

Narrator: John Thiessen (JT)

Company Affiliations: Paterson Grain

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Summary: Retired manager of country operations for Paterson Grain John Thiessen discusses his long career in the grain industry on the Prairies. He begins by describing his first role in the company as a country grain elevator manager. He recalls a typical day, the major challenges he ran into as the sole elevator staff, interactions with farmers, and interactions with the railways. He describes his duties changing with the seasons, his relationship with the competition, the services he provided to attract farmers to Paterson's elevator, and the elevator's central role in rural communities. Thiessen then discusses his move to regional manager in charge of supporting 12 country elevators, performing elevator audits per Canadian Grain Commission regulations, and dealing with grain grading disputes. He recalls the differences in farming practices within his region and the major industry changes that affected farmers and the company, like the building of large inland terminals. Thiessen then describes his move to manager of country operations and dealing more closely with other industry players. Other topics discussed include a story of farmers plugging traffic while lining up to deliver grain, a story of miscalculations during the change to the metric system, a story of visiting Thunder Bay to sail on a Paterson ship, changes to grain varieties and farming practices, a story of a skunk getting stuck in the elevator leg, the challenges of weather and international trade fluctuations, and the importance of people to Paterson's success.

Keywords: Paterson Grain; Country grain elevators; Grain elevator managers; Grain farmers/producers; Grain varieties; Grain storage; Grain grading; Grain weighing; Grain cleaning; Grain buying; Boxcars; Grain doors; Grain transportation—rail; Farming—equipment and supplies; Farm supplies sales; Fertilizer; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (SWP); Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR); Moisture testing; Dockage; Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain elevator audits; Inland grain terminals; Grain elevators—Design and construction; *Comeaudoc*; Richardson Main Terminal; Saskatchewan; Manitoba; Alberta

Time, Speaker, Narrative
BC: Today is December the 2 nd , 1900--. Oh, 1900. [Laughing] Stop, stop!

NP: No, go ahead.

BC: 2008. We're meeting with Mr. John Thiessen, and Nancy Perozzo and Bea Cherniack are volunteers interviewing Mr. Thiessen. So we'll start off by having you tell us how you came to work in the grain trade, how you got started.

JT: Yeah. I used to farm at one time in Killarney. When I left school, I went farming in the Killarney, Manitoba, area, and a fellow by the name of Mr. Barry Woods, who I'm sure you'll be interviewing at one point in time, he was the manager for Paterson in Killarney at the time. So I was hauling grain to him for five years, and then I showed an interest in maybe wanting to change occupations. So he said, "Well, if you do, come in to see me," because there might have been an opportunity with Paterson's. So after a while, I decided I was going to go and try something different, so I went and seen Barry, and he steered me onto the regional manager. That was Mr. Tommy Nesbitt at the time, and we had an interview. That was on a Thursday, I think. On Monday the next week, I was working for Paterson at Carievale, Saskatchewan, and I stayed there as a-- Well, I managed the elevator there for 21 years as a manager of buying the grain and so on.

Then after 21 years, they decided maybe I should take over the regional manager's job here in the Winnipeg area. So I did. I started that. I was there for three years, and that's when we moved to Stonewall at the time because it was central. So then when they asked me to come into Winnipeg and become the manager of country operation, that takes in all country operations of their elevator system. So I did that for, I guess, about 11 years when I retired. All the time we lived here in Stonewall because it was handy. [Laughs] Even while I was working in Winnipeg, it was pretty nice, you know? Didn't have to live in the city and still keep in touch with the country, the grain operations the way I was growing-- I still like it, so I guess once you're in the grain business, the production of food, it's pretty hard to get out of it. I still like it. Yeah, that's how I got started at it.

BC: So if you would do the math for us, what years did your career span from?

JT: Okay. That was 1965, spring of 1965 when I first went to Carievale, and then I was there until the fall of 1987. That's when I came here. Then it would be three years, so that would be, I guess, '91, I guess it was, '91 or 2 when I went into Winnipeg. Then I retired in '01, January of '01. That's the-- Yeah. There's been quite a few changes in those times. [Laughs]

BC: Oh, good because we're going to talk about those. Listening to you, I see that you had large chunks of time in both parts of your career because it's a long career.

JT: Yes.

BC: So if we go back to the beginning part of your career when you were managing the elevators, what would a typical day be like? Who would you come in contact with? Because thinking of people who would have no idea what it would be like to run an elevator--.

JT: Yeah. Well, as a manager of the elevator, basically, farmers you would--. If you're looking what would a regular day be, well, you'd start about—when I first started—it was 8:00 in the morning you started, and we worked until 6:00, and we worked on Saturdays too those days. [Laughs] We'd get up, and there'd be guys delivering, and sometimes there'd be guys waiting for you at the door when you arrived at 8:00. Basically, we would weigh their grain, buy, and bin it, and wait for the railroad to come and bring its cars to ship it to its destination.

[0:05:19]

We always shut down for lunch. That was one thing we always did, and I was close at hand. I could always go home for lunch, which was nice. By 1:00, you'd be back there, and there'd be another line up of grain trucks. Not always. I mean, sometimes it was quite slack, and there was quotas and stuff that we had determined how much grain was hauled and when it was hauled and what was hauled—whether it was wheat, oats, or barley, or rye, or whatever. They didn't usually--. Well, in those days, they put on a quota, and they could haul pretty well anything. That was for the first number of years. Oh, maybe about ten years that I was there. So it was pretty hard to come up with a binning program that would accommodate all the different grains, and that was sometimes a problem because each grain you've got to bin it separately, and there's different grades of different grains, especially wheat. So you had to have a lot of different bins. And of course, in those days, the elevators were small. They had lots of little bins. It's a little different than today.

And then, of course, it would sit there. We had to make sure that the grain didn't spoil. You know, if a bin leaked, water would get in, and the grain could spoil, and it just was out of condition. It's not worth much, so we had to be very careful about that. And also, we had to do a lot of repair work ourselves. Like when I say you've got to watch the leaks and such in the roof and stuff, we had to kind of do a lot of our own repair because in those days, I know Paterson had a lot of elevators when I first started. The repair crews were busy, and they were old elevators. A lot of them needed a lot of attention. So we had to learn to be independent as far as fixing and so on. So we did a lot of that.

Of course, when the train did bring cars, we didn't have a very big spot. We had about, oh, maybe a six-car spot at that time, and they were all the old type, the boxcars we call them. We had to put grain doors in them. I don't know if you know what I'm talking about is a grain door. When I first started, they were wooden. Big, heavy, hard to lift. There would be about, oh, five or six on each side. There's two doors in the car, of course, one on each side, and they had to be boarded. There would be about six boards to each

side. Sometimes about the time that you'd get them all ready to climb over top to be all done, they'd fall down. [Laughing] Start all over again. So anyhow, then eventually—This was still with the boxcars—they switched to a paper door, a cardboard door, with a lot of steel straps through them. So, oh, I would say the straps would be about this far apart, so the cardboard was quite strong enough to hold the pressure of the grain. So that was a great improvement as far as we were concerned. They weren't very heavy, but it took a lot of time to do it.

Then, of course, eventually they came to the hopper cars, the government cars. They were much better. But then we had a problem with the spouting. The spouting wasn't high enough coming out of the elevator, some of it. They had to be changed because now all of a sudden, the cars were much higher, and you loaded from the top. The old cars, you loaded from the side. So there was a problem. So now, of course, there was a big rush on to get them all changed. But it was a much-improved system that we had there.

Of course, it wasn't just the grain at that time. We went into the farm inputs—fertilizer and chemical and such—and that took up a fair bit of time. Not so much the work, but to go out and sell it, to promote it. That was a big--. Like a lot of people had the idea that, well, the farmer would just come to the elevator, and he'd buy it, and that was it. Well, in any business, it's not just quite that simple. You have to go out and promote it and spend evenings, maybe have meetings or something, to promote your product, which at that time when it first started to get a fair bit of volume, then we had to have some meetings and stuff and explain to people what was coming up—and also seed. We sold a lot of seed, and good seed is very important to the production. Of course, the more they produce, the more we can buy, so we did that. We promoted good seed and all this stuff, and chemicals, of course, to kill the weeds.

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So that took up quite a bit of time. So our day was getting a little fuller than what it used to be because we did have--. In the wintertime, we did have a lot of spare time, but as we got big, as the company got bigger—at Carievale, I'm talking about—the company decided they were going to build a new elevator, gave me a little more capacity and easier to handle. It might have been easier to handle, but my days got longer. [Laughs]

BC: And did they build a new elevator?

JT: They built a new elevator in 1981. No, it wasn't '81. '77, I guess it was when they built a new elevator. That was still wood. It was lumber, but a lot bigger and, again, more bins to work with. Then with that, of course, they acquired more fertilizer equipment, and more fertilizer was handled. Of course, then we had, all of a sudden, we had to have more help. So I got an assistant, and we had to get a secretary to kind of keep track of the books and so on. So then even though it was more help, but still, then you're

responsible for the help. [Laughs] But then the days started--. You know, especially with the fertilizer and chemical, we used to start at 8:00. Now, all of a sudden, we would start at 5:00.

BC: In the morning?

JT: At 5:00 in the morning. Mind you, that's not every day, but that was maybe a month in the spring. So then we would--. Because people would come to load up their chemicals because chemical is a thing that you have to put on when there's no wind. And a lot of time in the early morning, it would be kind of calm, so the guys would come and get it early in the morning. And of course, you know, lots of times, some of them would stock up at night so they'd be prepared. The ones that knew what they were going to be putting on in the morning, they'd be coming, you know, lots of time 10:00, 11:00, sometimes later. But that wasn't every day, but that was just part of the day's work. Of course, we didn't have to worry about anybody telling us how long we had to work. We just did that on our own. As managers, we did that. We looked after that part.

BC: I was wondering how, as the times changed during the season, how you and your clients would know when they could come and what they could do? What kind of communication system did you have?

JT: Oh, yeah. We had really good communications because we seen them. We talked to them pretty well every day. Not the same ones, but there was always somebody that you were talking to, and you had an idea as to what was going on. Like, say, in seeding time, well, we knew what everybody was doing, but we were cleaning a lot of grain in those days too. Most elevators had a grain cleaner, so we spent a lot of time doing that, but we tried to set that up in the fall in about November. There was always somebody that would like to get started at it, so we would love to do it in the wintertime when it was quiet. So we did that. We started in November, and we would probably end, oh, probably the first part of June when they were done seeding because not everybody wanted to do it in the wintertime because there's a lot of farmers, they wanted time off. But then that meant that we were far busier in the spring than we would be in the fall, and we would love to have kind of spread it out. And it worked. At least it did for me.

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As far as knowing--. Well, yeah. But the phone. They were constantly on the phone. "Hey, I'd like to pick up the stuff or have my grain cleaned. Could you do it whenever?" And we arranged for a time and tried to even it out so nobody would have to wait a whole lot of time. Sometimes they did, but we used to learn--. We learned how to run pretty well every kind of truck that was going at that time because they'd come and park the truck, and we'd have to drive it through and dump it so that they wouldn't have to wait. [Laughs] So anywhere from a half-tonne to a semi-truck, we wheeled it in. We'd get a chuckle at the ladies. The farmers

would send their wives in. Well, that was kind of funny because some of them, no problem, they'd just wheel right through. The next one, they'd come up, "Could you drive my truck in please?" "No problem." [Laughs] Yeah, it was fun.

But, like I said, as the elevators grew--. Oh, pardon me. I'll go back to the fall in the harvest time. That's when the hours were really erratic because some days the weather wouldn't be cooperative, and all of a sudden, bang, 4:00 or whatever, the grain would become dry, and everybody would start harvest. The combines were going. Well, now, I didn't think it would be very good for business if we didn't look after them, so we made arrangements that as long as they went, we went. Quite often, it was 12:00, 1:00 in the morning that we would still dump grain.

BC: When you're saying "we," I'm thinking you talked about the original elevator that you went to, and then you built a new one. How many people would have worked in each of those elevators? I know you mentioned later you had an assistant and a secretary, but who works in an elevator?

JT: Okay, we're talking about like in my case with two elevators. I had two elevators there for a while, but that was worked as one unit. The new elevator was our main. That's where we did our main business. So if we needed space, which we did of course, we kept the old elevator going. When I was in the old elevator, I started by myself, and I was there for a good number of years by myself until things really started booming in those days. Then I had an assistant, and he would work right alongside me. Then we got the secretary, then it freed up my time to work out there as well because sometimes we had to have a man in each place. Like, the main bookwork would be done at the main elevator. We would just carry a--. We had books of tickets, grain tickets, storage tickets, and then we would just run them back and forth. It wasn't that far, maybe three blocks. So we run it as one unit, but some days I'd be working there depending on what we were doing, or some days a man would be working there, my assistant. So we run it as one.

BC: Now, in that town, did you have any competition? Were there other elevator companies?

JT: Oh, yes. Yeah. We had Sask Wheat Pool, and in those days, they were the biggest company going at that time in the country. Yes, we had good competition, and that was good. I'd hate to be buying grain without competition. I don't think that would have been very good. But competition keeps you on your toes. It keeps you up with the business. It keeps you sharp.

BC: So there were the two grain elevators in that particular town?

JT: Yes, yes. In those days, we were getting full. We were congested. Then as the managers of the elevators, we would get together and go to the local railway station, which was CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] at Carievale, and we would ask the manager of the

station to fax the Wheat Board that we were ready for another quota, that we felt the farmers had delivered all they could on this particular quota, and that if they were going to give us another quota, we were ready for it. So that would maybe be, usually, on a Friday, and then by Monday morning, we would generally have an answer. That was all done by telegraph in those days. There would be a message there, “Yes, you can go ahead,” or “No, you can’t. You’ve got to wait a little longer.” Usually that was done when we had a fair bit of space. But if we wanted cars or felt that we should have more cars, then we would go to this railroad station, and he would try to look after us, whereas today you have no control over that. It’s all done from the offices.

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So yeah, we had a kind of, I felt, a little bit more control of our own destiny in those days as to how we operated, and competition was a very big--. It was good. I know of stations that didn’t have any. I don’t know. It just--. Business wasn’t flourishing there, and I found that after I was a regional manager. I found that’s true. But yeah, it was good with the competition. Strange. [Laughs] We were very fortunate in Carievale. I mean, we got together with the opposition as opposition in business as well as in our personal lives. Of course, Carievale was small, 250 people. Everybody talked to everybody, and that was good. There was lots of stations that I know of where they would hardly talk to each other. You know, they would just--. That’s competition and that was pretty fierce. But yes, we had: Here’s competition—there’s no doubt about that—and that was the understanding between the two of us that business was business, and personal life, that was something else.

The idea was to get a load of grain to town. You get the farmer to come to town, regardless of company, and then we’d try to work on getting the customer to our--. By better service or whatever, better grades if we could do it. Didn’t always work, but there’s always something to compete, and that was--.

BC: So would a farmer come to town and probably have a conversation with each grain elevator manager and then decide, or were loyalties built up where you always had a certain farmer?

JT: Loyalty was built up, but you still had to be--. If you didn’t get a service, that loyalty was soon gone because it was a dollar factor. It was dollars involved. No, what a farmer would do as a rule, he’d come in with a sample of grain. First of all, how we first got to have contact with him in the fall was they would bring a sample of grain to be tested for moisture. They didn’t have testers on the farm in those days. It was all done at the elevator. So then you had an opportunity to look at the sample, the one that you’re testing. And see, this might be an old customer, a regular customer, and it might not be. It might be somebody else. My policy was that in the fall, we would test grain seven days a week. I might not be at the elevator, but I had my machine at the house, and that served me very well because we got to know a lot of people. When I say “we,” my wife was testing grain when I wasn’t there. She knew how to run the tester too.

So I'd get a look at the sample. Of course, we'd start talking business, you know, and that was the first opportunity to look at this grain. "Well, it looks like it's going to be this kind of a grade and so on." "What's the price?" And the price is pretty well set anyway. That wasn't really a big--. Not on wheat. That wasn't a big issue because--. The big issue was grade and dockage. Dockage is, of course, the seeds and stuff that's in the grain that has to be removed before you buy it. So we had an opportunity to work at it there, and that was the start. So then, you know, they come in with their little pail with a bunch of grain and have it tested. Of course, they'd be talking—the farmers amongst themselves—and they would talk about, "Well, this guy's easy to deal with," or, "This guy's hard to deal with. This guy might take more grain if it's a little higher moisture because he has a--." They didn't know that, but you had a chance to mix it with drier grain, so you were able to work that. But all these things were tools to work with.

Word of mouth. They spread that around. I mean, all you had to do was talk to a few guys, and word was out. In those days too, communications--. I can't remember what they called it. The word slips me here right now. Anyway, they would have--. If there was a quota coming on, the way we got word out to the farmer was, it was all local telephone lines where the operator was still--.

[0:25:18]

BC: Oh, party lines?

JT: Yeah, party line. Yeah. So anyway, the operator--. That was a given thing in those days. It didn't matter whether it was an emergency or whatever, if the operator wanted to get the people's attention, they'd keep ringing that thing. The phone would ring, and it was nobody in particular, but it's one big, long ring. Well, everybody would pick up the phone to see if there was a fire or something. Well, then we'd leave a message with the operator that the quota is going to open Monday or Tuesday or whenever, and then she would do it that way, and hey, everybody knew. [Laughs] There was nothing very private in those days as far as telephone. So that's how we got word out to the farms that there was--. Or the elevators might all be plugged, and we had asked for cars maybe on a Friday, and they had said, "Yeah, you're going to get them." So then we would get the word out, let's say, maybe Saturday or something that she would do this. Usually the ladies at the--. There was supposed to be cars coming to Carievale, so be prepared if you want to get your grain in before it filled up again. [Laughs] So that worked very well.

I remember one time we did that, and we were in the ball tournament. It was Sunday. There was a ball tournament in the next town, but anyway, when we came back to Carievale, the whole main street—that would be about five blocks—all the main street of Carievale was lined up with vehicles with grain on it. That was getting towards the end of the crop year, and they only had a few more days to get it in before the end of the crop year. [Laughs] And there was this line up of vehicles of all descriptions. Like, if

there was anything that would hold grain, it had grain in it. We got up on top of the elevator where you could look down on it, and we took pictures of it. They sat there, but we hadn't got word from the Wheat Board yet that we could go ahead. So anyway, we couldn't dump them--. [...*audio skips*] Or even the Wheat Board that early in the morning.

So they sat there, and of course, they were not very patient. They were impatient. Mind you, it was the time of year when things were all that hectic out on the farm because it was the end of July, and spraying had been done. It wasn't ready to harvest yet. Anyway, I remember the farmers sitting under the trees there beside their vehicles, whatever. There was, I think, a lot of politics done that day. But anyway, that was at 8:00 in the morning that the whole street was plugged. Actually, there was a few left Sunday that was still a little space, but by 8:00 in the morning, everything was--. Like, they were coming down both sides of the street now. You couldn't even drive your car. You had to take another route. The town wasn't very big. There was two entrances then. Out the highway on both ends of town in both directions was lined up.

So by 10:00 that day, we got word to start dumping. We hadn't really received an okay from the Wheat Board yet, but our companies give us permission to go ahead and dump. If there was a problem, well, they'd take the heat. [Laughs] By that night, we were just about full. We had to actually shut it down. By 6:00 that night, we shut her down. Then we did up all the books. What we did was we just had little pails sitting all over the place with name tags in it. And I had my brother working for me at that time, so we had kind of an assembly line that night. I would do the grading and the docking, and he would help me. So it took us to about, oh, 10:00 that night before we had all the paperwork done up, and the trucks were still lined up down the street. It wasn't anyone going down the highway at that time, but then we started again 6:00 the next morning to dump. By that night, we were full, and we had farmers that--. We had a big annex that consisted of three bins, three big bins, so they would go up there and shovel to make more room. So by the time that night came, we were plugged. There was no way that we could--. There was still a few trucks of people that had to go home that couldn't deliver. But.

[0:30:01]

BC: Why that year? What caused it to happen that year? And what year was that?

JT: Yeah. I'm just trying to think of what year. That would be in about, I would say, around '70, early '70s. The grain wasn't moving as good as it is now, like the sales were very erratic. Some years, big sales, they would move well. Next year, they wouldn't. So this particular year, the quota was not very high, and usually the quotas were high enough that most farmers could deliver all they wanted. But there was a few years there that they couldn't because the sales weren't good and maybe the quality wasn't just right. You know, they wanted different qualities. I'm talking about the buyers, the other countries. Then they--. Well, at

that time, the Wheat Board had kind of promised the farmers that they would get X-number of bushels per acre quota, and in order to get that in, they had to--. Some of the grain wasn't moved until late in the summer that year, so they rushed it in.

There were some stations that didn't get it in. They weren't that lucky, so they had to go into the next year or else extend the quota—the crop year—and if they'd extend that, that meant that, yeah, that would give some other guys a chance too. We've had that happen a couple times where we had to extend it, but that was an unusual year for it. But that was quite the pictures we had. [Laughs] Most farmers we were able to accommodate. But then the thing was too, there was such a variety of vehicles that took longer to dump it, and of course, the old elevators were slow, the legs were slow. That was when I still had the old elevator only. Yeah, that was quite a year.

BC: Looking at that, we're talking about your time in was it Carievale?

JT: Carievale, yeah.

BC: Carievale. Two questions come out of that for me. One is what would surprise people the most about what you did in that kind of work?

JT: I don't quite understand. What did you say, surprise?

BC: Well, the question they have is what might surprise people most about the work that you did?

JT: I find that kind of hard to answer because I don't--. It's just the work that I chose. It's part of the food chain. I think that's what made it very interesting because you were doing something in the production of food. I don't know if anybody would be surprised with what I did because I started on the farm. That's the way you start growing it, and then buying it, and then, of course, in the end I was in management. I kind of followed it right up from start to where it kind of finishes off. But yeah, I find it kind of hard to answer that one. [Laughs]

BC: Okay. So the second question that does come out of that—and I'm focusing now on when you were in Carievale—what would you be most proud of about that part of your work history?

JT: Being able to work with people. To maintain a good working relationship with my customers. I think that would be the thing I was proud of. And of course, the fact that I was able to do it in such a manner that it was profitable for the company. I mean, you can buy grain, but if you don't make money, what's the point, as far as I was concerned? And the company's would too. Yeah, you

had to manage that, to do both—to maintain a good clientele and still make it a paying proposition for both. I think that's something that made it successful for me and made people come back, and that is if they felt that you were doing something for them that was profitable for them as well. That started right from cleaning grain, to do a job of cleaning--. So they were sowing clean seed instead of poor stuff. And provided they--. Well, you could advise them as to how to keep the crops clean. I'm talking about chemical here now.

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That's where my secretary really came into play. She was an excellent--. She was a farm girl—grew up on the farm, and she kept in touch. She knew what all these different chemicals did, what they should do, and what crops you can put them on and this. That kind of service is what the farmers really like. In later years, they could go to farm service centres, which our opposition had. Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, they had big service centres. Paterson now has two. In those days, that's where they could go, and they were less dependent on the elevator manager and staff to advise them, which was--. But we were able to do that, and I think that was, yeah, I'm kind of proud of that.

BC: I can see why. And I think you've actually probably answered the next question, but you can comment if you don't think it--. The question was what connection do you see between you and the farmer producing the product you handle?

JT: What connection? Well, I think maybe I have in a sense. In those days, they depended on us for pretty well everything. In fact, when I first started, we were even bankers so to speak because we could give the farmer--. First of all, we would give them a cash ticket, we called it. It's a cheque. It's money. Then we could give--. Certain stations, we would have a supply of cash in a safe that we could cash that out so they didn't have to go to the bank. So we did that. In my case, we had what they call a paymaster. One of the storekeepers in town did that for Paterson. So I didn't have to have that. But yeah.

The connection there? We were an essential service because you had to have an elevator to haul grain to. I mean, they had to come to an elevator. That changed a little bit in the later years too, but in those days, that's the only way they could move their grain, sell their grain, and it was all done for the Wheat Board, of course, mostly. Especially wheat, oats, and barley, rye. It was always noted in those days if there was an elevator in town that the town would survive, and if the elevator was removed—which happened a lot especially in the '80s and '90s—that the towns would fall. That wasn't always the case, but that was the feeling they had because the elevators were that important to the community that if they were gone, the town would fall. In some cases, sure, that was the case, but I know many small towns that, no, it didn't matter. I mean, there's still the stores there and the post office and so on, whatever, but it was an important part of the community. The offices, there was a lot of good stories told there too. [Laughing] Lot of stories because that's where the farmers met, especially in the wintertime, and they've just got a lot of things to discuss there.

Of course, we knew more things about that community and people in it than sometimes--. That I was happy to know. I didn't really want to know some of the things that happened, so you had to be careful of how you--. You didn't want to relate to all of these things either, you know? You had to kind of keep them to yourself because there was a lot of things discussed outside of the grain business too, but mostly grain business. It was good.

BC: Was there any one story that you recall hearing that you think would be of interest to people that would give a sense of what it was like in the community at that time? Because your eyes were kind of lighting up when you were saying, "Oh, I've heard a lot of stories."

JT: Yeah, yeah. Well, a lot of the things I wouldn't want to reveal either, but--. [Laughs] No, I'm thinking. I'm just trying to think of a story that--. Well, I can't think of anything right now. It might come to me. But really that would fall into that category.

[0:40:10]

BC: Because I'm sure there's some sad ones. There's some funny ones. There's some bizarre ones.

JT: Oh, yeah. Yeah, but I just can't think of anything right now that would be of interest.

BC: Well, it's come. If you think of it, you just--.

JT: Yeah, it probably will.

BC: You just throw it in if it comes to you.

JT: Yeah, yeah.

BC: So just staying then on the theme of connections because we talked about between you and the farmer and, really, you and the community. I guess they're called the producers. They have listed here carriers, handlers, the Canadian Grain Commission, the Canadian Wheat Board, the purchasers. You were kind of a hub there. What was your connection to some of those, and what kind of connection did you have?

JT: As a buyer, the only connection we would really have--. Well, I guess, okay, the Grain Commission. They had a guy on the road, a traveller, that would come see us occasionally. The Wheat Board, we got a regular visit from the Wheat Board. They'd have inspectors out on the road to come check to make sure that we stayed within the operating rules. [Laughs] That was the Wheat Board, the Grain Commission. There was somebody else that you mentioned there.

BC: Well, you were a purchaser. So that's yourself. There was handlers, carriers, and producers. And you've talked about the--.

JT: Yeah, the producers, well, we've talked about that, and of course, the carriers was the railroad. We had a local agent there that lived right in the station house on the railroad. That was changed in later years to a traveller. They done away with the local guys, and there would be a central one. In our case, a guy who was stationed in Virden, and he'd make a trip around and pick up the waybills and stuff. So that connection wasn't as good as the one with the--. Like the service to us wasn't as good once they went to that system. But yeah, if we wanted them, we could always get a hold of them by phone, but that's how--. We didn't really--. Except the railroad, yeah, we needed them a lot. As far as the Wheat Board was concerned, yeah, an inspector came, and he just did his reports. But basically, the quotas and all that kind of stuff was done through our offices. My dealings with the Wheat Board and the Grain Commission was more once I got to Winnipeg. But in those days, it was done too.

Of course, we had our regional travellers too, our regional managers for Paterson. They would come on a regular basis if there was anything that was needed. We'd work through them. We had constant contact with them by phone. They would in turn, of course, be in touch with whoever they needed to be to help us. They were to assist us to do our job. I can't think now of any of the other ones. Of course, our office, the phone was always there. We always had help from--. And they were good. Most guys, they were always good to assist us, to help us do our job.

BC: You have so much to share here. I'm trying to format it that I get everything from you. So after you were a manager at Carievale, your next position was--? You really had--.

JT: Regional manager.

BC: Regional. And then what was the last one?

JT: Manager of country operations in Winnipeg.

BC: Okay. So I guess, really, we take a big breath here and move on. If we then shifted up to when you left Carievale and you became the regional manager, I have very similar questions that go through that whole strain part.

JT: Yeah, they would be. Yeah.

BC: So I guess a typical day for you when you then became the regional manager. Where did you move to and how was it different?

JT: Of course, we moved to Stonewall here where we are today. Then I would, of course--. It was a totally different mindset from now you're strictly managing, managing the country and the guys in the country. Now you had to change from your way of thinking from buying grain as to instructing those guys, and it was strictly management. So what I did then—at least that's how I did it—I used the things I had learned over the years as to how to run an elevator, and I felt, and I guess the company did too, that I run it successfully. So my goals at that time was to get all the managers to get into that same position, to have the same success that I did if they wanted it. Of course, we really only wanted managers that had that in mind. [Laughs]

[0:46:00]

So we had to do some shifting around of managers and, of course, help. I was more involved in the managers. The help, we kind of left that up to the managers because they could get--. It was nice if we could get local help. Therefore, they were in the best position to do that. Like I always hired my own guys when I was in Carievale, my own people. That wasn't the case everywhere, but that's how I did it, and I had far more success. Anytime I hired somebody local, I had far more success than if they brought somebody in from outside because I knew the people, and they worked with the people, worked with the farmers. They knew them. I had some real good staff. Pardon me. Now this is back to Carievale again. [Laughs] But I had some real good staff where they brought another manager in, and they became my assistant. And that was a really good move. He was a really good man. So yeah, we got along really well.

And that's what I did as the regional manager. I would try and get everybody with the staff that they could really work with, and everybody could work with. Yeah, that would--. But my days weren't as long. I could manage my time a little better, and it's something that you can't--. When I was running the elevator, I could start a day, and if there was a problem, I fixed it. I run into a lot as a regional manager. They didn't seem to know how to fix it. My job, a lot of it, was to go in and fix it for them, whatever the problem was. Whether it was a problem with a customer or local--.

BC: When you were the regional manager, how many elevators were you dealing--?

JT: 12.

BC: 12. Okay.

JT: I had 12 stations to work with, and that got smaller as they've done away with elevators, smaller elevators. So my thing was there was a lot of driving involved, and sometimes you can't be very productive when you're driving. [Laughs] But then you had time to think about problems. What I liked about that job is if you run into a problem you couldn't really solve today, you could always drive away, come back the next day.

BC: True. [Laughing] And geographically, how big was your region?

JT: Arborg. I had to go as far north as Arborg, and as far south as Morris, and west as Holland. Of course, there isn't any further east, so that was my territory. I tried to visit each station at least once a month. A lot of times, you had to go back more than that depending what the problems were. Once you get on a territory for a while—say a year or so—there are problems, but most of them I could take care of. They wouldn't reoccur quite so often. Then we would have to do--. Part of the regional manager's job was doing cut-offs. You know weigh overs?

BC: No. You have to explain that.

JT: Audits. Audits. Audits.

BC: Okay. And what would that be then?

JT: Well, we had to weigh all the grain in the elevator just to make sure that the scales were working and managers are honest and all this kind of stuff. Of course, the Grain Commission required that. We had to do a cut-off once a year, and they had to be notified of the results because there are certain rules and regulations that had to be followed. It was my job to do the cut-offs. That was kind of a tough job in a way because it was usually done in the wintertime when there was space or time. Of course, usually cold, and they are a cold place to work, those elevators. You'd have to stand there and weigh all the grain that was in the elevator place. Then there'd be long days because we tried to do it as fast as we could to get the guy back in operation. Because the idea was to try to shut off business while you were doing it because it's a lot more work to do a weigh over when people are delivering grain because you have to use the same leg, the same equipment that they would be using to bin it. So that was kind of tough.

[0:50:47]

Of course, as far as for the farm inputs, the fertilizer and the chemical, all the pails of chemicals had to be counted, and the fertilizer had to be measured or weighed or whatever. That was part of the job. We'd hold meetings too. You've got to have meetings that you would--. Once or twice a year, we'd get the managers together and talk about common problems and so on. That was part of my job. There too, I did a lot of communications with farmers too. If there was a problem, especially, you'd go and see the farmers and try and solve it. We still wanted the customer the next day, so you had to kind of sort things out. [Laughs]

BC: What kind of problems would they bring to you?

JT: Well, a lot of it was a lack of communication or they'd get the--. Usually it was between something that--. Here again was the Wheat Board and Grain Commission regulations. Like we have to follow certain ones, and they figured we shouldn't have to. Anyway, they just didn't understand how our guys had to operate, and those kind of things. That was one problem. Quite often it was because of grades, that they felt that we should--. [...*audio skips*] That big a problem because if we got right down to it, the farmer had the right to submit a sample to the Grain Commission, and then both parties had to abide by it. Well, I shouldn't say that. Both parties had to abide by the grade, but the farmer had an option. He could take the grain back home. He could take it home and try somewhere else if he wanted to. But usually, he would have to pay a little fee for that for handling and stuff, but he had that option, so it wasn't totally--. But most of the time, we went to the Grain Commission for it, that's usually what they abided by. And sometimes they found that our guy should have done better, and there's also cases where he did better than he should have. So those are the things that we dealt with.

Construction too. I mean, repairs. I had to go if there was construction going--. [...*audio skips*] To the point that you weren't there all the time, but you had to keep an eye on what was going on. There again, I was the kind of go between them and the other company because I had time to go out there and take a look. Oh, yeah. There was times where we--. I remember one time--. This is a story I should have had for the other one. [Laughs]

BC: Put it in! It doesn't matter.

JT: Make a little note there: skunk.

BC: Skunk? Okay. [Laughing]

JT: But anyway, yeah. There was just different kinds of problems that I looked after for them instead of them doing themselves. A lot of times it was communication between the office and them that I was kind of the second-last step. Once it got to the office,

well, then it was the last step. I was kind of inbetween. That was a very interesting job because you met--. Like in my territory, the geographical difference was so big from the north to the south. It was such a difference in how they operated. Like I'm talking about farmers, producers, how they operated. I found it so interesting. It was so much difference there.

BC: Can you tell us what those differences are?

JT: Okay. In the south, they had the modern equipment. Everything was big. The farmers--. It was just kind of a transition, and it just didn't get past the perimeter, I'll say. Their way of doing business with the Board, with the Grain Commission was entirely different because they were so big. They were so much bigger. Their operations were so much bigger. Farmers were bigger. That has changed now, but I mean, at that time. So it was just going from the present to the past, so to speak. Because I was part of the past when I was farming, I knew all of that stuff. It wasn't new to me, but the machinery was smaller, their quotas, their allotment of hauling was smaller. Everything was smaller. Their equipment, their trucks, it was entirely smaller. That has all changed, but it has just moved further. But in those days, it was such a--. And I found that so interesting because I could go from one to the other and work with both. It was very interesting. Yeah.

[0:56:03]

West didn't matter so much. Most of my territory was south of Number 1 Highway and to the west. Actually, down Number 2 Highway was where I worked. Yeah, that was very, very interesting. And they had more--. The people to the north, they had more kind of diversified because they had cattle. They had pigs. They had whatever and grain, whereas to the south, it was either cattle or pigs or grain. They weren't all--. That was a big difference. It was very interesting. Yeah.

BC: In the time that you were the regional manager—you kind of mentioned it—the number of elevators diminished. Was that in that period of your career that you saw a number of elevators you had to oversee go down?

JT: Yeah. That would be the biggest timeframe would be--. Well, I shouldn't say while I was on the road. I was only there three years as a regional manager, but yeah, that was when they started building the new ones in that timeframe, when I was the regional manager until I retired. That's the timeframe that we built all the big ones. Yeah, there was big, big changes. In the last half of my career would be the big changes. And the big changes being, of course, the way the grain was handled, the elevators were built, the big terminals, the amount of cars you had to load. I can remember when [inaudible] maybe six or nine cars. I forget what I had to start with. Now they have 100-150. That's what they spotted all at once, and you had to load them, and in most cases, you could do it in a working day. That was amazing. From where I started to where it finished up--. I never did run a big terminal, and I'm not so sure that the age that I was in from where I started until I finished that I would have wanted to, because the managers of today or

even at that time, when they first started it was even worse than now, because they had to make a transition from the small to the big. That must have been awful hard on the boys to do that because of the speed that everything went. They had to do it in the timeframes to meet, and they still had to maintain their quality that they had in the elevator. And they have to do that all in a short period of time. So that must have been tough. Although, they did change the standards for shipping considerably from the time I started until I quit, and I'm sure it has changed again.

BC: So what would be an example of that?

JT: Well, the quality of--. Let's say they were shipping a No. 1 wheat, and at that time, it was visual. You had to look at that thing, and you had to be able to tell that this is what--. And sometimes tough. There was a whole lot of little different things. Today, they have kind of bulked them up. The specs are a little different for, say, No. 1 wheat. Vitreous kernels came into play, which you can tell, of course, by visually, but a machine can do a better job. Then of course there was funguses that came up in the grain that we didn't really have, but that was, again, they could bin it accordingly. The grades have been narrowed up, and there was a whole lot.

[0:59:57]

This happened in my time as a grain buyer that they took some of those standards out, and they made it easier to bin. You didn't have to bin everything separate, and they could bin it together and still be classed a [No.] 1 or [No.] 2 or [No.] 3 or whatever. In those days when I was buying, they had more grades. There was down to [No.] 5, [No.] 4, 1, 2, 3, 4 and--. I don't think there was too much [No.] 1, but 2, 3, 4, and 5, and feed. When it got too bad it was called feed, and all that had to be kept separate. But today, the standards have changed, and I think it's a little bit easier for them to do that. But still, they have to do it in a timeframe that is very--. Well, it must be hard on the people. I don't think that the guys are going to get as many years in as I did. That's my point is that in my era, there was lots of guys retired after 40 years of service, and mine was 35, but that was my choice. So today, the stress level is a lot higher than what it would be in those days.

BC: But think of you in a different time era because you're saying--. It sounds like when you were running you call it your small elevator, you had to have a really wide range of skills. So just imagine yourself being a young man running a big one. Do you think there's much of a difference in the kind of skills you would need?

JT: Basically, no. No. You'd need the same skills. The only thing is that I was--. Yeah. The skills would be the same because you still deal with the farmer. The only thing is when you started dealing with the farmer is that today--. Like in those days, I knew everybody, and I knew everybody's business, which wasn't always good. But I knew everybody's business, and if something went wrong with a guy's family, well, hey, I mean somebody got sick or whatever, I knew about it, and you could talk about it. Today,

it's more like the farmer's a number. He's got a permit book. He's hauling grain, and that's basically all they know about him. Not in all cases. No, I shouldn't say that. But they don't have the time to spend with the farmers that I did.

BC: Yeah.

JT: And that's not good for the business as far as I'm concerned. But the way to do it today, I mean, hey, that's just the way it is, and it will carry on. A guy like me has a little hard time seeing that because we would miss--. And that's what, even as I'm retired, that's what I miss the most is being in touch with these people. I don't think that the guy today has that opportunity. That's what I feel.

BC: Now, you were talking about when the little elevators were going, and the big ones were being built, so there are two questions that come out of that. One would be did Paterson have their own construction arm when they were building these new, bigger elevators? Or how did they do that?

JT: Okay. When they first started into the bigger one--. I'm not talking concrete now, this is still the wooden like my first big elevator I had, which was called an inland terminal at that time or a high throughput. There was different names they had for them, and they still do. Anyway, in those days, yes, it was all Paterson. They had two different crews at that time. Pardon me, they had one crew working building elevators. It took them about a year to do ours, the one in Carievale. Then they went to concrete, which is entirely different operation and different techniques they use. They used to hire other companies to come in and do that. But the last three, I think it is, they had their own. They formed their own company that they still have today. They're still building an elevator in Saskatchewan this year, and they have their own crew where the staff that they had, they learned what they needed to do and all the different techniques that was required. Of course, you've got to have different equipment and this kind of stuff. Yeah. They're building their own now. They went from doing their own to hiring out, and now they're back to their own again. It's worked very well for them because they could do it on their timelines. They didn't have to wait on somebody else. Usually, they employed local people, which was also a good thing for the communities that they were building in. People hired locally, so that worked. It worked very well for them.

BC: Now, the flipside of that is, as you mentioned, the number of elevators decreased. So what was involved in closing down an elevator?

[1:05:11]

JT: Well, Paterson's way of doing it was they did it very gradually. They wouldn't build an elevator and then just go in and take a whole bunch out. For instance when they did the Winnipeg one inside the perimeter there, they had Meadows and Marquette. There was Dacotah. There was all the way down to Arborg and Teulon and Balmoral. So for the first number of years, they just kept them, and they used them for satellite stations. They'd fill them up and truck it to Winnipeg to be cleaned and get ready for shipping because today, all the grain is cleaned. All the wheat and stuff is cleaned before it's ever shipped to the terminal to its destination. The little elevators haven't got that capacity. They all have cleaners, but not to the capacity to clean it to export standard. So they would truck it to Winnipeg.

As long as the farmers--. Farmers, they didn't take to the idea of having big terminal elevators. They didn't like that, except for big farmers that had big semi trailers, and they'd load up 1,800 bushels. It didn't really matter whether they went 10 miles or 50 miles. The cost wasn't that great, and they could usually get a better deal at the terminal than they could locally because of cleaning and all that. So as long as the station was viable--. Once it started losing money, then they would start knocking it down, taking it down. But it was done gradually. Then they would maybe—to start the process—they would maybe say, “We're just going to take canola in this one elevator because that's in the area where a lot of canola is grown. We'll just use it for canola.” That way you didn't have to have a whole bunch of binning problems and stuff. You could just put it in there and then leave it there until it was ready to be shipped. So that was one way of just kind of holding it there for a while. Like I said, as long as it's a paying proposition, then why disturb the whole industry so to speak, because farmers didn't like it. But as they got used to it, more and more they would bypass their little elevator and go to the—, especially the bigger guys. The little guys with maybe a three-tonne truck or something that would only 300 or 400 bushels, they would still dump there, and then it was trucked from there.

Since I've left, they have taken down Dacotah, and they have taken down Balmoral because those two elevators were in really bad shape. As long as they didn't have to spend a lot of repair dollars, then they could keep it going. But once they had to start with too much repair, then it wasn't a paying proposition, and that let it go. Arborg's still there. Teulon is still there. Meadow and Marquette is now operated as one by one manager because if you segregate your grain—you're only going to do this—then you can do that. So he's looking after two. Dacotah is, of course, gone. But it wasn't done all at once, *bang, bang*. So they let the farmers get used to the idea, and the transition was very good. It really worked well. So that's--.

Then, of course, once it's determined that they're going to take it down, then they would bring somebody else in. They would hire somebody to tear it. They wouldn't tear their own down because the labour cost was just a little too much. Yeah, and we had a guy here in Stonewall that used to do it. That was his business. He would go out and contract it to have it taken down. But then, you have to satisfy the railroads because it's on railroad property that these elevators are on.

BC: Oh, I never knew that.

JT: Yeah. That all had to be decommissioned and all this kind of stuff, so it's not just going in and knocking it down and everybody's happy. But they also had--. Now, the municipalities have got tougher, of course, with the environment and all this because you can't just go in and dispose of it like you used to. You have to--. It's a lot more involved. But that was usually done by a contractor, yeah. And the elevator was levelled, and everything was left the same as what it was many, many years ago when they were built, probably 1928. [Laughs] Yeah.

[1:10:11]

BC: Well, let's go to the third phase of your career. Then you became--. And I don't know, this is obviously what you're going to tell me, the difference between being a regional manager and being the manager of country operations.

JT: Okay.

BC: What's the difference in those jobs?

JT: Well, it was the area you covered. [Laughs] As we've said, it was from Arborg to Morris to Holland. Now it's all the way from Winnipeg to Alberta because that's where they have their--. They have elevators in Alberta, and now I was in charge of seeing to it that they all operated. So now we had the regional managers that I just came from have to answer to the manager of country operations, and then, of course, the managers, they have to answer to the regional managers. So actually, my responsibilities increased a lot. [Laughs] A lot in that when I went in there, I would now be more in the business line.

There again, my mindset had to change again because now you're management. You're not in the hands-on because the hands-on you can do a lot of things that you can't do when you're in management. Now, I'm dealing more with the Wheat Board and Grain Commission. Once a month, we'd all get together. The whole industry would get together, like all the grain elevators. Every company would have a representative on this, and they would discuss common problems that we had with whatever to try to improve the industry. So I was on committees like that.

BC: So that would be the different grain companies getting together?

JT: Yeah, but my job was still with Paterson.

BC: Yes, of course.

JT: But we would get together as an industry. We would get together and discuss to see how we could, as a group, get together and make things better for the whole industry, for everybody.

BC: Did that--.

JT: Oh, I was just looking. That's just the meter reader.

BC: Did that group have a name?

JT: Yeah. The Country Elevator Association, and there were different groups. Within that group, there was a lot of little different groups. Like when I first went in there, I was involved in the safety and health was one. Then there was, oh, at one point in time we had to deal with the taxes, government taxes, taxes on property and how they assess elevators and all that stuff, so that was one group. Another offshoot of that was I was on the Flax Council for four or five years. That's another just a little offshoot that you have to deal with when you're in this. Generally, we dealt a lot with the Wheat Board, a lot with the Grain Commission—the grading and the dockage and all this kind of stuff. They're setting standards, and we were involved in that. Oh, I don't know. It was just any general problems that the industry had that we were trying to deal with as a group, and that, of course, benefitted everybody.

Of course, then we would have there again meetings with all our managers and stuff. Then I would have to arrange those kinds of things. There again, it didn't--. Well, when I said before as you step up, the buck stops here so to speak. So when the problem before in a country or regional manager, when there was a problem I couldn't solve, I had to go to the one step higher. Now, when the problem stopped at me, once it got to me, there had to be an answer. [Laughs] So again, you think a little bit different in how you handle things. But there again, you didn't go out as much. We did. I tried to go out at least once a year, sometimes twice, to all the elevators. But there again, you had to deal with a lot of farmers.

BC: I was going to ask that question, the types of problems you were solving, yet you're saying you're still going straight back to the producer sometimes with this. Were the main things you had to solve, problems you had to solve would be at that level?

[1:15:04]

JT: Yeah. But it was sometimes a little bit different level. It was problems that they had taken all the steps they could. Like I said before, they could go to the Grain Commission or whoever. They had taken all them steps, and they still couldn't seem to come to

an agreement. I had to go out, or usually over the phone mostly. Usually, it didn't take a trip out. It was usually a phone call would do it, or two or three or whatever. [Laughs] Then, of course, when the decommissioning of elevators, I got involved in that. That was kind of my job when I shut one down, or they donated one to English, to the--. Oh, it's a heritage thing there that they have. I was involved in that for Paterson because Paterson Elevators are part of that. So I was involved in that. I had to go out to their meetings and see what they wanted and kind of arranged to do what they ended up doing.

BC: Because that required some repair work too, didn't it?

JT: Not on our part. Oh, yeah. There was a lot of repair work done. A lot of repair because Paterson and the other company, UGG [United Grain Growers], was involved at that time too. Those elevators, when they know they're going to shut them down, they don't do a whole lot of work because, well, what's the point? It wouldn't be a very good business proposition to fix an elevator to let it go. So yeah, they had to do a lot of work, and they did a wonderful job. But that was one of the things that you have to do as a manager of country operations.

BC: So during that third phase of your career, what were the biggest changes that happened in the industry?

JT: That's actually when the majority of the elevators were built, the concrete. All companies went into it, and they just went headlong into it. [Laughs] They all built as fast as they could, and that was when they--. Of course, the railroads got involved, and they wanted so many car spots, 100-150. So that's when all the companies, they went and built elevators. That was the biggest change. I know that was the biggest change. There was a lot of changes. Metric was a big thing for--. That was a tough one to overcome. Took a lot of time and a lot of concentration on everybody's part not to make a mistake. I could tell another story too instead of a skunk--. [Laughs]

BC: Well, tell this one first. [Laughing]

JT: Anyway, we had a--. It was just when they went from gallons to litres. It was the spring of the year in spraying time, and this product was for flax. They were going to spray flax with this. My secretary, she was very good. I mean, everybody could rely on her. But anyway, this particular day, I was out. I had to go to the country or something, and I came back, and I seen this truckload of chemical go out to leave the elevator. So anyway, at supper time that evening, we were sitting there for supper, and the phone rings. This was the farmer. We had a custom sprayer that worked for us at the time, and he had put it on, but the farmer come pick up the chemical. He was a well-educated guy. His figures were good. And between him and my secretary, they figured out how much they need. Anyway, when he went out to the field and he put the chemical on, he realized that they had made a drastic mistake. They had put it on double to what they should have. [Laughs] So anyway, he was upset, and he says, "I can't really blame

you guys in particular because,” he says, “I was in on the figures. I can’t blame your secretary entirely.” But I says, “Is there something we can do? Is there something that can be done about this?” He said, “I’m going to lose this crop.”

So anyway, after supper, I drove out, and we had a look. Yeah, there was a definite already--. Normally, you don’t see results that fast, but you could already see the old flax was looking pretty sick. So damage is done, now we’ll just have to deal with it. How do we deal with it? We don’t know. So anyway, I went back. The next morning, I called the representative for this chemical company and, “Oh, my,” he says. “I don’t see a whole lot of hope for that crop.” So we didn’t discuss anything as to how we were going to compensate or anything. We didn’t talk about that at that point. So anyway, he says, “But there could be a chance that if there happened to come a good rain shortly after it’s put on that that crop might come back.” I don’t know why, but that night, they got a rain.

[1:20:26]

So anyway, I went and told the guy. I said, “This is what the guy said.” But he says, “We’ve got to wait until we see the results.” [...*audio skips*] “Come take a look at this.” Well, that crop was about this much shorter than the rest of it, but it was thick and full of flax balls. It was just loaded with seed. Unbelievable. He said, “I can’t believe it, what it’s doing. This is a far better crop than the rest.” [Laughs] So anyway, “Okay. That’s great. Maybe we’ll come out of this yet.” So anyway, we waited. Of course, come harvest time, they just started harvesting. They just started swathing, and they had never got a chance to combine because a hailstorm come and knocked everything out. [Laugh] There was nothing in everything. So he got hail insurance. He was well insured, so he got a crop--. That’s the easiest problem I solved. [Laughs] That was good. But yeah, I’ll never forget that one. But it was a close one. We would have come out of it all right, but I mean, where I thought I was going to have to--. [...*audio skips*]

BC: But the farmer obviously felt that you were going to solve this together whatever the outcome was.

JT: Oh, yeah. It would have been solved because he was just that kind of the guy, but it was easy. It was solved for us, and he got paid for it.

BC: That’s good. [Laughing] Well, I’m just thinking that--. Let’s see. There’s so much to ask you. Perhaps we’ll focus a bit on Thunder Bay now because we haven’t talked at all about Thunder Bay. One of the questions that we do ask people is if they have any recollections about your operations in Thunder Bay, your connection to them, or anything that you would--.

JT: Well, the only thing that we were involved in was to ship grain there—to ship it. Because we didn’t really have--. Like that was an entirely different operation to what we were in. We were in the buying of the grain, and they were--. We would ship there all the

time, yes, but as far as my dealings with Thunder Bay, it really wasn't that much. Very little because we would just load the cars out in the country and ship it in there, and they'd take it from there. So I really haven't had a whole lot to do with Thunder Bay.

BC: Well, obviously, we're going to have another question on this subject here because it's coming to me right now.

JT: Yeah, well, that's fine. Okay.

BC: Did you ever visit Thunder Bay?

JT: Yes, I did. That was--. Actually, we visited twice. Yeah. Okay. Yeah, I guess the story would be the once, but that was I took a trip on one of their boats. They don't have them anymore, but when they had boats, the deal was that if you were an employee for Paterson, you could make arrangements and take a trip. I had always wanted to do this. So anyway, the wife and I decided, well, yeah, we'll do this before I retire. So we made arrangements through Andrew and the boys. I guess there would be the boys in Thunder Bay. So we made arrangements that when this boat arrived that we would be there, and we'd go to Montreal. So then they said, "You know, it might be lonesome up there. Why don't you take a couple with you?" So we took another couple, friends of ours, we took with us.

So we went to Thunder Bay, and they showed us through their office there. Had a visit with the boys, and they took us to the boat. But the day before, we had a friend of mine from Pioneer elevators. He's a good friend of ours, and he says, "You know, when you go--." Like Paterson didn't have a terminal at that time. They just leased space. This fellow, he said, "I'll make arrangements with our staff." He was still working at that time, "with the Pioneer elevator terminal, and they'll give you a tour." They did. They gave us a wonderful tour. We looked through all the elevator, how it worked. I was very interested at that time because we were just starting to build elevators with big cleaners in it, and the big cleaners in the terminal were very interesting to me. So we had a real good tour there, then the next morning they took us to the boat. That was a boat called the *Comeaudoc*. It was being loaded at the terminal, at the Pioneer terminal, and also then they moved over to another terminal, so we watched them moving it from one to the other, and how they docked them and loaded them. So we took off across the Great Lakes, and we were on the boat five days.

[1:25:46]

BC: So what was accommodation like? I've never been on one of those.

JT: Oh, it was good. It was great! They had their state rooms or whatever they called it. I can't remember now. Ours was that there was two beds in it and a little chest of drawers and whatever you needed. Each one had their own bathroom. The one that our

friends got was a little bit smaller, but not a whole lot. Oh, yeah. It was clean, and you ate with the crew. It was wonderful. Weather was good. We had good weather. Yeah, we spent five days on the boat going through the locks and all that kind of stuff. At nighttime, how they communicate with the--. The boat never stops, but their mail arrives, and the little boat comes beside, and they transfer it all on the go. Bypassed Detroit. That's where they did that. Yeah, we pulled into Montreal, and they docked the boat, and we watched--. We spent that night still on the boat and watched them unload it into a transfer terminal. That morning, one of the crew, he give us a ride. He had a car there. That's where he was from, actually. So he give us a ride around town to see if we could find a place to stay. Our son was working at the Winnipeg Auto Auction, as you might have come past it on 7 there. He made arrangements for a van to be brought from Montreal to Winnipeg to be sold at the auction, so we had transportation back. [Laughs] We stopped at Niagara Falls. Oh, we had a wonderful time.

BC: And you didn't stop in Thunder Bay on the way back? [Laughs]

JT: Oh, yes. We did. I had to pick up my car. [Laughing]

BC: Oh, right!

JT: But that was on a--. They were all closed. We didn't see the boys again. But Thunder Bay was--. I liked it. It was nice to see how they operated.

BC: Oh, I was going to ask this question. Great minds think alike. Of all three phases, I mean, you did three very distinct things within the company. What was the job you liked the best? What was the most satisfying for you?

JT: The time in the regional manager. That was the most because you could do--. It was satisfying because you were always helping someone out of trouble or helping them to do better. I think I said if you run into a problem you couldn't solve, you drove on and come back the next day and thought it out and got the information you needed, and then you could--. Whereas at both other levels, both at the buying, you had to make decisions right now, and sometimes that wasn't the easiest thing in the world. Again, at the last in the city, the same thing. You had to make the decisions, and it was a little bit tougher. And the people you dealt with, they were great too. Like you were dealing with the top end. You were dealing with management of the Grain Commission, the Wheat Board, to try to get everything working in there, and it didn't always work smoothly. That was tough to get everything to work smoothly for everybody because as you--.

Of course, buying grain, I was the only one I really had to deal with as far as the company. I mean, I had to make--. Along with my regional manager. The onus was on me to make things work at the country level. Then of course, it worked the other way. You had

a whole bunch of elevators, like 12, and it compounds it. And then, of course, when you get to the management in Winnipeg, like the overall country operations, well, that meant everybody then. Not only their problems, but the problems with, like I said, the Wheat Board, the Grain Commission. I shouldn't call them problems, but there were things that had to be overcome and this kind of stuff. So I found that a little tough. But yeah, the most enjoyable part was the time as a regional manager because you were on your own type thing, and you were trying to work with everybody. There again, you worked with the Wheat Board and the Commission in a way because they set the rules, so you had to work with them then. Yeah, there was things there I didn't like either, but the most overall--. Yeah, I enjoyed it. The whole time, I really enjoyed it. But that was my most enjoyable part. Yeah.

[1:30:55]

BC: I'm just going to--. You've covered so much in your conversations, so I'll just look for things, little holes we may not have covered.

JT: Sure. Yeah.

BC: And I don't know if this would be even a relevant question for you, but one was what role has research and science played in your company's international grain trade? You've talked about the chemicals expanding.

JT: Oh, yeah. In the international grain trade? Well, I think for one thing is, yeah, the development of different kinds of grain—different varieties, I should say—on the international part because--. When I'm saying that, there's--. Because of the variety, there's a big interest—I know at least on the Paterson part that I had to work with—was the millers in the UK really took to this one variety of wheat. That really worked well for Paterson, as well as other companies too, but Paterson mainly that I know of. They were able to export this wheat because of the variety, and that's where technology comes in and the development of wheat and so on. There again, that was very--. It was a significant thing where this type of grain, of course, had to be grown differently. The farmers that were involved, they had to do it a little differently. I'm not too sure whether chemicals involved. You know, the chemicals involved were different. Not too sure about that. I can't remember. But it had to be binned separately, and of course, shipped separately.

BC: Did it have a particular name, this kind of--?

JT: The wheat, you mean? The wheat?

BC: Mmhmm.

JT: I think one of them was Oland, I think, and Teal. Teal, I think, was the main one. I think that's what it is. The name is kind of--. [Laughs] There was so many in those days too. Another thing too is when they went to, oh, this chemical. I forget what it's called. Where you can't have chemical, You can't produce--. Oh, I can't think of the name.

BC: Organic?

JT: Organic, that's it. Yeah, the organic one. That played another big part in the Paterson business, and the grain industry as a whole. But Paterson has certain elevators, I think there's three now. There was two when I left that's strictly organic, where you can't handle any grain in through there unless it's organic. That grain come from a long ways. There's extra dollars for the farmers in it if they--. and technology there about growing. It used to be they did organic, and they were so badly full of weeds that you couldn't--. There was more weeds than seed! Oh, I've had to deal with that many times in the country elevator. Now their methods of farming has changed, and now that isn't so bad. Now, for the farmer it's quite profitable if they--. Yeah. So that was quite a--. We had to really clean up the elevators and stuff, but that's one.

BC: Oh, I was going to leave the--. The skunk?

JT: Oh, the skunk! [Laughing]

BC: Skunk, and then we'll do the last page here.

JT: Yeah. This was after I had two elevators. This was in the end of July, the end of the crop year, we call it. We turned all our grain in the elevator at that particular time to make sure that the quality didn't go out of condition or anything. We just turn it from one bin to another, make sure it isn't heating. I had just hired a new guy. We had a local fellow. At that time, I had a secretary and two helpers. This local guy is a young fellow just out of school. It comes time to do this, so I sent my main man to the old elevator to get him started at it, to show him what to do, and all this kind of stuff. Not long, the phone rings. My main man said, "John, I think we've got a problem." I said, "Oh?" Because it was the old elevator, it could give lots of problems. [Laughs] He says, "Yeah, I think we've got a skunk."

[1:35:30]

So anyway, the elevator had been sitting for a while not being used, and of course, the doors and stuff, they weren't as tight as they could be, and a skunk had walked it. It was a big one, and he had fell into the pit where we dump the grain in, and it runs into the

leg, and we take it up. The chute, the slide to the pit had been left open, which didn't happen all the time. But anyway, this skunk had fell in there, and it was in the leg. When they had started it--. They started the leg before you start moving grain into it, and well, I guess when they--. This young fellow was standing right in front of the leg, and of course, the leg wasn't that tight either like today with the steel and everything. Anyway, he got the full shot of that, the smell coming out of it. [Laughing] Anyway, he was out the door. He was a little sick.

So anyway, I went over there. What do you do? The thing is in there. You've got to get it out. Anyway, and it was so big, and he wouldn't roll into the cups. We took a pry, a 2x4 to pry it and move the cups up slowly so that we could bring it out. So anyway, we couldn't do it. So anyway, we had to get a long stick with a nail in it, and I worked it up so I could go up the leg and then work it down. Looked with a flashlight. Yeah, he was there all right. So we moved the leg very slowly. So then with the help of this nail on the end of the stick, we flipped him into the cup. So anyway, then we slowly brought him up so we got him up where we could see him. He was laying on his back with his feet up. Of course, the leg killed it. The cups had killed it. So anyway, it was a good job it did because we would have never got him out.

But anyway, now who's going to take him out of there? How are we going to get him out because he wouldn't just flip out because he was really heavy. So anyway, we finally decided that, there again, when you're in charge, you've got to do what you have to do. So I got a pair of gloves, and I grabbed him by the leg, and I lifted him out, carried him out the door. [Laughs] But that was funny. I'll never forget that one. But this poor guy, he just really got a shot of that. But the thing was, now how do you clean this up? But before we found him in the leg, I went up top. I thought maybe it might have been a small one who went up the leg and into a bin up top, which happens occasionally. But once I got up there, there was no smell, so he didn't come this far, so he's got to be down below. But then, you just clean that mess up, and the humidity was hot in July. Oh, it was hot.

So anyway, this was on Friday, and then I had to go up the ladder down to my regional manager. "Now, what do you kill the smell with?" Well, he didn't know, so we went to the manager of the job I ended up with. You have to have an answer for this thing. And the guy did! He says, "Give me a little time." So he phoned around within the industry and stuff, and he says, "Get some Nilodor and wet coffee grounds. They have to be wet, and you mix that altogether, and you sprinkle it around where he was." So we did that. I hate Nilodor. I mean, it's worse than skunk to me. But anyway, I didn't do one bottle. I did two. I was going to make sure one trip was going to be enough. Mixed it all up and spread it down in there, and Monday morning it was all gone. There was no sign of it.

BC: And did you still have the young employee?

JT: Oh, yeah. [Laughing] But I hate to say it, but he didn't last long in the grain industry. I guess he figured if he had to face that kind of stuff--. He might have been a week or two, but he didn't last long. [Laughs] Yeah, there's other skunk stories too, but that's the one that really--.

BC: Stuck with you.

JT: Stuck with me, yeah.

BC: In summary, I'm just going to ask you a couple of questions. I know you've talked about the three parts of your career, and you've probably touched upon these things, but one of the areas they look at is significant events. Some of the subsections they talk about would be changes in working conditions, which you've talked to somewhat, labour relations, advances in science and technology, which we just spoke about, and obviously awful is disasters. Out of that list or just the whole idea of significant events, is there anything that comes to the forefront for you?

[1:40:34]

JT: Hm. Well, I don't know. Weather, of course, was always a big thing in the grain industry. There was--. Well, as far as disasters, of course, we were always looking for hailstorms was a bad thing for us. That would do so much not only for the farmers and of course for the grain because if there was a big hailstorm in some areas, you know some years you couldn't hardly ever keep the elevator open. There was no grain to handle at certain stations. There was those kind of things. But that weather we couldn't do anything about. I'm just trying to think what might have been--. I think the biggest thing for the grain industry in the earlier years I was in it was no sales. Like there was no--. The Wheat Board couldn't make sales, so that meant that the quotas weren't hardly existent. That's when the farmers really had a tough time to make ends meet. We were in the, of course, in the selling business at that time too—fertilizer and chemical and stuff—and there was a lot of outstanding debt that farmers couldn't really pay. But they--

Usually, it came out that the farmers are a tough bunch. They would generally come back in another year or so, but sometimes we had to carry them for a year or so. That was tough. That was tough to handle because you had to make your own budget work. So if those things happened, there again, that wasn't crop. There was lots of crop, but they couldn't sell it. But then how things turned around. The very next year--. The worst year was, well, there was one really bad year, and then after that, the next year, they couldn't find enough grain. So those things changed.

BC: What would you identify as the worst year? What year was that?

JT: That would be in the early '80s, I guess. Early '80s. There was a few years there that was kind of tough. I can't think of any--.

BC: Now today, what do you think the shape of the industry is?

JT: I think it's good. I think it's good. It's good for Paterson. I know it is. There's lots of opportunities there yet. But you know, you can't sit still. You've got to move ahead. Anybody that sits still or status quo doesn't work today. You've got to be going because it's such a changing industry not only for the production and the handling of it, but how people use it. There's a lot of different uses for--. Different countries use grain differently. I think the grain industry is okay. This economy, the way it is now, I don't know how it's going to affect that. Maybe it's going to affect the grain industry. It's not that bad, I don't think, because everybody--. It was pretty stable. Now, as far as construction, they are where they're going to be. They think they've got to where they're going to be. There's so many companies that have amalgamated, and some don't exist anymore, and the ones that are there, they've got—I know for Paterson—they've got some pretty good people working there. I think that they'll--.

No, I think that that's one thing with Paterson all my career was we always worked with excellent people because if they weren't good, well, they weren't there, so to speak. We always had good people to work with, and that was good. No, I think the grain industry is all right. I'd do it again if I could. You know, I would. I enjoyed it. Lots of challenges.

[1:45:06]

BC: And what you're just talking about absolutely dovetails into my absolute last question, which was your sense of the role--. You worked for Paterson for what was it, 30--?

JT: 35.

BC: 35 years. The role of Paterson as a grain company played in the international grain trade. Your place in history as a company.

JT: As a company? Yeah. Well, Paterson was not known as a big company, and it still really isn't big, but they always--. Well, of course, with the ships and stuff, they played a big part in the transportation of the grain, in the gathering of it, and the moving of it. They always played a leading role in those things. As far as being big, well, they never were very big, although they had over 200 and some elevators at one point, and maybe more. I mean, that's just how I can remember. But as far as--. It was tougher for them because they were smaller, and let's face it, bigger dictates to what's going to happen. But they always held their own. They always had people that--. They got their share. Because of being small, it was hard to get a bigger share. That was the tough part to get a

bigger share, but they always did. They always managed to increase their share. Of course, today, with the Pool elevators—Alberta, Sask Wheat Pool, and Manitoba, and United Grain—they were the biggest companies, and in order to make it work, they joined hands. Today, Paterson still got a good share of their business, and it's growing. Their share is growing, the grain share.

BC: And if you had to put it down to one thing about Paterson that made them be able to survive and thrive, what's their biggest asset?

JT: Well, the asset is the people that work for them. They've had good management, real good. I mean, you've got to. And sticking with it. No, they've done a real good job as far as I'm concerned. But yeah, the biggest asset, as far as I'm concerned, is people. If they didn't have the people, they couldn't have done what they did, I don't think in the grain industry.

BC: Well, from talking to you for two hours and the depth of knowledge that you've got and your ideas, I can see why they have done well. I mean, I don't think this is supposed to be part of the interview, but I'm very impressed with your career.

JT: Well. No, it's been great. I've enjoyed it. Like I said, if I had to do it again, I would pick the grain industry and also the company I was with because it's--. No, they use the people well. There's lots of people that maybe think there's other better companies, and maybe there is, but I haven't found them, [Laughing] Yeah, yeah. No, it's been good. It's really--.

BC: Two. I mean, time has flown by. I wanted to thank you. I know we used all our time up.

End of interview.