

**Narrator:** George Searle (GS)

**Company Affiliations:** Searle Grain Company, Federal Grain Ltd., Federal Industries

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**Interviewer:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

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**Summary:** Former vice president of operations for Searle Grain George Searle discusses his and his family's history in the Canadian grain industry. Searle starts by sharing the story of how his grandfather, Augustus L. Searle, started the Canadian business after his experience in the American grain industry, as well as how he chose the location for country and terminal elevators. He shares his remembrances of his father's career and then his own career, starting in the Searle office in Winnipeg. He describes working in different departments before moving into managing terminal operations in BC and then Thunder Bay. He recalls the difficulties of boxcar shovelling and Searle's development of the Seabar dumper with Barnett-McQueen. Searle discusses some of his other work experiences, like being on the trading floor of the Grain Exchange, travelling overseas to market grain to customers, and working with the railways to attempt the first unit train of grain. He then moved up to vice-president position, gaining responsibilities for labour relations. He recounts his time with the Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association, interacting with the union, and the friendly rivalries between companies. He shares other information from Searle Grain's history, like the Searle Farm Home Weaving Service program, the company's introduction of Thatcher wheat, and its construction of war distress grain storage. Searle also tells the story of the company's merger with Federal Grain, the eventual sale of Federal to the Wheat Pools, and his continuing with Federal Industries' non-grain businesses. Other topics discussed include his military career, standout grain trade personalities, the issue of rail rationalization and country elevator consolidation, the history of the CGC and CWB's operations in the trade, and the Searle Book of historical photos.

**Keywords:** Searle Grain Company; Federal Grain Ltd.; Prairie Provinces—History; Country grain elevators; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Terminal grain elevators—British Columbia; Searle Elevator; Grain transportation—ships; Grain transportation—rail; Boxcar shovelling; Boxcar dumpers; Seabar dumper; Grain trading; Grain marketing; War distress storage; Winnipeg Grain Exchange; Canadian Wheat Board; Lakehead Terminal Elevator Association; Labour relations; Labour unions; Contract negotiations; Grain export destinations; Grain farmers/producers; Grain varieties; Rail line rationalization; Consolidation; Amalgamation; Unit trains; Canadian Grain Commission; WWII veterans; Peavey Company; Minneapolis

## Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Today is the 19th of January, 2012, and a very special occasion. This interview is taking place on Saint Simon's Island in Georgia, and I will have the person that we are interviewing introduce himself and his connection with the grain trade.

GS: Well, my name is George Searle, and I have a long association with the Canadian grain trade. It was my first job. We had a family grain company, which I joined just after I graduated from university and was with it until we merged with Federal Industries, Federal Grain.

NP: Good. I am particularly interested in interviewing you because of the fact that you are one of the unusual people in Canada in that you are involved in the grain trade from the perspective of your family being involved. So, could we start there with you just providing whatever information you would like for historical purposes about your family's start in the grain trade and the growth in the company?

GS: Oh, that's wonderful Nancy. It started with my grandfather, whose name was Augustus L. Searle, and he grew up in the grain trade himself. His first job when he came to Minnesota was a buyer of grain in a country elevator in Minnesota. He worked up for a number of years and joined various companies including the Peavey Company in Minneapolis, worked both in the country elevator business, but more particularly, the most important part of his career was when he was in charge of the Peavey elevators in Duluth. He went to Duluth in 1900 and became the superintendent of the Peavey terminal elevators in Duluth and did so for about 10 years before he moved back to Minneapolis. During that time, Peavey were interested in expanding into Canada and so was my granddad. So, he established a Canadian grain company and employed his—two then—sons-in-law as managers of various aspects of the grain business of this company, and my father. So, I have a long family association with the grain business.

There's kind of an interesting story about how he got started in the grain. I don't know whether you've heard this story about the private train that went across northwest Canada? Did you hear about this?

NP: I'm not certain until you tell me. And people add extra pieces from their own memories.

GS: Granddad and the Peaveys were interested in starting Canadian grain companies—National Grain Company was a Peavey subsidiary. So, my grandfather, in typical fashion, went to the Peaveys and said, "Look, we ought to find out something about Canada, northwestern Canada," particularly Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. He said, "Let's go up there and explore it." And so they did, in fact. They went to the railway and hired a train, left for Winnipeg, and went from all across northwest Manitoba, across into northern Saskatchewan, up into northern Alberta. They all, of course, had appropriate private cars on this train.

The instructions to the conductor were that they were to stop at every town on the way—no matter how long it took, stop at every town—and each member of the grain business on the train was assigned a job. One was to jump off the train, go and see the bank manager; the other would go and see the senior hardware agent; the other was to see if there was any farm business there at all. When the whistle blew in ten minutes, they all jumped back on the train, and the decision to build an elevator in that town was made on the trip between that town and the next town. So, in typical fashion, my grandfather had learned all he could about where to build elevators and how to start the grain business, and at the end of that trip we had established a number of elevators that my grandfather built. He hired members of his family, his sons-in-law particularly. My dad was too young at that stage of the game; dad was still in the American Army. This was just before the First World War. That's how we got established in the grain business.

**[0:05:38]**

Now, one of the key aspects of the grain business is that there are actually two parts to it: There's the part that gathers the grain in the country elevator system and ships it to a terminal where it's processed. One is not profitable, and the other is very profitable. The unprofitable part is the gathering of the grain in the country; the very profitable part is the processing of it and blending it and shipping it out, selling it, which takes place at the terminals. Now, my grandfather was in a unique position to be able to appreciate this because he'd had all this experience with the Peavey Grain Company as superintendent of the elevators in Duluth from about 1900 to 1911/1912. So, he was well aware that for us to have a successful Canadian grain company, we had to have a terminal. Now, there were terminals being built at Thunder Bay at this time just after the First World War—and just prior to the First World War in fact—but they were not considered very modern terminals. My grandfather decided that he wanted to build a modern terminal.

Couple of aspects that are important about this. First of all, it had to be built out of reinforced concrete. The early terminal elevators were built of wood or were built of tile and tile structures. They weren't anything like as permanent as reinforced concrete. This is one of the things that granddad brought to our company, his knowledge of how to build a terminal. He, in the course of travelling overseas, saw a terminal design that he liked in Milan in Italy. It had flat sides, which is, once again, a unique feature for terminal elevators. So, he decided that we should build a modern terminal out of reinforced concrete with flat sides. So, that's how in 1929 we started to build our elevator, the Searle terminal, in Thunder Bay.

My father was originally--. He was in the American Army in the First World War, then went to Yale and graduated from Yale, and started off in the grain business in Melfort, Saskatchewan. But shortly thereafter, when the terminal was built, my dad was put in charge of the terminal operations. So, my association with Thunder Bay has very deep roots, including my grandfather deciding we had to have a terminal there, including my father running the terminal for a while, and including myself when I ran the terminal.

NP: So, did your family live in Thunder Bay, then?

GS: Oh, no, no, no. Everybody lived in Winnipeg at that stage. Everybody in the Canadian grain business lived in Winnipeg. Winnipeg was the centre of the grain business, largely as a result of geography. All of the railways from the west, the traffic going to eastern Canada, followed through Winnipeg. So, that's where the grain was inspected and, originally, they started to set values on the grain basis in Winnipeg. So, the trade moved to Winnipeg and that's how the Winnipeg Grain Exchange was established. That's why it was established because there were inspection services available in Winnipeg. Because all of the grain from western Canada going to eastern Canada had to go through Winnipeg. So, nobody lived in Thunder Bay. I don't know why; I would have loved to live there, but nobody did. We all lived in Winnipeg.

NP: Why Melfort, Saskatchewan for your--?

**[0:10:01]**

GS: Oh, it happened to be the head office of a line of country elevators that was established by my grandad that he put my father in charge and sent him up to head office, which was in Melfort. My father--. There's a famous story about my dad getting off the train at 2:00 in the morning—because Melfort is in between Winnipeg and Edmonton and obviously on the way up, but you go through at 2:00 in the morning—and he got off the train to Melfort in his coonskin jacket and his Yale skimmer that he wore, which was not exactly the appropriate garb for arrival in Melfort. But anyway, he lived in Melfort for a couple of years, still had fond memories. In fact, when we rebuilt an elevator and opened it in Melfort, my father insisted that he come along and went back, and woke up all of his previous relationships with people—favourite cafes and friends, et cetera.

NP: Couple of things come to my mind based on what you were saying about your grandfather making the decision to move into the Canadian market. Question first is: Why move into the Canadian market rather than staying where he was probably comfortable?

GS: No, no. My grandfather was an expansionist. I mean, he saw opportunities here to make money and that's why he did it.

NP: And he was working with Peavey, whose Canadian arm was National.

GS: Ended up by being National.

NP: National. Those two elevators--. Like, the Searle Elevator is next to the National.

GS: Oh, the terminal elevator? That's correct. Happenstance. Nothing significant about that.

NP: Hm. And do you recall who constructed or designed the elevator?

GS: No, I don't know. I'm sorry, I can't help you on that.

NP: Okay. Yeah. It was 1929, though, I think you said?

GS: Was 1929, correct.

NP: So, C.D. Howe was--.

GS: Might have been involved. Could have been involved. Quite typically would have been involved.

NP: That's right. Yeah.

GS: He had somebody who knew how to pour reinforced concrete, but that could have been C.D. Howe. I don't know. I'm sorry I can't help you with that.

NP: No, no problem at all. Do you recall anything from what were--? Was your grandfather alive when you were born?

GS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah.

NP: Do you recall him and your dad talking about the good old days, the early days, of the grain industry at all?

GS: No, because granddad lived in Minneapolis and really only came to Winnipeg during the horseracing season, because he was a pony player. We had to have the annual meeting of the Searle Grain Company during the Polo Park racing season. So, my contact with my grandfather was relatively limited because I was born and raised in Winnipeg, and he lived in Minneapolis. It's not to say that I didn't go down and visit him often, but in terms of he and my father talking about the old days, I don't think that happened.

NP: What was your grandfather like as a man from your perspective as his grandson? Any thoughts on that?

GS: Very many. He was a man greatly admired. He was a man of tremendous integrity. He was a man of great foresight. He was a man of great intellect. And he wore spats. I mean, that tells you the world about the man; he wore spats all the time. I so much enjoyed going down to visit him in Minneapolis. He was a man of very erect stature. He was absolutely erect in everything he did. He's a man I greatly admire, and, unfortunately, I didn't know him as well as I should have. For example, I have in my possession a gold headed walking cane that the Community Chest gave to my grandad in 1935 because he was the only man they could get to run their campaign. And, you know, I think speaks wonders for my grandad being the character that he was.

NP: Tough time to raise money.

**[0:15:00]**

GS: Tough time to raise money. They picked the right man to do it. He ran the Community Chest campaign in 1935 and they gave him a gold headed walking cane as a result of his efforts.

NP: He lived to a grand old age, I believe.

GS: Yes, he lived into his early nineties. So, I knew him very well. We have a four-generation photograph of my grandfather, and my father, and myself and our number one son, which was taken just before his death.

NP: When I was looking through some memorabilia that still lingered at the Searle Elevator in Thunder Bay, there was a journal that someone had kept, and there was the obituary for your grandfather in there from the Minneapolis newspaper.

GS: Yeah, yeah. He was a fine, fine gentleman. He was a real tribute to the Canadian grain industry, which he loved and fostered and promoted. My grandfather had so many unique skills that I did not appreciate at the time, but I should have. For instance, in 1951 or '52, there was a very heavy frost in August—August the 18th, the 19th, and 20th. It froze out the Canadian grain crop. This was a unique experience for us. We had no concept as to how to handle all this frozen grain. Well, grandad said, "It's simple! I'll tell you how to do it. I've handled it before." So, we were in a unique position of being able to handle that grain properly.

The secret of it, not that it matters very much, was to keep one empty bin in your country elevator and keep turning the grain all the time to cool it off because the frozen grain had very high moisture content and, therefore, subject to mould and mildews. The way to reduce the temperature was to keep turning it. So, that's one of the things he taught us. Now, that's unique advantage that we had over our competitors that we knew how to handle. We didn't lose any grain at all as a result of his advice and counsel to us.

NP: A question about the Duluth and Fort William, Port Arthur, at that time, relationships. I don't want to call it rivalry because I don't know if it's rivalry. What--?

GS: No, I don't think there was because there was a distinct difference between the Canadian grain system and the American grain system. That had a lot to do with markets. It had a lot to do with government regulation. It had a lot to do with transportation. They were separate entities. We didn't look at Duluth as being a competitor at all. They were an associate, friends. We learned from their experience, but we handled grain differently than they did. The process within the terminal elevator was different. We had to do a great deal more cleaning than they did because they were able to market their grain in unclean condition, and we were not able to do so.

NP: Why was that?

GS: Well, that's because of the desire by the Canadian government to establish appropriate grading standards and appropriate standards of quality. The Canadian government set up the Board of Grain Commissioners [CGC] whose function was to regulate the quality of the grain within the Canadian grain trade. The Americans didn't—I do not believe—have anything comparable to that. So, it was primarily the function of the government.

NP: They're celebrating their 100th anniversary this year.

GS: Yes, they are! They've done a wonderful job.

NP: I'll come back to that because I want to deal a bit more with sort of the everyday running of the operation. So, we'll come back and visit that and other pieces of the Canadian system. Your dad, from what I remember from what you said just before, went off to--.

**[0:20:12]**

GS: My father went to Yale before the First World War, and in the spring of 1917 his whole class—pretty well to a man—volunteered for the American Red Cross Field Service Ambulance Corps. That includes all kinds of people: P.T. Barnum was in that class, Bill Jones from The Cloister here was in that class. All kinds of men were in that class. Dad joined the American Red Cross Ambulance Corps in the, I think, just after university closed, so it may have been May. Three weeks later, he was overseas, and two weeks after that he was driving an ambulance and was assigned to the French Army. He served with the French Army until he

became sergeant and got a Croix de Guerre, if you please. He transferred into the American Army when the Americans came into the war in 1917 and served all through the rest of the war in the Ambulance Corps in the American Army. Then he came back after that and went to Yale. Then he went to Melfort.

NP: What year would he have gone to Melfort? Approximately where are we in the--?

GS: Oh, I think we're talking about 1921.

NP: Was it always assumed that he would follow in his father's footsteps in the industry?

GS: I don't know, but knowing my grandfather, I suspect so.

NP: You mentioned two sons-in-law. Who were they, just for the records?

GS: Oh, the first one was Norman Lawrence Leach, who married my grandfather's eldest daughter, Rosabelle. The second was James Stewart Gilchrist, who married grandad's second daughter who was Florence.

NP: Now, both those names, Leach and Gilchrist—particularly the first one—strike me as being grain people names. So, what do you know about them?

GS: Well, all I know is that grandad, when he established the Canadian grain business, what turned out to be the Searle Grain Company--. It was not established as the Searle Grain Company. The Searle Grain Company ended up by being a merger of a number of smaller companies. [Coughs] I beg your pardon. He put his two sons-in-law, Norm Leach and Jim Gilchrist, in charge of a couple of these grain companies just the way he put my dad in charge of a grain company. Then in 1929, I think, they merged all of these smaller grain companies into what then became the Searle Grain Company.

NP: All to funnel their grain through the Searle terminal elevator?

GS: That's the only way to go.

NP: Was there any connection with those companies through the West Coast, or were they exclusively delivering through--?



GS: Well, yes, there was. But the bulk of the grain, certainly from Saskatchewan and certainly from Manitoba, went to Thunder Bay. A lot of the Alberta grain went to the West Coast, and we had a small terminal elevator at New Westminster, just outside of Vancouver.

NP: Your dad's history in the company then. Did your grandfather stay in it right until sort of the end or were reins turned over? How did that play out?

GS: That's an interesting question. I think I can answer that best by telling you what granddad said: "You can do what you like, but here's how I would do it." I think that describes his management style. [Laughing]

**[0:25:06]**

NP: But the fact they were living in two different places probably helped a bit.

GS: Yes, oh yes. Dad lived in Melfort for, I don't know, I think maybe a year, and then he married mom in Minneapolis and then they moved to Winnipeg. They lived in Winnipeg all their time after that.

NP: Did your mother have any connection to the grain trade?

GS: No. No, no, no, no, she was not. That's a whole different history. But none of that has to do with the grain business at all.

NP: The Leach and the--.

GS: Gilchrist.

NP: Gilchrist. Were they in the grain trade before they became son-in-laws of your grandfather?

GS: Gosh, I don't know. I don't think so. I think Norm Leach was an engineer, mining engineer. I don't know what Jim Gilchrist was. I just knew him as Uncle Jim in the grain business.

NP: And they lived in Winnipeg as well?

GS: They all moved to Winnipeg. When we all merged, everybody moved to Winnipeg.

NP: Great. Your dad, what were his--? We figure he's starting in with the grain trade after the First World War. How long did he stay in the grain business?

GS: In the grain business? Oh, for the rest of his life.

NP: And when did he pass away, approximately? The '40s, '50s, '60s?

GS: Oh, no, no, no, later than that. Let's see. Mom died in '69. I guess dad died about '77. In 1977. He was never anywhere else except employed in the grain business.

NP: The merger, or the Federal, was--?

GS: That was after he had retired.

NP: Your dad's time in the grain trade, are there any things that you recall about that? Or they start to blend in with yours?

GS: Well, they certainly start to blend in with mine. I just knew him to be involved in the grain business. I certainly knew where his office was in 365 Grain Exchange. I knew a lot of the people in the grain business when I was still young. I knew that he ran the terminal, was the terminal manager, and Norm Leach was the president of the--. Jim Gilchrist ran the country elevator operations, and my father ran the terminal operations. That was my first awareness of what was going on in the grain business.

NP: When did you first go down to Thunder Bay to see the Searle Elevator? Do you recall?

GS: Oh, yes. Very clearly.

NP: Tell us about that experience.

GS: Oh, I think that was in--. I was trying to think when that was, but I think it was in say about 1938, when I was just a sprog. Dad loaded my brother and I onto the train as we always did. We got onto the Fort William car and rode down the train and got off at Thunder Bay. I remember visiting the terminal, [laughs] and I remember distinctly being unable to manage the large lever that controlled the winch on the car haul to haul all the cars. I wasn't strong enough to do that. But the track shed superintendent said,

“Lemme show you how to do that. *Rrah!*” Pulled the lever across him. Anyway, that was my first visit to Thunder Bay. I was down, obviously, lots of times after that.

NP: Stayed at the Royal Edward?

GS: Well, no. I didn’t stay down often. I usually overnighted both ways. More lately, I caught the early plane to Thunder Bay first thing in the morning, and then worked all day, and then caught the late plane that night back to Winnipeg.

NP: Any other remembrances about the physical aspects of the elevator at all?

GS: No, not at all. Not really. That was a long time ago. The only memory I have is the issue of hauling the car-haul lever.

NP: Now, I think from our earlier conversations you were born in 1923.

**[0:30:05]**

GS: That’s correct.

NP: So, that would have put you in your teen years when you were having a little difficulty moving the lever.

GS: Yes, I wasn’t strong enough to do so.

NP: So, how did your history with the industry, other than growing up with a grandfather and father in it, how did that unfold?

GS: Well, I was, obviously, immersed in the grain trade because living at home and my father being so actively involved as the terminal manager—and subsequently as the president of the company—I came in, I guess, by osmosis almost. I never thought about going anywhere else except working for the family grain trade. So, when I left the Canadian army and went to Queens, when I graduated, there wasn’t any doubt about-- I wanted to go to Harvard and dad said, “No. We need you here.” That was it. So, I came back and started to work.

NP: So, what were your studies at Queens?

GS: Oh, business. Business administration.

NP: Did it prepare you?

GS: For the grain business? Nothing prepares you for the grain business, Nancy. [Laughing] The grain business is, in my experience, is unique for a number of--. It's unique because there's so many personal contacts. I mean, we'll come to the story about the merger later on, but it's a unique business.

NP: Now, when you talk about it's unique because of the personal connections, would I be wrong in assuming that you grew up on or near Wellington Crescent?

GS: Oh, no. You'd be exactly correct, 1001. We lived originally in Waverley Street, 215, but then we moved in 1935 to 1001.

NP: Who were the grain families that you recall growing up with in that area?

GS: Well, Jim Gilchrist. My Uncle Jim had lived next door and Uncle Norm lived down the street. I didn't really know anybody else in the grain business then, but I knew, of course, them very well.

NP: So, the other families that would be part of those connections we've probably interviewed some of their representatives?

GS: Oh, I'm sure you have. The Patersons. I don't know where the Patersons lived. Richardsons we knew very well because they--. We were very close to the Richardsons, friendly with the Richardsons. My father knew Mr. and Mrs. Richardson very well. And, of course, I went to school with both boys, and so we knew them very well.

NP: Don and--?

GS: No, Jim. Jim.

NP: Oh, the Richardsons. Ah, okay.

GS: Yeah, yeah. Not the Patersons. I didn't go to school with--. But Jim and George I went. George was a classmate of mine.

NP: When you went into the business, did you actually have a starting day, and can you tell us what it was like to officially start?

GS: Well, I'd had a mixed academic career until then. I went to an independent school in Winnipeg, and then I was in the army for two and a half years. I'd gone to Queens and then I graduated. And so, all of a sudden, I end up on the doorstep the 1st of June, 1947, at 365 Grain Exchange. I'm given a job in the handling documents in the terminal department.

NP: What does handling documents entail?

GS: Oh, shuffling, mainly shuffling. Preparing some of them but shuffling them mostly. Sorting them.

NP: So, what would be the main documents there?

GS: Oh, warehouse receipts for grain. I worked with some very nice people in the grain business just shuffling documents. I eventually, during that particular summer and fall, worked through all of the departments in the Searle Grain Company, spent time at each department so I knew what was going on.

NP: Those departments besides the paper shuffling, as you say, what other departments did you work your way through?

**[0:35:00]**

GS: Oh, all through the handling of the country grain elevator documents and the grading of grain. We had a grading office there. We had a merchandising office. I spent some time in there. Then I went out to New Westminster in early December of '47 and worked in the elevator at New Westminster. The hardest work I'd ever done. Unloading grain cars is the toughest job in the grain business. So, I was unloading grain cars, and I went through all of the various departments in that particular elevator under the tutelage of a fellow named Hudson Burney, who was a very good teacher. So, I spent all of the spring of '48 out in New Westminster learning the terminal business. At my father's touch and call, I guess.

NP: Was your dad still, at that time, in charge of the terminal in Thunder Bay?

GS: Yes, oh yes. Very much. Yeah. Oh, yes. He was still in charge of that. As I worked my way through the various aspects of the Searle grain Company, I was then promoted to be in charge of the terminal in Thunder Bay. Great honour.

NP: [Laughs] Oh, you smoothy, you.

GS: No, no, it was a great honour. Yeah, I mean that was a great promotion for me.

NP: So, what would be the difference between the two terminals, would you say? Was size the major issue?

GS: Oh, yeah. Size a major issue, mostly size. The New Westminster elevator was up the Fraser River by 15 or 20 miles, so we had different kind of ships onto [inaudible]. We had ocean-going ships that came up there. Where, of course, at Thunder Bay we had nothing but lakers at that stage in the game.

NP: So, the New Westminster elevator then, did it stay in the company until the company moved on from the grain trade or was it--?

GS: No, we leased it. We leased that company from the New Westminster Port Authority, leased that elevator. We ran it for a number of years until our friends, who had larger elevators in Vancouver, persuaded us that it was more appropriate for us to go in with them. And that's what we did.

NP: Who did you merge with for that operation?

GS: Well, there was a consortium called Pacific Elevators, and they ran a number of terminals in Vancouver on both sides of the harbour. They persuaded us to come in and join them.

NP: Any difference in the operation, I mean, other than the ships—you were mentioning at that point it was lakers at the Lakehead and ocean-going ones from BC. Any other differences in the operation?

GS: Not fundamentally. Minor differences. If you had a problem on an ocean-going ship, that was a big problem because you had a lot of grain in the hold. If you had to empty that hold. That was a lot of grain to move. Whereas the laker cargo hatches were smaller, and if you had trouble you didn't have as much grain to take out. Not much difference in the operation. I didn't see any difference.

NP: What kind of problems would occur that you would have to empty out the hold?

GS: Oh. Essentially, having loaded the incorrect grain onboard. Either it was contaminated or one thing or another. Not up to grade, that's essentially what that--.

NP: Didn't happen too often, I would imagine?

GS: Oh, not very often. That was a major catastrophe when that had to happen.

NP: I imagine. You've answered pretty much my first early questions. I forgot to mention at the beginning of the interview the able assistance of Ron Perozzo on the technology here.

GS: Technologist.

NP: That's right. You're scribbling down a couple of questions. Is there something I should add before I move on?

**[0:40:15]**

RP: Well, I was just curious. When you said you were unloading cars in Westminster, at that time how did you do it and how did that change over the years, unloading the boxcars?

GS: Originally it was brutal. What you had was a piece of wood, about three feet long and maybe four feet high, attached to a power winch. It was an automatic power winch in that it would release so that you could take this sled and throw it back up into the grain, and then the winch would catch, and it would drag the sled and the grain out to the front door. Walking through loose grain with a 20-pound sled, never being sure when it was going to grab you and haul you out, was a killer of a job. That's how it was done. Eventually it was done by rocking the car, automatic unloaders. That's why, necessity of being the mother of invention, that's why we got into the boxcar dumping business, but be that as it may.

NP: The boxcar dumping business meaning?

GS: We built boxcar dumpers.

NP: Under the Searle name?

GS: Well, it was an associate with ourselves and some friends we had in Thunder Bay. It was called Seabar and the dumper that's installed in the Searle terminal is a Seabar installation.

NP: Actually, one of the items we borrowed from Bruce Hayles was the installation of the Seabar dumper at the Searle elevator.

GS: You're kidding!

NP: No. So, it was step by step.

GS: Well, there you go.

NP: So, great to hear you talk about it because I had no idea that it was also something that had been designed by--.

GS: Well, Seabar is a combination of Searle and Barnett-McQueen. We worked very closely with Barnett-McQueen. I mean, Jerry and I were in the army together, Jerry Cook, and we went to Queens together. But that's a whole other story.

NP: So, this is the Cook family in Thunder Bay? V.B. and--.

GS: Yeah. V.B., that's Jerry.

NP: Ah. We have interviewed him.

GS: Oh, have you?

NP: Yes, so this is wonderful to hear the connection.

GS: Oh, yeah. Great pal. Wonderful man. One of my good friends.

NP: It's unrelated, but I find it fascinating the broadness of people who are in the industry. So when you were in the army, what was your—in a little capsule—your career in the army?

GS: Oh, a very uninteresting army career. I was commissioned a lieutenant in the artillery and served in the Canadian artillery in Canada. I was unfortunately the wrong age because the Canadian army made too many officers. Literally made too many officers. They projected their officer requirements on the basis of the World War I killing experience, the ratio of men to officers. That didn't apply in World War II. So, on the basis of that ratio, they created a whole bunch of officers, and they became literally surplus officers, and I was one of those. I was just, you know, I served in the field artillery. I served in light anti-aircraft artillery. I served up in Prince Rupert, I served in ack ack, [anti-aircraft].



Then I was retreaded to infantry and was all set to go overseas, and eventually was stationed in Vernon, went through the battle school at Vernon. Stationed at Vernon as part of the 6th Division, which was the division that was to go and fight the Japanese. Fortunately, the bomb went off and we were disbanded.

In fact, two days after the bomb went off, I discovered that they were giving early discharges to men who wanted to go back to university. So, I wired my dad, and I said, "Dad, for god sakes, get onto Queens and see whether or not I can get back in there." He said, "Yes." My good friend, Gene Royce, who was the registrar of Queens got me in. I got in and three days later I went to the commanding officer and said, "Here, I'm going to Queens." He said, "Fine. Here's your train. Catch the train up here." I was immediately discharged, got right to Queens. Came home, bought some clothes, went to Queens.

**[0:45:58]**

NP: Good. I think we were talking about your career. We left off where you had gone out to--.

GS: New Westminster.

NP: To New Westminster and learned the ins and outs of the--.

GS: Handling of grain in the terminal, yeah. That's why I say there was no difference between the New Westminster operation and the Thunder Bay operation. Different scale, different people, different events, different unions, this kind of thing, but fundamentally the same.

NP: So, the unloading of boxcars didn't sound like your favourite. What did you like about running a--?

GS: Oh, I liked the people. I loved the people. I mean, they were wonderful people. Here was a fresh-nosed kid just out of university, didn't know anything about anything, and they all took me in and taught me everything they could. It was a wonderful experience.

NP: What did you learn about the handling of grain?

GS: Oh, I learned all how to do it. They taught me how to do it, and what was important and what wasn't important. What you should pay attention to and what you don't want to pay attention to. I've learned it all.

NP: If we talk about what to pay attention to and what really not to sweat, any things come to mind that--?

GS: Well, the most significant part about the handling of terminal grain is the shipping. How you blend your grades in order to--. The blend of grain that you have to meet grade that's required, that was the real skill. I wasn't a good blender, but that's what I really learned. That's what they taught me, what was so important.

NP: You learned to hire a good shipper.

GS: Yeah. Exactly right. Yeah. It was so significant that, very often, the superintendent came down and did the blending, both at Thunder Bay and at the--. The foreman would call him up and say, "Gee, what do you think about this?" And he would come down and they'd pour over the sheets under the light, examine the grain and all the rest of it.

NP: When you came into the industry then, were there surpluses still in the system?

GS: Yes, yes. Very much.

NP: What do you recall about that issue?

GS: A lot. There was, because of the war, there were still huge surpluses of grain. Not that there wasn't a huge demand, but there wasn't any way of shipping it and handling it. So, Canada had a huge storage problem. The grain trade manifested this problem in a number of ways. They built temporary storage facilities all over the place, not just at Thunder Bay, but at places like Kenora, like places like all through western Canada, where the grain was stored. We ran a huge operation in Kenora, Ontario where we stored a lot of surplus grain. That was, of course, a wonderful thing for the Winnipeg grain people, the Searle grain people, because we had to go down and inspect Kenora. Well, of course, you did that on a Friday afternoon, and on and on. [Laughs] Anyhow. Be that as it may.

NP: So, did you have a summer property there too along with the others?

GS: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

**[0:50:11]**

NP: The building of the storage in Thunder Bay then, do you recall it at all? From pictures I've seen, it seems to me it was back behind the office building.

GS: Yeah. It was along the out-tracks. I was not part of that. I was otherwise involved when all of this was going on. It was built of concrete slab, 6x6 or 8x8 posts, and then some sort of mastic material on top of plywood for a roof. Just a temporary. We built lots of them, I mean, we built them in Kenora, and we built them just outside of Winnipeg at a place called Searle, Manitoba, on and on.

NP: Searle, Manitoba? Any connection?

GS: Absolutely.

NP: So, how did that one little town get the lucky name of Searle?

GS: Well, it was originally named Alcrest, but the CNR [Canadian National Railway] in their wisdom decided that they wanted to change it, so they changed it to Searle, Manitoba.

NP: So, all your elevators were on the CN line?

GS: No, no. If you look at the geography, the Canadian Pacific [CPR] runs across the south, the CN runs across the north, and we were in the north. So, the result of it was that we had a lot more CNR grain than we had CP grain. That's partly a function of the private train that Peavey and granddad ran. It was a lifesaver in a couple of years because of the crop failures in the south during the drought. We didn't have that same experience in the north. We had more grain. Our share of business during the dry years was very much higher than it should have been or was normally because of the drought. So, the answer to your question, yes. We were dominantly CN.

NP: One person that we interviewed, or heard interviewed, said something about the connection between the train companies and delivery at the elevators. Was there a time when there were contracts for delivery to the terminal elevators that only one company would do it, or was it always a combination of CN and CP?

GS: I don't know how to answer that question, really. I do know that we were on National trackage. In other words, we were served by the National. That was good and bad. I should say that was good. I shouldn't say that was bad.

NP: How about it offered opportunities or some--. [Laughs]

GS: Oh, did it ever.

NP: Say more about that.

GS: Okay. As you know, the centre of the operation is the track shed where the grain is unloaded. Okay. You have in-tracks and you have out-tracks. There's a grade down--. The grade runs from high on the in-track down towards the track shed, and then grades down towards here. So, you have a whole series of tracks on your in-side. Some tracks are not as easily served because of the switching and because of how you handle it. Guess whose cars got stuck out there on the not-easily-served track? CP, because here's the crew of CN with a whole bunch of CN cars and they want them turned around and back out, so they put them on the easy tracks and the Pacific gets shifted down into the--. I'd be unfair if I said that was deliberate, but it just somehow seemed to have happened. And I'm sure that other people had the same experiences. I'm sure the houses that were served by the Pacific found their National cars on their hardest tracks to unload. [Laughs] That's quite okay, I mean, that's part of the business.

**[0:55:01]**

RP: You said that you had storage in Kenora, and I'm just curious why Kenora? Wouldn't you have to offload and load the grain?

GS: Yeah, oh yeah. But there's provision in your bill of lading for in-transit of storage. And same at Searle, Manitoba, we did the same thing there. That was on the National trackage.

RP: So, what was attractive about Kenora that you'd built storage there? What made you build it there?

NP: There was a big flour mill there, wasn't there, at the time?

GS: Oh, yeah. In fact, two questions. We built on the site of the flour mill. The flour mill had a fire and burned down, and we built on their site. I suspect we built at Kenora because it was on Pacific trackage. We didn't have a major facility on Pacific trackage, and of course Kenora's on the mainline. Kenora's a divisional point on the Pacific.

NP: Now, I'm going to ask you this question about the storage because it's a personal interest. When we moved to Winnipeg—we spent our working lives in Winnipeg—we lived in a housing development called Wildwood Park.

GS: Wildwood?

NP: Wildwood.

GS: Oh, yeah.

NP: And, in doing the history of the Wildwood Park community, we uncovered some information that said that Bird Construction, who built that development, built it with lumber that they purchased from temporary storage bins in Thunder Bay.

GS: I wouldn't be surprised. Various places. Could be Thunder Bay, yeah.

NP: But you have no personal knowledge of that?

GS: No, I didn't know that. I wouldn't be surprised though.

NP: I thought that was why we felt so comfortable there.

GS: The Birds were a fine family. I went to school at Ravenscourt, so I knew all about Wildwood Park. In fact, I was chairman of the board at one stage in the game, but that's a whole other story.

NP: We left your career when you were still back out in New Westminster, so where'd you go from there?

GS: Oh, I moved back into Winnipeg, and I ran the terminal department in Winnipeg, operations of the terminal department in Winnipeg.

NP: Could you describe a typical day of the person in charge of terminal operations in Winnipeg?

GS: Well, it wasn't very exciting. I'd arrive about 8:00 and open the mail, start to see what was going on. Very quickly you'd end up on the floor upstairs, on the sixth floor of the Grain Exchange, because you did the merchandising as well of the by-products that were produced at the terminal—the refuse screenings, the mixed-bean oats, all that good stuff, as well as a lot of oats and barley that you merchandise as well. So I spent a lot of time on the floor selling grain.

NP: So, as selling grain through the Exchange, did you ever get to know the buyers, or were they just sort of blips on the screen?

GS: Oh, no. I mean, yes, I went down and visited the buyers in eastern Canada.

NP: Say more about that because this is an area that we don't hear much about.

GS: Well, there were a number of important buyers of Canadian grains, particularly feed grains, in eastern Canada—dominated, I suspect, by Toronto Elevators. Have you heard of Toronto Elevators? Okay, well there's another name for you. We used to go down and visit them, do the right thing, make sure that their needs were being looked after. And there were other buyers as well. Also, I had to handle problems, like some guy wouldn't pay his bill. I had to go down and visit him, beat him up a little. [Laughing]

NP: You're saying that with a smile, I'll just say that for the--. [Laughing]

GS: Well, first of all, I'm not very well qualified to beat up people. [Laughing]

NP: So, Toronto Elevators, who were they?

GS: I don't know, they were a large--. They had a terminal in Toronto, and they distributed feed grains out of that terminal to the eastern Canadian feed market.

NP: And any international customers? Or that was pretty much done by agents?

GS: Yes, we had some international customers. At grandad's suggestion, we established what we called an export department, which was involved in the handling of wheat for the European market. It was not one of our outstanding successes. We were not really very competent at it. It was very hard to do against the international wheat marketing people like Bunge and Intercontinental, and others like that.

**[1:00:45]**

NP: Huge companies.

GS: Yeah, who knew a great deal more about it than we did. But we struggled along. At one stage in the game, I went with my wife to South America, to Colombia, Bogata, and to Venezuela to try to promote the sale of Canadian grain, not very successfully. I also went to visit the Chinese in Hong Kong, and same thing.

NP: On your own, or were there delegations, Canadian delegations?

GS: No, on my own. On my own, with associates. You don't ever do those trips alone. You always take somebody with you to hold your hand and pull you out of the mire if you get involved.

RP: So, what type of grain were you attempting to sell? Wouldn't the international marketing have been done by the Wheat Board?

GS: Yes, but the Wheat Board, you know, employed agents to do their work for them, to do their selling for them. Sure, the Wheat Board sold the grain, but they employed agents to do it for them. You had a Wheat Board contract, you could buy grain from the Wheat Board, and try and sell it overseas. So, that was what I was trying to do.

RP: So, you'd essentially sell it to the Wheat Board, buy it back from the Wheat Board, and try to sell it overseas?

GS: You don't sell it to the Wheat Board. It's the Wheat Board's grain. All you do it act as their agent. Okay. You handle it for them. You have a handling contract with the Wheat Board, so you handle their grain for them until it gets to Thunder Bay and you get a warehouse receipt and then that's their document. You turn that back over to them. That's their evidence that you've handled that grain properly. Okay. But once the Wheat Board has all those warehouse receipts, what are they going to do with them? They're going to try and sell it. So, they sell it to the mills in eastern Canada, but primarily they sell it to grain companies overseas. So, we tried to become involved in selling it overseas. We sold a cargo of grain to a family named Fakhoury in Lebanon. We were very good friends with a firm in Hamburg, Germany, that we visited often and talked to in an effort to move the grain along.

NP: So, again, the personalities, the personal connections, were a very important part.

GS: Oh, you bet. I mean, well, that's the key to the grain business, the personalities.

NP: Now, you smile when you say that, the personalities. During your time, then, in the industry, who were the personalities that you recall mostly from--?

GS: Oh, you talked about Bruce. Bruce Hayles. Bruce and I were good pals. Don Paterson, I knew all the Richardsons. Well, the Grain Exchange has been accused of a lot of things—some of which are correct and some of which are not—but one thing it did, it gave you an opportunity to meet everybody in the grain business. So, you went around and met everybody in the grain business. You met all the cash grain brokers, and you met all the pit traders, and you met all the exporters, and you met the terminal operators, and you met the line elevator operators. You knew them all.

NP: I'm just thinking—different names are coming into my head as you're talking about those different people. So, would you have been a member of the Mouse Trap Club then?

GS: No, oh no, no, that was--. Oh, that was where they had lunch on the--?

NP: All those grain people coming together in a--.

GS: Oh, no, I wasn't a member of that.

NP: So, were there any characters that you recall? Would you have known Charlie Kroft, Charles Schwartz—was it, Schwartz?

GS: Oh, Charlie, very well. Oh, yeah, Charlie Schwartz.

NP: So, what about those people who can't speak for themselves, what do you recall about them?

**[1:05:15]**

GS: Oh, gosh. Well, I liked Charlie Schwartz. I was very good friends with his nephew, who's name is Hart Rusen, who unfortunately was killed in an automobile accident in California. He and I became the best of friends, so much so that we joined the Junior Chamber of Commerce together and went on a lot of industrial tours together. That's Charlie Schwartz. I knew Charlie very well and he was a great gentleman.

And Charlie Kroft, of course, I knew him very well with McCabe's. There was a fellow who worked for McCabe's, Scott—I can't remember his last name. Anyways, he became our chief negotiator in the Lakehead Terminal Elevators Association, which was the association of terminal elevators. We did all of our labour bargaining together. We had an associates' weekly meeting, and we would talk about mutual problems—the represent of all of the Pools, all of the grain companies, the terminal operators—and we bargained with the unions through the Lakehead Terminal Elevators. Scott—I've forgotten what Scotty's last name was—anyway, he became our labour negotiator, and he was one of Charlie Kroft's men. Eddie Gould, who was also one of Charlie Kroft's men, used to work for us. Yeah. I think he got fired because he told off my uncle, the best I know. [Laughing]

NP: But landed on his feet.



GS: Oh, of course. Much better with McCabe's than he would have been with the Searle, that's for sure.

NP: Labour negotiations, what was your experience there, your thoughts about ins and outs, ups and downs?

GS: Well, I learned a lot in my experience through the Lakehead Terminal Elevators Association. I was chairman at one stage in the game. My father also was the head of negotiations in the old days with Joe Payton and the rest of them with the union. Bruce Hayles' father, Charlie Hayles, was the head negotiator at one stage in the game with the labour negotiations. I was directly involved, as part of the negotiating team, in a whole series of labour contracts.

We'd all fly down to Thunder Bay and meet up in the hotel, get drunk, and all the rest of it. I learned a lot about labour negotiations from my experience at Thunder Bay. Basically, I would say that the labour unions were tough but fair. I had developed an attitude that felt that while there were many on the team who hated unions—including our superintendent at Thunder Bay—who hated what they stood for, who hated what they did to them, I could not honestly say that the employees of the terminals would be as well off as they were without a union. If you say that, then you have to say, "Okay, let's get on with dealing with the situation." That's what I learned about them.

NP: The different people that you were dealing with, the managers, in Thunder Bay, who were some of the names there from the various companies that would've been your counterparts?

GS: Well, Bob Phillips of National, Scotty Neil for McCabe's. I've forgotten who--. Oh! Lorne Peterson from Paterson's, and various members of the Pools. Arn Metcalf from Sask Pool, and I don't remember the Manitoba Pool guy's name, and the UGG [United Grain Growers] guy was—oh, I've forgotten his name. Anyway, they were all members and good friends.

**[1:10:15]**

NP: Was that Mr. Titheridge?

GS: No, no, no, no.

NP: It was before that?

GS: No. Before that. I've forgotten what his name was.

NP: The issues that were dealt with--.

GS: At the union contracts?

NP: Yeah. Obviously, wages, but--.

GS: Oh, wages and the various provisions of the contract that they wished to change, and that we wished to change.

NP: Any crisis issues that you had to deal with? What kind?

GS: Well, there were always threats of strikes and, you know--.

NP: Safety issues?

GS: Not really. We seemed to resolve those pretty well. We had a grievance procedure, and we always insisted that our grievance package was pretty small, that we didn't have many unresolved grievances. We got on with resolving them. Some companies I don't think felt that, but we did. Most of those issues were resolved through the grievance procedure.

NP: Was Frank Mazur with the union at that point or--?

GS: Yes, he was.

NP: And any thoughts on--.

GS: Oh, I liked Frank. He was a tough negotiator, and he was--.

NP: Did he come from Searle?

GS: No. Oh, maybe he did! I don't--. Before my time, anyway. So, I can't say.

NP: I think he may have. I was reading some of his early reports.

GS: Electrician, was he? I'm not sure. I knew Frank very well.

NP: What makes a good union negotiator would you say?

GS: Tough and honest. Tells you what he thinks. "Let's get on with it. Come on. Let's not have any BS. Let's just get the issues out on the table. Lay it out. Talk about it. Talk about your both sides. Set your goal posts, see how we can narrow it." And he was good at that. Had a great respect for him.

RP: To your knowledge, did the contracts that resulted from the negotiations ever influence decisions on locations, things like that? If you had New Westminster and Thunder Bay--?

GS: No. No, Ron, they did not because they had separate contracts for them, separate unions for that. There was a union that dealt primarily with Thunder Bay, and Frank was--.

RP: But did the cost that you ended up having in Thunder Bay influence whether you'd ship through Thunder Bay or through New Westminster or anything?

GS: Not really. It was pretty profitable under any case, so you were going to get on with it. Now, what did influence you was the transportation cost, and secondly, how much room you had. Because when I started taking over the terminals, we were always short of storage. We never had enough storage.

NP: So, your time in charge of the terminals then, where did you go from there? How did your career progress?

GS: Well, I became--. I travelled with the export department because I ran the export department as well. I did some travelling with that. And then I became--.

NP: What years would that have been in? Approximately, again.

GS: I would guess in the late '50s, early '60s. I became the vice-president of operations of the company. We reorganized a little bit and moved both the line and the terminal and put them together under operations. Then there was the VP of administration, and I was the VP of operations.

NP: So, tell us a bit about the day in the life of the operations head-honcho.

GS: Oh, that was easy. It was just selecting people. You had to make sure you had the right peg in the right hole. That's what your job was. You had labour negotiations and those other things, the Wheat Board contracts to think about, and all the rest of them, and help negotiate all of those—but from an operational perspective, you had to have the right people.

RP: How did you know you had the right people across the whole scope, like superintendent in Thunder Bay, the operations in general—what did you look at to tell that?

**[1:15:09]**

GS: Results.

RP: Financial or--?

GS: Yes. Operational results. You established over time a whole set of criteria against which you measured these things: what's your share of business, how are you handling your grain in Thunder Bay, what's your grade loss, and what's your grade gain. A whole set of criteria, and you learn that over time.

NP: That leads nicely into a question about the other players in the system. I'm going to reverse my order of questions here. How would you describe the interconnectedness of your company with other major components of the industry? And some of these are pretty basic, so you may be able to deal with them quickly. The farmers?

GS: Well, they're not farmers. They're producers.

NP: I have producers here, but some people--.

GS: Good girl. [Laughing] That's what's important. Well, you cannot run a successful country elevator operation unless you have good relations with your producer customers. So, having said that, then you want to put a man on the driveway who knows how to handle producer relations. That's all there is to it. If he doesn't handle producer relations, if his volume of business goes down, your share of business starts to drift to other elevators. Producers are very fickle, very fickle. They'll move very, very easily to other customers. And, if they do, then you lose the opportunity of handling their grain. And boy, do you watch that like a hawk. So, it was terribly important. We used to do all kinds of things to promote. You've heard about the Farm Home Weaving Service? You know anything about the Searle Farm Home Weaving Service?

NP: No, tell me! I'm sorry, obviously I've missed a big--.

GS: You have, my god, woman! [Laughing] My grandfather thought that one of the ways to get the producers was to get through producers' wives. So, we, you know, put a hack in the post for that one. He thought these poor women are sitting out there in the bald prairie, and the wind's blowing through the north. They don't have a damned thing to do. Why don't we get them something to do? And so, he established a Searle Farm Home Weaving Service.

This was a program that acquired a bunch of looms and acquired a teacher who went out and taught producer wives how to use a loom, and how to make garments, and how to run the Farm Home Weaving Service on the basis that they would teach five more other people how to do it. So, here we were producing looms, selling wool, getting people lined up. We even arranged to market some of the garments—the scarves, the cloths, and everything else that they wove. Oh, come on! [Laughs]

NP: So, do you have one of those garments that have been produced?

GS: Looms?

NP: Or the loom.

GS: I used to have a loom, but no I don't have--.

NP: That would've been a great artifact.

GS: Well, the Manitoba Tartan is a function of the Searle Farm Weaving Service. It was designed by the woman, Dorothy Rankin, who ran it. So, if you ever see the Manitoba Tartan, you think of the Searle Farm Home Weaving Service.

NP: Wonderful! How long did that last?

GS: Oh, God. It was a source of endless trouble. [Laughing] But it lasted, I don't know. I don't know when it started, but it started obviously before the war and lasted well into my career.

NP: So, why do you say it was a source of trouble?

GS: I guess you didn't know Dorothy Rankin. [Laughing]

NP: I'm not sure, but my educational background is home economics out of the University of Manitoba.

GS: Good for you!

NP: So, I'm sure some of those people that I know will be able to tell me a bit about Dorothy Rankin.

**[1:20:06]**

GS: Oh, okay, I hope so. I hope so.

NP: She sounds like a go-getter.

GS: Oh, she was a pistol. Amazing woman. I'm not knocking her. I'm just saying we spent an undue amount of executive time worrying about the Searle Farm Home Weaving Service and Dorothy.

NP: Do you think it worked?

GS: Who's to say? You never know.

NP: Did any of your competition have similar--?

GS: Oh, no. Come on! Don't think about that. [Laughing] That's for one. And the introduction of Thatcher wheat to western Canada, that was a Searle project.

NP: Say more about that one.

GS: Well, you recall the rust years? We were running varieties of grain that were not rust resistant, and so in the early '50s—sorry, earlier than that. I've forgotten exactly when, but Thatcher wheat was introduced into western Canada by the Searle Grain Company because my grandad said, "Go and find some rust resistant wheat." And so, they went and found a strain of rust resistant wheat, and we arranged to have it reproduced in Mexico, and introduced three boxcars full of grain, which we sold through our elevators as rust resistant wheat, as Thatcher, that lasted until the 1950s.

NP: That brings, in my mind, an automatic question then: how did that fit in with the whole grain registration system that Canada was very, very rigid on? So, how did they--?

GS: Well, we had rearranged to get it registered. There was no problem about that. It was obviously very well received because it became the only grain that was grown in western Canada for years.

NP: Who were the companies that grew the seed grain then? Was Searle in the seed grain business?

GS: Yeah, we had a seed business.

NP: Under Searle Grain?

GS: Yeah, I've forgotten what it's called. Yeah, under Searle Grain.

NP: So, you were marketing that?

GS: Not much, we weren't very much involved in that. It wasn't a big feature in our lives.

NP: Anything else you'd like to say about the producers then before I move onto some of the other players?

GS: I just spent the best years of my live meeting producers. I mean, never in my whole career have I ever had as much fun as I had in the grain business, and that's primarily because--. We had 365 elevators, and I think I knew, personally, at least 200 of them, and they were wonderful men. And it wasn't the fact that the Searle name was on the driveway. It was the guy that was in there who was busting his butt for you. Aw, I just loved the grain business.

NP: What happened during the war years with the grain business? I'm just thinking of all these guys that were at those elevators, and some of whom I would think would have gone off to war, was it always run by guys?

GS: Yes, I'm afraid so. I don't recall a female agent that we had anywhere. It was a guy's deal.

NP: The whole business was pretty much a guy's deal?

GS: Yeah, it was.

NP: Any exceptions to that on the Winnipeg scene?

GS: I can't think of one. I can't think of one. I think about the friends I knew on the floor of the Exchange, there weren't any women there. No, it wouldn't fly today, but it was wonderful then.

NP: Maybe it kept several marriages together, not having some temptation. [Laughing]

GS: Maybe like that, I don't know. I can't comment on that.

NP: Now, you made some comment early on about the CP, CN. Are there any other points you'd like to make about the interaction of, particularly in your work, with the railways?

**[1:24:48]**

GS: No, except to say that I always got along famously with the railways. I liked the railways. I understood what they were trying to do. I understood their pressures. I understood the-- I was particularly responsive to their reaction to our needs.

You will recall, then, in the early '60s, there was a great move for railway abandonment, railway line abandonment. The poor railways were stuck with, you know, Crow's Nest Pass deal which forced them, literally forced them, to handle the grain at below market rates—way below market rates. So, I appreciated what the railways were trying to do. They were trying to get out of this thing to try and get something, get this thing back in order. You've got a wonderful business everywhere else, except the grain business stinks. So, I had great empathy for the railways and what they stood for. Some people looked on them as tyrants and this, that, and the other thing—certainly, a lot of producers did—and forgot about the benefits of them.

But I had great empathy for them. So I tried, wherever I could, to help the railways if possible. For instance, one of the most important things in the country elevator business was what's called a spot of cars, which was the number of cars that you got at your elevator vis a vis the number of cars your competition got. I started a program of making sure that we handled those cars properly. In other words, typically the freight train left a divisional point with a string of empty cars. They'd stop at every station all the way down, drop a few cars off, move down to the next station, drop a few cars off, go down to the next divisional point, turn around, and come back and pick up the loads if there were any. That's how they ran their country operations.



I started a program—I started to promote a program—to make sure that as soon as that car hit our elevator, we loaded it. We got it loaded. No matter what you were doing, you know, having coffee, whatever else, you got out there and loaded that car. So, by the time the train came back down the track, he had some of your loads. Well, the railway thought that was wonderful. I mean, bless Searle’s heart. Anyhow, that helped. Things like that helped.

We spent a lot of time with the railways. I spent a lot of time with the railways, talking about unit trains of grain, talking about batches of cars of grain, how we can get around this cost of--. You know what hump switching is? Where they have a hump—they have a couple at Thunder Bay—and they start off with a load of cars coming down here, and they hit the hump, and there’s a guy there that breaks the car, sorts it into various tracks going to various elevators. Okay? That’s a lot of work for them, and a lot of money for them, and all those guys hired. Why don’t we get a bunch of cars, all the Searle cars are together? And so, you’ve got 20 cars, all of which end up on the Searle track, instead of sorting them all out. So, that was the concept of batches of cars and, subsequently, unit trains. I spent a lot of time with them.

We actually had the first unit train of grain. The Searle grain train, the famous Searle grain train. It went from Saskatoon to Vancouver, all one unit train. First time it had ever happened because we went to the CNR and said, “Look, let’s do something.” And we did. We put a unit train together out of Saskatoon that went to Vancouver, just one train. It got unloaded together. It kept together the whole time. No switching, no humping, nothing. None of this bad stuff. We made a movie about it.

**[1:30:04]**

NP: You did?

GS: Oh, yeah. The Searle Grain Train. We even got a song [laughing] called “The Searle Grain Train”!

NP: Can you sing it? We do have people recite poetry--.

GS: No, sorry. I’m not competent. I have--.

NP: Oh, come on.

GS: I can’t.

NP: Hum a few bars. [Laughing]

GS: I'm sorry. [Laughing] I'd spoil this whole thing.

NP: Could you pause that, Ron, while I go--.

**[Audio pauses]**

GS: No, no, no. I understand that.

RP: Shall I?

NP: Yes, I'll hope for the best from my stomach. So, we were talking about the trains and the fact that--.

GS: The unit grain trains, right.

NP: Yes, the unit grain trains. So I don't want to lose track of where is this film and where can I get the song? They would be perfect.

GS: Well, if you get the film, you get the song because the song is in the film. And you know, we did that, we sent copies out to all of our agents and thought that was wonderful stuff. I'm not sure where--. I think we have a copy, but I'm not sure where else it is. But anyways.

NP: So, your son would have a copy?

GS: Somebody has a copy. The Searle Grain Train is something for you to think about anyway.

NP: I'd love to--.

GS: This came because Otto Lang, when he was Minister of Agriculture, set up a committee of which I was a member, and a member from Sask Pool and a member from Alberta Pool. The three of us met in Ottawa, dealing with this whole issue of rail line abandonment and what's going to be the future of the grain business. It was absolutely crystal clear as a result of the work that we did on this, the unit trains were going to be the answer.

NP: And were they from then on? Or did it take a while for unit trains to become the--.

GS: No, no, no, no, no. Nancy, western Canada is dominated by elevators that the producer says, “My grain built, and you damn well don’t take that elevator away unless you talk to me.” That has been a very tough, tough issue on this whole business of grain elevator consolidation. It’s inevitable. Finances will make it so, but you’ve got “that elevator that my grain built” mentality behind it.

NP: Was there, during your time heading up the operations group, were you starting to phase out elevators?

GS: Oh, you bet. You bet! The program was called saw-offs. You went to your competitors, and you said, “Okay, you’ve got a crap house here, and we’ve got a crap house here. Let’s get rid of it, and we’ll put the elevators together. We’ll saw them off. We’ll saw-off.” We were very, very active in that program.

NP: Was it all of the elevator companies, including the Pools? Or was it--?

GS: Well, first of all, it turned out to be all the line elevator companies, and then we persuaded the Pools. Never mind “That’s my elevator that my grain built.” “You know you’re losing money on it, and we’re losing money on this one. Let’s see if we can’t somehow get together and rationalize this situation.” So, there was a huge amount of that going on, and a very active program that we promoted.

NP: Was there an official group that met to do that?

GS: No, no. You did it company to company, unless there were three companies involved. Sometimes there were three-company saw-offs.

NP: Any particular downsizing that was particularly problematic in your mind?

GS: Well, if you had an elevator that the producer’s grain built, he didn’t want it moved. That was the problem. So, you had to get around with persuasion and negotiation, this kind of thing, about how we can do this.

RP: So, were there any offsetting benefits to the producer? I take it that they didn’t want to move because it was going to cost more to deliver grain.

GS: Yes, I think that's right. But during all this time, the road grid in western Canada was significantly improving and, therefore, we weren't moving grain with horses and carts in bags anymore, we were moving it in trucks. A lot of that we were moving it in semi-trailers. There were significant advantages to everybody to have this happen, but it takes time to get that underway, get people to appreciate that.

**[1:35:20]**

NP: The next on my list are the handlers, so those are the people that you referred to earlier on when you were at the terminal elevator. Any points to add about interactions between you as one of the owners of the company and the grain handlers themselves?

GS: I didn't find any, but no doubt there were. You can't be your father's son and have your name on the elevator without—your grandad's name on the elevator—without having some interaction. I personally didn't think it was significant, but maybe I was naïve. I don't know.

NP: Who were the superintendents at your elevator during your time?

GS: Oh. Les Irwin was the only until the very end, until Les had a heart attack. Then it was Bob O'Hara.

NP: Was Mr. Irwin from Thunder Bay originally? Or was he related to the Irwin Concrete people?

GS: Yeah, that's his son. That's Bob Irwin. Well, that's a whole other story. I can tell you about the concrete business because Les and I spent hours with Bob trying to get that concrete business established. Yeah. I don't know Les' background. As far as I know, he was there from the time the first yard of concrete was poured on the building of the elevator, and he certainly was until late in his career when he had a heart attack and he had to resign.

NP: Canadian Grain Commission [CGC]. What are your thoughts on them as they celebrate their 100th anniversary, and your interactions with them?

GS: Very significant interactions with the CGC. Established, as you know, to look after the producers, to stop people from taking their grain and doing wrong things with it. They were eminently successful. And they did more than that because they established the fact that if you bought 2 Northern grain, you were going to get 2 Northern grain. No matter whether it came from Churchill or from Thunder Bay or from Toronto or from Vancouver, you were going to get 2 Northern, and you were going to get the same product. The quality was assured, that was their whole role. Quality assurance.

They were tough because they had inspectors, and they had inspectors in your elevators, and they had inspectors downtown, and they had inspectors in Winnipeg, and they had inspectors everywhere watching the quality of the grain. They did a superb job of maintaining the quality of Canadian grain, which I think very much eased the marketing problems of Canadian grain, very much eased because you knew if you got 2 Northern it was going to be 2 Northern.

They came out with a sample, said, “This is what 2 Northern’s going to look like this year, and that’s what you’re going to get.” I don’t think there’s anywhere in the world—maybe Australia, I don’t know—but nowhere else that I know—certainly not in the States—is there anything like the work that they did on quality control. It made so much simpler the problems of marketing because you had this quality control assurance. I mean, you had a certificate from the CGC that this was it. So, I had tremendous respect for what these people did. Tremendous respect for them. They were all political appointees, and they all had their failings and phobias—we all have warts, but--.

NP: That’s at the head office?

GS: Yeah.

NP: So, what were some of the downsides of having that system?

GS: Well, if you didn’t maintain that quality, if you didn’t ship out 2 Northern, boy, you heard about it. You heard about it. They had inspectors on the ships taking samples all the time. When we were talking earlier about unloading cargo holds, that’s when if you didn’t ship 2 Northern, off she came.

**[1:40:06]**

NP: But overall positive on your business?

GS: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. You know, a lot of heartaches—and not small heartaches, big heartaches—but in terms of their role to preserve the quality of Canadian grain, unexcelled.

NP: When you say big heartaches, that’s just the effort of meeting the standard?

GS: Yes. Because why? Because you wanted to blend in lower quality grain, didn't you? I mean, you were shipping 2 Northern, but you had some 4 Northern over here. If you could ship a little bit of that 4 Northern and get 2 Northern price, would you? Okay. So, they wanted to make sure 2 Northern was 2 Northern, and the 4 Northern stayed over here.

NP: They also did audits.

GS: Yes.

NP: Any comments on those?

GS: They did a number of audits. Let's see now, how can I explain this? Periodically, you checked your inventory, and you did that by having what's called a cut-off. You cut off all business, and you weighed and graded everything that you had on hand. Then you compared that to what you had on hand to start with, plus your receipts, minus your shipments, and what you've got on hand now. Okay.

Then what's the net of all that? How are you on weight? How are you on weights? I mean, have you got as much grain now as you originally had plus what you bought, less what you shipped? Have you got that comparable quality now? Have you got more of it? If you've got more of it, then you were running what's known as the break of the beam—you were running your scales differently. If you've got less than, then of course you've got to have that. So, they ran that audit. Not only did they do that for terminal elevators, they also did that for country elevators.

NP: And you were in your position during the switch over to metric? Were you?

GS: Yeah.

NP: Does that raise any pleasant or unpleasant memories for you?

GS: No. I didn't have any problem with that.

NP: So, changing scales and such was--?

GS: No, it had to be done. It was appropriate.

NP: The other big player, that again you've mentioned, is the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB].

GS: You bet.

NP: What are your thoughts on that?

GS: They were our principal. We were their agents. We were their handling agents, and so we had intimate contact with them all the way through the system, as well as subsequent contact when we tried to help them sell their grain inventory.

NP: And what are your thoughts? You spoke fairly strongly about how you felt the CGC impacts the system, what about the Wheat Board, especially during your time? And your grandfather and father would have worked outside of the Wheat Board, so.

GS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

NP: So, there's likely some thoughts.

GS: Nancy, the CWB is a product—was a product—of producer complaints about how the grain companies were handling their grain. That's essentially why they came into business. They came into business because there were complaints about the grain companies hosing the producers. So, why not have a producer marketing board that handles all this problem? One of the things producers don't like very much are changes in prices. They didn't understand the futurist marketing system and how prices change day by day. And so, the producer would go into town, find out the price of 2 Northern, and when he brought his load in it might be a different price. That irritated them. On that basis, the resolution was a producer marketing board. Well, okay, that's fine. If that's what the producers want, let them go ahead and have it. I don't happen to think it's a very good system, but I think they're quite entitled to have it if they want it.

**[1:45:02]**

NP: How do you think the Canadian grain trade would have been different without it that--?

GS: Well, don't you think the Canadian grain trade was different before it than after it?

NP: I don't know. I wasn't there, but you were! So, what--?

GS: It was very much different.

NP: So, how would you think of the difference?

GS: Oh, I think there were unquestionable abuses like there are in all businesses. Okay? And the grain trade was no different than any other business from that respect. I think the producer marketing board tried to resolve those abuses. Other things that they took on that I'm not sure that was wise to do, but. Look, for a while I was the chairman of the Manitoba Marketing Board Commission. So, this was a commission set up by the Manitoba government to respond to producers' requests for marketing boards—eggs, all kinds of things, chickens, all kinds of things. So, I understand a lot about the function of a marketing board, and I think there are good things and bad things about the marketing boards. If the producer wants a uniform price? Great. If he thinks he's getting the best marketing system? Okay, that's their way. The fact is that the Wheat Board didn't do very much marketing anyway; they marketed all through agents. What the hell's different from having an agent and doing it in the first place without having the Wheat Board in there? So, you know, I'm not sure that that's a big plus.

The most significant piece of marketing the Wheat Board did was to enter into the negotiations with the United Kingdom government for the UK wheat deal, which set the price for grain over a long period of time during the war, which was okay except that grain prices escalated substantially after the war, and here we had all this surplus. So why don't we get the higher price for it? No, we've got this agreement with the UK. So, I don't think that the Wheat Board did an outstanding marketing job on some aspects of their marketing. They did a lot of things for the producers. I think they did a lot of things that producers wanted, if I can put it that way.

NP: So, what would some of those things be?

GS: Stability of prices. The fact that you got an initial payment price and two years later you got the balance, and you were out the interest et cetera, et cetera, on what the balance was. Everybody got the same price. Doesn't make any difference if you were here or there, no matter where it was, you all got the same price. I don't think that's the best way of doing business. As a producer myself—and we had a farm—I don't think that's the best way to sell grain.

NP: You mentioned about the grain that was developed, the rust--.

GS: Thatcher?



NP: Yes, Thatcher grain. Any other connections in grain research that you'd like to comment on? How would you describe your company's connection to grain researchers beyond what you've already said?

GS: Well, we had a research department. We published a grain market features letter every two weeks, which talked about what was going on, tried to inform people about what was going on—prices, trends, this, that, and the other thing. May have been viewed by some as being a house organ, but I don't think so. That's the kind of--.

NP: And I think most companies—correct me if I'm wrong—had a connection through the various organizations that worked on improving grain systems. So, either in advisory capacity, helping with the--.

GS: Maybe an advisory, I don't think they did--.

NP: No, not that you recall?

GS: No.

NP: Your connections with your competitors, how would you describe the Canadian grain industry from the standpoint of--?

**[1:50:04]**

GS: Well, there were areas of competition, and there were areas where you weren't really very competitive. On the driveway in the country, you were exceedingly competitive, exceedingly competitive. You and I talked about the criteria we used to measure the performance of agents, well, the agent's performance was, "What's your share of business?" And what's even more significant, "Is it increasing or decreasing?" So, in the country perspective it was very competitive. At the terminal it wasn't. Once you had the car loaded and behind the engine, it was going to end up at your terminal. So, it wasn't really very competitive.

NP: Were there situations where you had to cooperate in order to--?

GS: Oh, yes, you bet. If you had too much grain and you couldn't handle it all, then you had to give it to somebody else. So, you arranged for somebody else to handle it.

NP: So, friendly rivalry?

GS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Always friendly.

RP: Why were the country elevators unprofitable and the terminal elevators profitable?

GS: Oh, very simple. Very simple. The country elevator system was dominated by the producer cooperatives. The producer cooperatives are fine, but bless their hearts, they don't pay taxes on their capital. So, they were able to employ capital tax-free. The producer companies dominated the grain business. They were 65-70 percent of the grain business. Therefore, they dominated the setting of handling rates, the charges that you assessed against the producers. Whatever they said, went. They were influenced by their producer membership to reduce those charges. So, in fact, the country elevator system generally lost money, and the terminal system didn't because we didn't have that kind of competition. Essentially, it was the producer dominated cooperatives that set the rates.

NP: I'm going to shift gears a little bit here, just so we don't miss out on the progression of Searle Grain through the years. So, when you were in the system, they had the line elevators, and they had the terminal elevators. What played out in the future years of your career related to the company?

GS: What played out was the realization that the grain business was a wonderful mug's game, that there wasn't any future in it.

NP: Why was that?

GS: Huh! We talked about the cooperatives being dominant because they weren't paying taxes on their capital, and we had to pay taxes. Therefore, we didn't have the capital that they had to reinvest in the business. And the grain business was getting old. Elevators were wearing out, had to put new ones up. My assessment was that whatever capital we had, we had to deploy defensively. In other words, we had to employ it because somebody else was doing something. If the cooperatives built a new elevator against us in a town where we were marketing against a cooperative with a new elevator, or a new annex, we damn well had to put an annex in there as well to maintain our share of business. Okay. So, that meant that our capital employment in the country elevator business was all defensive, and the returns on defensive employment in capital were nothing like returns on the offensive employment of capital. There weren't new points that you could go and build an elevator where nobody else would-- some, but not many.

**[1:55:04]**

So, I came to the realization that this was a mug's game, that we weren't going to win this one in the long run. I loved the grain business. I loved the people in it. I loved the competitors. I loved the railways. I loved every part of it, but it was a mug's game.

My father had a house down here on Sea Island, and I came down to see him once. I said, "Dad, we ought to get out of the grain business." And he said, "Why?" I explained to him this theory, and he said, "So, we start to think about it." So, we start to diversify out of the grain business. I can't tell you how hard it is to see your name taken off an elevator. You've known the people. You've met a lot of their producers. You know your friends. You know the railways. There it is. That's what it was all about it. It was down here on 25th Street, my dad and I started talking about this. We subsequently decided to get out of the grain business.

NP: And how do you do that? How did you do that? What--?

GS: It isn't easy. It wasn't easy because we were only a 5.5 or 5.6 percent share of business, and our competitors kind of frowned on us and said, "Who the hell are they? Nothing. We don't have to worry about them." So, we embarked upon a different strategy. We said, "Okay, if that is the problem, then we ought to get larger." And how do you get larger? You merge with somebody else. So, then we went to Peavey's. We went to Richardson's, and finally we went to Federal and said, "This is what we think we ought to do. We ought to get larger and then we ought to get out. We ought to get larger so that competition is apprehensive about our ability to do things."

NP: Who was operating Federal then?

GS: George Sellers. That's what caused the merger. That was the reason for the merger, that we wanted to get larger because we wanted to get out. We wanted to become significant competition. Boy, once we got larger and started to--. We thought of a lot, a lot of ways to be significant competition.

NP: I'd like to get to the ways of becoming significant competition, but I'm interested too in the merger. So, what did Federal--? Was it a Federal, Searle exclusively?

GS: Yep.

NP: So, just from this standpoint of terminal elevators, what terminal elevators were then brought under the same umbrella?

GS: They were all the Federal operations and the Searle operations.

NP: So, in Thunder Bay just one Federal elevator?

GS: I think they had a couple, I'm not sure. And then we had one joint one. The Westland was a joint operation. They were twice the size we were. Twice the size we were. So, it was a two-thirds one-third merger. We just went ahead and did it.

NP: What did you see as what you could accomplish? You were talking about the advantages of the merger.

GS: Oh! Well, our share of business went from 5.6 to 15.7 or something like that. So, we were significant in terms of what we did. We had a reaction upon the market. You know, we talked about saw-offs, well, then we were in a much better position to--. We obviously consolidated our own. Between the Searle and Federal, we sawed-off all kinds of elevators. But in the course of doing that, we sawed-off other elevators with other competition. We embarked upon a program to aggressively expand our business, which we were not able to do because we were so small. We were under the influence of the cooperatives.

NP: What year was this coming into being?

GS: Oh, I think about 1967.

NP: So, what did you expand into?

GS: We expanded into the Federal Grain Company.

NP: And what services were they providing that--?

GS: Exactly the same as we were.

NP: Just more of--.

**[2:00:10]**

GS: More of 'em. They had a lot more elevators than we had. I think we went from--. Well, I don't recall exactly, but I recall that there were about 5000 at country elevators, and I think between the Federal and the Searle we had maybe 8 or 900. But we were able to do a lot of things. We had a competition amongst our country people. "Okay, whoever can expand their business the most, we'll give you a trip to Vancouver, will have a holiday in Vancouver. The superintendent that has the biggest expansion will have a

holiday in Vancouver.” That was a big, big feature. Boy, oh boy, did they start to load cars, did they start to get after malting barley. I mean, there were all kinds of things that suddenly came out of the woodwork. And all of a sudden, our competitors started to notice. So, when we went to them and said, “You want to buy us out?” They said, “Yeah. We’ll talk to you about that.”

NP: And who did you eventually sell out to?

GS: Well, we sold out to the three Prairie Co-ops and the UGG.

RP: When was that?

NP: Late ‘70s?

GS: No, earlier than that. Uh, I can’t think of the exact date, but I would say ’72. We had this idea, and it took us I think about two years to interest anybody in it. It took us about three years for them to actually agree, and then after that, there was about three years when we ran together. Whether a year and a half or a couple of years, maybe a year, when we ran individually, but then we merged the two of them together, and then we ran as a merged company. It was a long, long process I would say. Ten years overall from that first concept of the idea down here on Sea Island Drive.

NP: From the standpoint of management then, did both companies sort of share personnel, or did--?

GS: No, no, we merged them. Uh-uh, we merged them. We merged them. George Sellers was the president, and I was the executive vice-president.

NP: I’m going to ask you a couple of questions that you may have already answered, but you can add to them. When you think back on your career, significant challenges and significant events—other than the ones that you’ve already mentioned, which were pretty significant—are there others that haven’t come out in the questioning that stick in your mind as being important to you?

GS: I don’t think so, Nancy. The most significant event in my business career were the discussions with my father about getting out of the grain business. I mean, hell’s bells, I was a third generation. My grandfather had been a grain merchant, my father was a grain merchant, and I was a grain merchant. It wasn’t easy. That’s by far the most significant.

NP: As you see changes now that are occurring—I don’t know if you’ve been following them at all—but pretty major changes in the Canadian system--.

GS: No, I haven't, Nancy. I signed a contract when we sold that I would have nothing to do with the grain business for five years, and I've just honoured that contract to the spirit and the letter. I don't know anything. Don't talk to me about [laughing] the existing situation. I don't know!

NP: Ah! All of the major players, most of the major players, aren't there anymore, so just in retrospect it might be interesting to look at.

RP: So, did you retire at that time then once you sold? Or did you go on to something else?

GS: You don't know?

RP: No.

GS: Federal was twice the size of the Searle, so that was two-thirds, one-third. About a year after we merged, we bought the Federal out. The Searle family bought the Federal out, and we controlled the whole of Federal Grain. So, I didn't retire.

**[2:05:15]**

RP: No, but after you sold to the Wheat Pools?

GS: Oh. Oh, no, no, no, no. After we sold to the Wheat Pools, I was still an executive vice-president of Federal Industries, which was then we were converting into a holding company then, as opposed to a grain company. Oh, no, I had a very busy job, and I eventually became president of Federal Industries.

RP: And Federal Industries, what were they involved in? Not Federal Industries the electrical--?

GS: Oh, no, no, no, no. We had three or four subsidiaries: Standard Aero Engine, 100 percent controlled; Thunder Bay Terminals, 100 percent controlled; White Pass and Yukon Railway; Citation Cabinets; Panko Products; et cetera, et cetera. We had a number of companies.

NP: Federal still operating?

GS: Federal? Yes, but it's changed its name. It's now Russel Metals. We subsequently sold a lot of the junk and bought Russel Metals, converted to Russel Metals.

RP: Hope you kept StandardAero.

GS: No, they sold StandardAero. StandardAero was the jewel in our crown, Ron. Wonderful, wonderful business. It only had one defect: it never generated a dime of cash. [Laughs] It generated all kinds of profits, it expanded, it was a fun field to be in—I loved to fly—but it never generated any cash. So, we had to sell it to get the cash.

NP: When you think back on your long career in the grain industry, what are you most proud of?

GS: Two equals. My relationships with the people that were in it, and the decision to get out. I loved the people, I loved them. You've talked to my friends, you know, Bruce and many, many others, let alone the hundreds of agents on the driveway, let alone the superintendents, let alone the people in Winnipeg, let alone the railways, let alone the Wheat Board, let alone the Commission—hundreds of friends. And the decision to get out. To take your name off the elevator, which you worked so hard to keep up there and which you worked so hard to mean something, not just to you but to your employees and to your producer friends.

NP: Almost conflicting, definitely conflicting, because you had to leave behind--.

GS: Very much. Absolutely. It's a terrific dichotomy.

NP: Do you have any memorabilia, including pictures, that you feel would be important in publicly commemorating the history of the grain trade and your company's part in it? Especially as it relates to Thunder Bay because our ultimate hope is that we can actually establish a national--.

GS: Museum?

NP: Museum, that recognizes all of this important part of Canadian history. And a lot of it, especially with companies like Searle that have come and gone, a lot of the memorabilia--.

GS: I've turned it all over to Stu, so I don't have anything that's significant. I cherish one of the original spikes from the White Pass and Yukon railway. I cherish a scale that one of our agents gave to me when he retired. He said, "You've meant a lot to me, and this means a lot to me, and I want you to have it." Nothing significant. Stu has them all. We turned it all over to him.

**[2:10:15]**

NP: And that would include photographs and so on?

GS: Oh, absolutely. I told you, he's an amateur digital cinematographer. That's his hobby, and he enjoys it, and he's doing all kinds of things including work for the Atlanta Opera, including one on the family—the four generations. He's working away. Just about finished the one on granddad, which is like, I think it's almost an hour long now.

NP: We're starting a website, we're working on that now, and we're hoping to feature the various families that had a presence in terminal elevator operations in particular. So, is that something he would talk to me about, is maybe--?

GS: He would talk to you? Oh, absolutely.

NP: Okay, I'll get information from you on that. The last thing is that little black book there.

GS: Yep. The Searle Book.

NP: And this was the one that I mentioned to you on the phone that was loaned to me. I put these little stickies here because I met with your cousin who put me in touch with you.

GS: Woah, woah, woah, woah.

NP: Now, do we have a first one here. There, we got it.

GS: Okay.

NP: Now, the thing there is that those pictures are awfully small, but I'm sure you would recognize some of the faces. I have done a digital scan, but since we don't have access to a computer, I can't increase the size of those. But I would really appreciate it if you could take a look at them—and I can send the digital copies to you—and maybe name some of the faces?



GS: Oh, sure. Well, I ran the farm for a while.

NP: Oh, did you?

GS: Oh, yeah. Those buildings have all gone now.

NP: The property's been sold, I imagine?

GS: Oh, yeah.

NP: Where exactly is it in--?

GS: It's north of Winnipeg. Are you familiar with the history of the CPR?

NP: Somewhat.

GS: You know that the CPR, when it left Kenora, was contemplating a crossing of the Red River at Selkirk? And the citizens of Winnipeg determined that that was the wrong thing to do and agreed with the CPR that they would pay for a bridge across the Red if the CPR, instead of crossing the Red at Selkirk, would cross it at Winnipeg. The CPR agreed and put a 90-degree curve in their tracks and ran down to Winnipeg and across the bridge that had been given to them. We're on that 90-degree curve. And the reason we're on that 90-degree curve is because the farm was originally owned by Sir William Van Horne, and we bought it from the estate of Sir William Van Horne. Why did Sir William Van Horne have a farm up there? Sir William Van Horne knew damn well that if the CPR crossed the river at Selkirk, Selkirk would be a very important community, and he needed some land and bought three or four thousand acres of land. Of course, when the railway decided to go down and cross at Winnipeg, the land was useless to him, so he converted it to an immigration centre for immigrants coming across and ran a demonstration farm.

NP: So, where is it in relation to the town of Selkirk?

GS: Across the river. It's on east Selkirk.

NP: Okay, just almost directly opposite then?

GS: Yeah. If you find a 90-degree curve in the tracks, that's where the farm is. [Laughing]

NP: That should be easy to find!

GS: Now, Alcrest subsequently became Searle, Manitoba.

NP: Oh, right. You were mentioning that earlier.

**[2:15:05]**

GS: Now, there is the annex right there. Oh, yeah, it was built during the war.

NP: Who would you think put this together? Because the person's name isn't in it. Would it have been Mr. Irwin?

GS: Les Irwin? Les Irwin? I would think so.

NP: There's a couple of pages there.

GS: Ha! Sorry. Oh, that's my dad.

NP: Which one is your dad?

GS: Right here.

NP: Oh, okay.

GS: That's Jim Gilchrist, and that's Les Irwin. This was when my dad was in charge of the terminals. This is Jim Gilchrist.

NP: So, we're looking at 14, and the person on the far left--.

GS: On your right is my father.

NP: With the pipe.

GS: With the pipe. The centre man is Jim Gilchrist who ran the operations, and the man on the left is Les Irwin who was the superintendent of the elevator. The picture down below features my father. The picture on number 15 is my uncle, Jim Gilchrist. Now, sorry, am I missing a page? Yeah. Nothing there. Okay. This is on the back lawn of Jim's house, which is next door to the house that we had. There's my dad there.

NP: So, this is on Wellington Crescent?

GS: On Wellington Crescent.

NP: That's on page 18.

GS: Yeah. Wellington Crescent is on page 18. This is Searle Farms with the sugar beet crop. We raised pure-bred livestock on the farm, in the Van Horne tradition, and Belgian horses, pure-bred Belgian horses as well. Baldy. Baldy was the dog, sheepdog. Clarin Monarch! Clarin Monarch was a bull that we bought, a very famous--.

NP: From where was he purchased?

GS: Purchased? I don't know. Clarin, somewhere out in Calgary, I think. There's the model of the terminal. It was an operating—this is page 28—that was a fully operating model of the terminal.

NP: Where did it go?

GS: It was down in our head office in 365 Grain Exchange.

NP: Did it just get--?

GS: It was located--. This is in the interior of the office at the terminal.

NP: What happened to it?

GS: Oh, I don't know. It disappeared. Mice ate it, I guess. [Laughing] Ron Hicks was our assistant foreman. Oh, the instructions from Les. [Laughs] That's very nice, you better keep it.

NP: Yes, for sure. We've got it all digitized.

GS: Good for you.

NP: I'll send some of the photographs with people in them, and then you can--.

GS: I'll do what I can.

NP: You can magnify them and have a look at them. So, that brings us to the end. I'd like to thank you very much for fitting us in, particularly since I know this has been a tough time for you.

GS: Not at all. My pleasure.

NP: Wonderful to meet you in person. And I look forward to meeting your son.

GS: Yeah. That won't be easy but anyway, be that as it may.

NP: On the phone perhaps.

GS: Yeah, on the phone.

NP: Thank you, Ron.

GS: Thanks Ron!

RP: [Laughs] Signing off!

**End of Interview.**