay. Yeah, I know they say that, but the grain, just like it's out of Prince Rupert comes from Peace River district. The Churchill elevator was there since the early '30s or something like that.

NP: And it's—

FR: Primarily to the UK, but after that it went to many other destinations.

NP: Was it a pretty steady—?

FR: No. It was interesting. During the war, they couldn't operate that. They didn't operate all the war years because submarines were up in the north. I have a complete record downstairs of every year what was shipped, and I think there was about 7-800,000 bushels of wheat, which is about 20,000 tonnes. The American grain, they have to ship from the Dakotas all the way to the Atlantic. It's very expensive. Well, the Americans sent two or three ships escorted by naval vessels all the way to Churchill and loaded that during the war years. I have the quantities and dates and that.

NP: And where were they shipping it to?

FR: To Baltimore.

NP: For use internally?

FR: Oh, yeah. Sure. It was a lot cheaper than taking it out to Duluth in railcars.

NP: Really? Hm.

FR: So it was idle all that time, but the only shipment they had was that one shipment at that time. So it's quite a history. I've been up there many times.

NP: Any changes there?

FR: Well, now, it's operated by a private company, an American company.

NP: The same company that owns the rail lines?

[1:05:04]

FR: They don't own, they operate. They have an agreement. That's the only way to get there. And before, it was only the CN, and CN, it was taken off their overall-. There was a bracken formula. The CP would get so much, and CN would get so much.

NP: Bracken formula for getting so much grain business?

FR: Yeah. Rail. They had a percentage that was set, and the Churchill one didn't interest the CN, going all the way there and back. Now, this company can take from CP and CN, and they take it, deliver it, below The Pas there is a place, and they have their own locomotives or engines that pick up the cars and bring them back. And they only pay for the time that it's on their track. A good agreement for them.

NP: A good agreement for the rail company owners, or for the-?

FR: Oh, yeah. For the producer, the elevator. But other business has developed coming in.

NP: Such as?

FR: See, they don't publicize it in the papers. [Laughs]

NP: So what's coming in?

FR: Ore.

NP: From?

FR: It's harder and difficult. The mines are getting deeper in finding it, eh? So they get ore very, very reasonable, and just have to take it in when they need it from Churchill because they have good refineries.

NP: So where would it be coming in from? Places like Russia?

FR: No, no. Yeah, Russia would have some, but I don't think so.

NP: You're not at liberty to say? [Laughs]

FR: Yeah.

NP: Can't be top secret.

FR: Cuba and other places.

NP: Cuba and other places. Ore from Cuba, really? Hm!

FR: Yeah.

NP: This is fascinating stuff, isn't it?

FR: Yeah.

NP: We're running close to the end of our time, and I just have a couple of more general questions that I wanted to ask before we sort of wrap up because this is our last interview. And it's more just from a personal point of view.

FR: Do you want one of these?

NP: Yes, thank you. Your bio information.

FR: The Second World War.

NP: So as you look back on your career, what brought you the most satisfaction would you say in the grain industry? What would you say brought you the most satisfaction?

FR: Oh, yeah. That's very difficult to answer. I met an awful lot of good people, interesting people, but caring people. When you think they'd been growing it, or it was very difficult in handling it, but personnel in foreign countries that are importing from our country knowing that it's a food product. Yeah. Not like any other job. A lot of very good people looking for quality and supplied them, whether it was mills in the UK or people in North Africa or people in China.

NP: So your career has really given you an opportunity to see the world, and to promote Canada as part of it.

FR: With the other one, you ask about markets, that's quite a story with the manager of our London office. We were the first ones to go to Hong Kong in 1962 and spend about three weeks or a month in that area, in China. The first purchases that China made of wheat from Canada, and then involved in the delivery of that grain. The CIDA [Canadian International Development Agency], the World Food Program, with the Red Cross.

NP: We haven't talked about that. Tell me something about the Wheat Board's work with CIDA.

[1:10:02]

FR: Well, first of all, the best policy is, I still believe, the Canadian government's policy. We do most of our donations to the World Food Program, who then assist in feeding people in make-work projects in different countries, whether they are a country that are digging wells or building railways—like a railway across the Sahara—that certain grains or products that they produce food to feed those people and their families in those areas. So it is a very good one. Most of Canada's grain that we give in that way through CIDA get good recognition so that we're not giving to particular countries and expecting something in return. We're looked upon. Similarly with the Red Cross, they get portions of that.

NP: Through CIDA? They get portions through CIDA, or it's a separate program?

FR: So the department that gives out funds for that, the ministry. See there. I was responsible for that.

NP: Mmhmm. What's UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency]?

FR: Yeah.

NP: Relief?

FR: Relief, yeah. So the key personnel that were there, some of them mean well or are unfamiliar or they have a problem. In time some of them become clients to Canada, some of these. We were as anxious to provide the most effective type of grain for the country that is receiving it. Before, to them, it was just grain turned into flour.

NP: So what would be?

FR: So good personnel instead.

NP: What would be examples of the most effective grain to give them? What do you mean by that?

FR: Well, it depends on the country and what food that they're eating.

NP: So for some countries it might be more suitable to send durum instead of—?

FR: Oh, yeah. Definitely. But some, well, malting barley, eh? There's feed barley, but there's also barley for food that can be mixed, like you have barley soup and products like that. So those in Ottawa would deal with a grain department asking—. The department, and then would meet with these people. The World Food Program would send personnel to Canada, see what their policy was. We were trying, as anxious as possible, to ship it in seasons where we could get the most benefit, know where the exports were. So we provided it to them.

NP: So that you could do it in slower seasons so that it wasn't competing with the—?

FR: Mmhmm. But also, particularly what the individual country wanted, needed.

NP: Right.

FR: They're not all the same.

NP: Rather than just dumping whatever you had.

FR: This is it, yeah. No. And what we found in certain cases, I was always listening to them, but we would try to find out what they already eat, where did they get it normally, and why is there another country that has that where they could get it from that country? And we'd supply the wheat to this other country to pay for that. So cases have been made to that extent.

NP: Is there a section of the Wheat Board that dealt with that, or it fell under your responsibility?

FR: Well, it fell under me for my years in Montreal. The chaps in Ottawa would call with them. There was a grain division there that was in Trade and Commerce.

NP: Is there ?

FR: Yeah, just developed it.

NP: Is there still a group in Trade and Commerce?

FR: And you know, the government was saying, "The millers are interested in shipping flour. Once it was loaded, they didn't care where it went." Certainly, there was flour, but only for those that can use flour. But the authorities, as long as they got it on a ship.

[1:15:12]

NP: Which might not have been the most useful.

FR: No. The World Food Program was the best and known for projects that were built around the world. Some of them, they hired some of our people. Mr. Vogel, one of our chief commissioners, became the director general. There were two. Then there was a deputy minister from the Manitoba government here that went to Rome. Very, very good organization.

NP: So we talked a little bit about what brought you the most satisfaction. When you look back at your career, what do you think was the most challenging thing that you ever had to deal with?

FR: Oh, very difficult on short notice. I'd have to think about it. I don't—. I sure know a lot of people. Just how much.

NP: Nothing pops to mind?

FR: No.

FR: So an awful lot of nice people.

NP: Yeah. We stopped the recording. Mr. Rowan brought out an address book that his secretary had kept during his time with the Wheat Board, which outlined the various countries that he had had contact with, and the people that were involved in those contacts. And in going through it, he had mentioned that he had visited Russia over 40 times. So a lot of travel. Just a couple of questions to finish off, and these are more—.

FR: These I don't know if I showed you. So when I retired, I get this type of message from Moscow.

NP: So when you retired--. Do you mind if I read it into the—?

FR: Yeah.

NP: Okay. "We learned with great sadness that you finally retired from the Canadian Wheat Board. Thanks to you [tape skipped]. Equal satisfaction of both organizations. Your contribution was invaluable at times when we had to overcome occasional problems. We hope that in the years to come, our relations with CWB will continue to be based on mutual understanding and cooperation. Please note that you will always be welcomed in Moscow as a good, old, reliable friend. Before your retirement, all of your friends in Export Khleb join us in sincerely wishing you, Anita, and the kids very good health, happiness, well being, and all the very best in life. Yours truly, Oleg, Mikail, Yuri, Eugene, three Borises, Alex, Vladimir, Andre, Dimitri, and many others. Best regards."

FR: Yeah. When you get that officially from—.

NP: I'm just looking for the year that this would have been sent. 1998, is it?

FR: Yeah, '88.

NP: Or 1988. So if we **read**. With the signatures, great.

FR: All Canadian commissioner service, the people there.

NP: Good. So you haven't decided yet where your records are going to be housed? You'll have to let us know. So the last couple of questions have to do more with our project than with you, so if you'll bear with me while I sort through my papers here.

FR: Isn't this something?

NP: That date book is amazing. It's such a small book that covers--.

FR: Yes. I had this, and the secretary had one. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. This question actually relates to your date book. Are you aware of any memorabilia including pictures that you feel should be preserved to commemorate the history of the grain trade--other than your records, which I understand are substantial. Should we do an inventory of those just to know what there is at some point? Would that be something that we could help you with?

FR: Yeah. I will look at them. I will look at them.

NP: Yeah. If there's something that you would like help with, let us know. And what part of--this is a big one, so it might be difficult to answer--what part of the Canadian Wheat Board's history is important to preserve and share with the public? Because remember we were talking to you that at some point, we hope to certainly have a website to share your stories and other things, but at some point maybe even a public centre for the grain trade. So what part of the Wheat Board's history do you think is important to let the public know about?

[1:20:23]

FR: I have copies of their annual reports, which really covered all the details. I tell you, it's not--. You know the private companies, but I know that there was a record independent that they had. Independent accountants. And every transaction, every day, they received a copy. And not a matter of it coming at the end of the year and doing a revival, so the records that came in were just--. So in the various annual reports. But the overall, I would just handle that transportation. The big dealings were with the producers of the 200,000 and all that. The deliveries at country elevators and some of the personnel because, as I say, most of the exports, we

had these accredited exporters that did business, and go between, but the big part of the Board was attending to. Some of them passed away and the documentation.

NP: Which brings up something that we had talked about earlier off tape, and that was computerization of the records at the CWB. There was a special project, was it, with IBM?

FR: Yes. One of the first computers that was put in, they asked us, which was smart, so that other companies could come and examine the work or have personnel come over to our offices, eh?

NP: So IBM approached the Wheat Board?

FR: Yeah, the Board, and they put in that. One of the surprises I got each day, we didn't often. I would travel with Air Canada, and the confirmation came in, and I read the paper. I'd say, "Well, this is a strange address." It was our address that most of the—. At that one time, the reservations and that were made were through Air Canada's office. They had one whole floor in the building where we were next door.

NP: Using the same computer system?

FR: Yeah. So as new ones came in, they would put it in, and so other companies here in Winnipeg, major companies or others, could come in and see, have their people spend the time before they made the decision of buying one. So some of the first computers were in there.

NP: Because of the masses of paper that they had to deal with?

FR: Well, over 200,000 farmers with 5,300 elevators, you can imagine every truckload and wagonload that it kept. Staggering!

NP: Mmhmm. So now that's part of the story to be told. I think a lot of Canadians have no idea of the size of the operation.

FR: Oh! And then the number of railcars loaded. This is not only the [tape skipped]

NP: Amazing.

FR: So the bulk of that work was done in that business, and then they recognized exporters that did most of the trade, which was here. The Board sold it, which we did, but, I mean, a big benefit to those countries too. Good traders. Yeah.

NP: Yeah. So we've come—.

FR: I was very fortunate in my years there.

NP: They were very fortunate to have you too, I would say.

FR: Oh, no, no.

NP: Well, certainly. Dedicated, knowledgeable, friendly, outgoing, good at languages, I understand. So it worked very well for both of you.

FR: Yesterday, I took Anita. She went to the dentist, and I was sitting in the lobby, and a lady was asking me something, some information about—. I said, "Where are you from?" And she said, "I'm Portuguese." And I said, "*Muito obrigado.*" And she just looked at that! [Laughing]

NP: So that helped.

FR: Yeah. "Thank you very much." [Laughs]

[1:25:01]

NP: Well, and speaking of thank you.

FR: It's different between Spanish and that, I tell you, when I got into that.

NP: Yeah. And speaking of thank you, I'd like to thank you very much for taking the time to share your stories with us. It's going to be a valuable addition to knowledge about the international grain trade.

FR: Yeah. Well, and then, I continued even after I retired with people in doing trade at Thunder Bay because I was involved in the Russian trade of other goods, and about arranging. We got the range to bring cargos in ships that unloaded cargos of goods that then could be picked up and shipped out in western Canada. So I showed you some of the letters there of other people.

NP: Right. Yeah.

FR: No, I always had a good spot about the people there.

NP: I guess what comes to my mind about that—and one of the many things I've learned from you—is just how important it is to have cargos coming and going. And from what you said today, even with the building of the elevators in the St. Lawrence closer to the Atlantic, a lot of it had to do with, not that it was a great place for grain, but it was a place to pick up the cargo. Yeah.

FR: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. The Japanese, almost everything, the ships with cars and everything else, and they picked up grain and took away.

NP: Well, thank you again. I'm going to shut this off with our thanks.

FR: Yeah. I was—.

End of interview.