

**Narrator:** William Turner (WT)

**Company Affiliations:** Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), Searle Grain

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**Summary:** In his first interview, former supervising weighman for the Canadian Grain Commission in Thunder Bay William Turner discusses the first part of his career in the Canadian grain industry. He begins by describing his upbringing in Westfort during the Great Depression, joining the Air Force during the Second World War, and returning to work for the CGC in the weighing division. He discusses his first job as a trackman recording boxcar information, checking seals, and estimating weights with load lines. He lists the levels in the weighing division from trackman to assistant weighman to shipping or receiving weighman, and he explains the different responsibilities in each role. He describes other tasks performed by the weighing division, like inspecting weighing equipment, repairing scales, and auditing elevators. Turner then surveys the grain elevators in Westfort and describes unique construction or equipment features of each. Other topics discussed include his three months of work in Searle Grain's wartime storage facility, the operation of manual scales, things that could go wrong in the weighing of grain, supervising weigh staff across the waterfront, and the conversion to the metric system.

**Keywords:** Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain weighing; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Manual scales; Wartime grain storage; Boxcars; Inward weighing; Outward weighing; Grain elevator audits; Metric system; The Great Depression; World War II veterans; Searle Elevator; Lakehead Elevator (Electric Elevator); Northwestern Elevator; Paterson Elevator; SWP Pool 5; Fort William Elevator F; Consolidated Elevator; CPR Elevator D; Grand Trunk Pacific Elevator; Ogilvie Elevator and Flour Mill; Gillespie Elevator; Empire Elevator; Searle Elevator

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: Introduce himself and then we will get started discussing his very interesting career

WT: Thank you. My name is Bill Turner. I am the fellow who lives on Garden Ave. I spent 30-some-odd years in grain terminal elevators. I hope these ladies don't ask me too many complicated questions. [Laughs]

NP: Were you born in Thunder Bay?

WT: Yes. I expect to die here.

NP: Was that an easy question?

WT: Yes. [Laughing]

NP: I ask that question because then it allows me to ask the next one, which is, when did you first become aware of grain elevators in Thunder Bay?

WT: I first became aware during the Depression. This brings up a little story. I served in the Air Force during the war, and when I was discharged, I thought seriously about my future. I had an opportunity to go back to school. I had visions of becoming a dentist, but I would have to go to school for seven years, and I just wasn't willing to invest that much time. So, I looked around and I remembered that the only people that had money in their pockets and cars to drive and perhaps a summer cottage were those who were steadily employed, usually working for the government. So that was when I determined I am going to get one of those government jobs. I had veteran's preference, so I had my choice. So, I selected the Canadian Grain Commission [CGC]. I subsequently spent 30-some-odd years there.

NP: What area of Thunder Bay did you grow up in?

WT: I'm a Westfort boy. I spent my entire life before getting married in Westfort, except for three years in the Air Force, which a year and a half was spent overseas.

NP: So, were you near the elevators because Westfort was a hive of activity?

WT: Yes, I lived on Brock Street. Yes, I was fully aware. My neighbours were--. There were at least three that worked for the Grain Commission, and they were the wealthy ones on our street. They all drove cars. They all took holidays. The rest of us couldn't.

NP: Do you remember the names of your neighbours?

WT: Yes, very well. The Ainsworth family—Tom Ainsworth was a grain weighman. Stan Drabo was another weighman, and a fellow by the name of Spencer just down the street. He worked at the GC. There were others, but they were the lucky ones during the Depression.

NP: Very thoughtful on your part. I don't think I have ever heard anybody so carefully consider their future in that way.

WT: That's why when you came in, I told you that if you had lived through the Depression, you would know what I am talking about. Well, the Depression had an impact on the survivors that's almost like the war.

NP: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

WT: Well, people were destitute. People living across the street from us accepted parcels from the city, welfare. They'd get a ton of coal a winter to heat their house. It was unbelievable how destitute people were!

NP: Was your father working at that time?

WT: My father joined the Fort William city police force in 1927. I know his wages were much less than \$100 a month. But he worked every day during the Depression. However, there were eight children in our family and \$100 even in the Depression didn't go that far, although my father drove a car. So, we were one of the lucky ones.

NP: When I talk to people who grew up in the area you grew up in, as kids they oftentimes found themselves down at the Kaministiquia River. Were you one of those kids?

WT: Yes, I was amongst them. Mind you, when the Depression ended—and I consider it ended when the war started, because there was no employment prior to that—but when the war started, all the boys were enlisting, and you could find work. I found work at the Canada Car in 1940. I worked there for 2 and a half years before I joined the Air Force.

NP: So the elevators along the Kaministiquia River would have been there when--.

WT: Yes, the elevators were there. I don't remember spending much time around them. They didn't attract me at that time, but they sure did after the war. [Laughs]

NP: Great! So then you decided to work for the federal government and the Board of Grain Commissioners at that time.

WT: Exactly.

NP: Where was their office at that time?

WT: In the Grain Exchange Building, above Chapple's. During the war, my sister worked there. The CGC had a number of divisions. There was weighing division, inspection division, statistics division. There was actually in Winnipeg a laboratory section.

NP: The Grain Research Lab?

WT: The Grain Research that's--. You have heard of it.

NP: I'm just trying to impress you. [Laughs]

WT: You did. You just impressed me because I couldn't remember what they called it. You keep me straight.

NP: At that time, as I recall, that whole area—the Chapple's building offices—it must have been abuzz with activity because the Lake Shipper's, theirs is there, the grain companies would have their offices there.

WT: Absolutely right. Yes. I forget what year it was we moved out of there, but that was where the weighing division had their office, too. But when the new post office was built, right next to where they play hockey--.

NP: Fort William Gardens.

WT: Fort William Gardens, right next to it. That's when we moved into there. That would be--. I was a supervisor at the time, so it would be in the '50s, I imagine.

NP: So you were in the war. You were a pilot. And when you came back then, did you apply immediately to the Board of Grain Commissioners?

WT: No. No. I had seniority and hiring rights at the Canada Car because I worked there before the war. Actually, just a point of interest, I worked on every Hawker Hurricane that was built there, except the first four. They were already built and gone before I

started. I worked on every one. So when you see a Hawker Hurricane, built in Thunder Bay—Fort William—I worked on it. An aviation enthusiast would find that very interesting. What was your question?

NP: The question was did you apply immediately after coming back?

WT: No. I went to work for Canada Car, but they gave me the most monotonous job you can imagine. It was at a belt, at the bench, filing parts. It just grated on my nerves. I just couldn't stand the monotony, so I didn't last long there. Then I went to work for the Searle Grain Company.

NP: You keep throwing in these little nuggets.

WT: I went to work for the Searle Grain. When you hire on, you start at the bottom, and they put me on the power shovel, cleaning out their wartime storage bin. Yes. It was like shovelling boxcars. You have a great big board, and you get in the grain pile, and the cable pulls you into the leg where the grain is elevated and taken away. It was a dusty, dirty job! But I lasted there two or three months. Then I applied for the GC. I was soon accepted.

NP: Now, Searle. You are the first person I have talked to who has ever had personal experience with the wartime storage.

WT: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

NP: It was behind the elevator, in front actually--.

WT: Yes, in front. Absolutely, just where the road enters, right there to the left.

NP: When you were in there, would it be 1946-47?

WT: It would be the latter part of maybe even 45. But, no, '46 I would say, definitely '46.

NP: Was it still filled with grain?

WT: Oh yes. We were there to empty it out as they had space and ships came in—[inaudible]. It was just huge. I can't remember how many millions of bushels the [inaudible] held, but it was huge. They put us in there shovelling. They kept refilling the bins in the elevator.

NP: I just have to tell you this story because it's a quick one. I know those wartime storage structures came down. I'm trying to verify where the wood went. Because the story is I lived in Winnipeg for 30 years, once I grew up here. The house that I bought in Winnipeg supposedly was built with wood taken from the wartime storage in Thunder Bay. So I am trying to find verification.

WT: I really couldn't help you there, but I do know that a lot of that stuff was sold or stolen. [Laughs] You know. People helped themselves to the lumber, but that would be a small quantity. No, I really don't know. There was a lot of lumber.

NP: They were huge.

WT: This would be a building comparable in size to the Fort William Gardens, huge! And some elevators had three of them.

NP: Can you remember which one had three?

WT: I think Northwestern had three. I'm not sure. Right along, yeah, right along the road there. Canada Car used one of them after the war for awhile.

NP: The Paterson's had a huge one.

WT: Yes, they had a huge one. Yes.

NP: Richardson's?

WT: I really can't remember.

NP: I think if you had an aerial photograph, you would see the concrete foundations still there.

WT: Yes, you can still see some of them. Yes, yes.

NP: Oh, I'm getting off track. Who did you work for at Searle? Do you know?

WT: Les Irwin was the superintendent and a very difficult man to work for. Mind you, he was a member of our church. I knew him from church. But he was extremely difficult to work for. He took no nonsense at all. You daren't take a five-minute break if he was watching. He was a bit of a slave driver.

NP: He had been there for awhile?

WT: Yes, oh yes. He ruled it with an iron fist.

NP: Did that result in a quality operation even though he was--.

WT: Well, he had a good operation because people were afraid. These people had a good job if they obeyed him. Give him a bit of an argument, you're gone.

NP: No union protection?

WT: No union protection whatsoever.

NP: You lasted for three months. You must have been in pretty good physical shape.

WT: Yes, I was. I was in good shape. I kept myself in good shape when I was in the Air Force.

NP: You were working with other people?

WT: In a grain elevator, unless you are an annex man or basement feed tender or something, you don't work alone.

NP: Were they all young people like you, back from the war?

WT: No, no. I was on this shovel, and it was heavy work. I mean heavy! There was an old guy and he made me look sick! He was a Ukrainian guy who could barely speak English, but boy could he work! That's all he had done all his life—heavy physical labour.

NP: Do you remember his name?

WT: No, I don't.

NP: Just tons of those people coming over in the early 1900s.

WT: I'll never forget we'd get a shovelful, get it up to the leg and then we would pause there to rest, but he would never rest very long, back we would go.

NP: So you've got this great big building. Was there a conveyor belt?

WT: Not on the bottom. Oh, some of them did. Yes, yes, some of them did, yes. I think this one we worked at had a leg that elevated up to a belt up above and took it straight into the elevator. But I'm not sure. I could be wrong on that.

NP: So if you think about coming into that building, what would you see?

WT: Pile of grain. [Laughs]

NP: Sort of what I suspected. [Laughs]

WT: No, there must have been a belt below the elevator because they would drain out grain. You wouldn't have to shovel in, just the volume of grain--

NP: It would have to get in there somehow.

WT: Yes, then it would be easier to get in after that.

NP: It would be unloaded in the car shed probably, and then transferred into that building.

WT: Yes, yes.

NP: Someday maybe I will be able to find somebody's drawings of them because somebody must have designed them.

WT: They are vivid in my mind. I didn't pay much attention at the time.



NP: Yes, it's in there. The thought is in there. So you managed to escape to a different job. When you went to the Board of Grain Commissioners, did you have a choice of which of their divisions?

WT: No, if I knew then what I know now, I could have said, "Well, I want the inspection." I kind of wish I had because they were the prestige branch. The weighing division were frowned upon. But actually, the inspection people had to be current, up-to-date on-. And grading is very, almost a scientific endeavor. You really have to know what you are doing. Whereas weighing grain, anybody can do that.

NP: Well, not quite because when we talk about is involved, we will learn more about it. I want to go back to something you said earlier because we went off on a different tact. You said your sister was working--.

WT: Oh, she worked for statistics in the Grain Exchange during the time I was overseas with the Air Force.

NP: And at the end of the war, she was--?

WT: Oh, the Board of Grain Commissioners moved to Winnipeg, the entire office. That would be very shortly after the war. Yes, I'm just trying--. See, the grain commissioners, were in Winnipeg always, the three commissioners. But the weighing division, the inspection, and the statistics all had offices here. Bill McLeod was very well known. He was in charge of the statistics at first. I know they also had branches of those offices in Winnipeg, but the main office was right here.

NP: There was a battle, as I understand it, almost from the start between where the head office would be. I think the Grain Commission started here in 1913, and then after the First World War there was a push from Winnipeg to get the head office transferred. I just didn't realize that those divisions that you mentioned managed to hang on here until after the Second World War.

WT: Oh yes, they did. Let me think. The chief weighmaster was a fellow by the name of Sid Capon. C-A-P-O-N. And he had his office here. And the assistant chief weighmaster was a guy by the name of Bill Comba. C-O-M-B-A. I can't remember if the chief grain inspector had an office here or whether he was in Winnipeg. I didn't pay that much attention at the time. I'm not sure.

NP: Was your sister required to leave at the end of the war when the men came back?

WT: They offered her a job in Winnipeg, and she didn't take it for some reason. She just died a short time ago, so I can't ask her.

NP: You said you went into weighing because you didn't know one from the other.

WT: That's what they offered me, so I took it.

NP: What did you learn when you started in that position? First of all, what did your job entail when you first started with weighing?

WT: Well, the first thing you do as a grain trackman is you record the boxcar numbers that are placed on the track ready for unloading. You had to be there before they ever unloaded anything. You got the boxcar number and the seal numbers. Both doors were sealed, and you had to get the seal number. If there was a shortage, they would investigate and find out if those seals had been tampered with and so on.

I don't know whether you know it, but the GC was first formed because of problems. There was hanky-panky and outright theft, and the GC was formed to prevent that. You probably are noticing now with some concern that the GC operational side is being phased out. I don't know enough about it to be for or against that. But there was a very good reason for starting the weighing division and the inspection division. I don't have any first-hand knowledge, but I have heard reliable stories of how a car full of grain would be spotted on the track of an elevator at midnight, unloaded quickly, and the switch crew would come and get the empty, and nobody would ever know what happened to it.

There was lots of hanky-panky going on. That's why the Commission was formed in the first place. They served a very useful purpose. Also, the Commission kept the terminal elevator business honest. I spent months auditing elevators all across Canada. We used to weigh-over every pound of grain. The Statistics Division checked that against the receipts and the shipments that they had made since the last audit.

NP: We will talk more about that when we move into especially the part of your career when you were in charge of the ones, when you moved to Winnipeg. But going back to your first few months as a car checker?

WT: Oh yes, I got off track there. Sorry.

NP: Appropriate to be off track.

WT: Once you have recorded the car numbers and the seals for the cars that are going to be unloaded that day, you then were on call by the weighman. There was another trackman, and then there was the guy who took the load line. He used to open the door

and look inside and estimate the depth of the grain. We used to have a chart. For that boxcar size, it told us exactly how much grain per inch at that weight per bushel. It was a complex system, but it worked.

If I took a load line and said there was 72 inches of grain there, the weighman would go in his book and 72 inches. This car should hold 90,000 pounds. And if he didn't get that, he would call down and, "Go and see what happened." There must have been a spill or something. It didn't reach the scale. Yes, it was designed for a reason.

Now I hear stories—I don't pay much attention—but I hear stories about the weighing division is being abolished and the inspection is being abolished. And I don't know what's going on, because with modern-day technology, maybe you don't need all that supervision. You know with scales that are automatic, and they automatically punch the weight, and there's no tampering with them. Maybe it's a good thing. As a taxpayer, I kind of think that I am in sympathy with getting rid of people that you really don't need. You see people who work for the government, they think they are entitled to that paycheque and that cushy job for the rest of their life.

As a matter of fact, I often remember just before World War Two, there was an article in the paper about a branch of government that had been formed during World War One because there was a need. Well, when then war ended, there was no need for it. The job was not abolished. That guy collected his paycheque until somebody discovered it just before World War Two. He served no useful purpose. That's the way governments work.

NP: A couple of things just in relation to what you have just said, would you consider the job you did, the weighing job, the car checker, was that a cushy job?

WT: I thought so. I had worked a lot harder than that.

NP: What made it cushy, just the amount of work you had to do?

WT: Well, we'd get to work and there were no cars on the track. So there would be nothing to do. We still got paid. No, it was a cushy job, and the people who applied for government jobs, I found out to my sorrow, are people who don't mind getting paid for not working. They are not all like your father, people like him. I knew George. There are people who, even today, people expect the government to pay for everything. Well, somebody's got to come up with that money. I just don't get that kind of thinking. Yes, I was disappointed when I started working for government to see the attitude.

As a matter of fact, I must--. I'll tell you while it's in my mind now, the weighing division, when I became a supervisor, they had no manual to explain the duties of a grain trackman, none whatsoever. You hired on and if you got working with somebody who was keen, and eager, and honourable, then you may learn the job properly. But you get on with some fellow who just doesn't care, you just go through the motions. I have seen that. I almost quit many times because of it. But I stuck it out.

NP: The other question I wanted to ask because I just finished a couple of weeks ago, interviewing Bill Kelso--.

WT: Oh, wonderful person.

NP: He was down in the yards getting the cars ready for you, what did he do that impacted on what you did when the cars got to the elevator?

WT: I don't really know what he did in the yards. But a train would come in from the west, a whole train of cars. He did something, what I don't know.

NP: I think he did some pre-checking for problems, missing seals.

WT: Bill worked for me for a long time. He is a wonderful person. I happen to know how he lost his arm and so on.

NP: During the war.

WT: He was in the ground crew. They sent a couple of Canadian squadrons to North Africa. There was one came back, and somehow the bombs were still aboard, and they blew up, and that's when his arm

NP: Friendly fire of a sort?

WT: Yes.

NP: Tragic.

WT: I liked Bill.

NP: But he worked outside because he wanted to be outside, with one arm.

WT: Is Bill still alive?

NP: Yes, he is.

WT: Do you know that Bill overhauled a Volkswagen engine for me at one time? One arm! I couldn't do it with two!

NP: Yes, quite a man. So, you were checking the cars and then providing information on the expected weight.

WT: If there was something wrong, the weighman would call down, "Check car so-and-so." So we would go out with a ladder. You would need a ladder to crawl up and look in the door. There would be a dust line where the grain was. This is all coming back to me. Where the grain rested in the car, there would be a dust line. So we would measure the dust line—see where the level of the grain was and average it out and give him another load line. If it agreed with the weight that he got, then he's, "That's fine." He's happy. But a lot of people didn't bother doing those things. If there was shortage, they wouldn't pay any attention, and once the car is gone there is no evidence. People have to be conscientious and desire to do the job properly. You just can't get along without them. But there were so many that didn't.

NP: What was the problem if there was a shortage?

WT: Usually leaks, seams in the car opening up, all the way from Saskatchewan. If you walk down the tracks, there was grain all over the place. If there was a leak in the car, we used to make a leak report. These were sent from the GC to the grain companies, and they would make a claim against the railway.

NP: That's right because the railway was responsible for the condition of the car.

WT: Oh yes.

NP: You mentioned the weighing system, and you mentioned now that is a digital weighing.

WT: I'm not sure now. But I suspect that.

NP: Most elevators. So if you are taking the car off of the track into the car shed and then it's unloaded, where is the weighing done?

WT: Upstairs. The grain goes into a pit, a receiving pit, along a belt into a leg, up the leg into a receiving scale. On the scale floor, the scales were shipping scales and receiving scales. They alternated down the floor. A conscientious weighman kept his eye on that scale all the time because somebody would come along while you are not looking and open it up and run a bunch of it into a house bin or someplace, and you'd never know it. So, this is where there had to be a certain amount of integrity amongst the employees of the GC.

NP: Why was there the two scales, the shipping and the receiving?

WT: The shipping scales were fed from basement belts coming from storage. Receiving scales were fed from belts coming from the receiving pits in the car shed. The systems were different.

NP: So it was just the mechanical setup of it as opposed to worry about the product?

WT: Yes, the design of the mechanical setup.

NP: How long did you work on the track?

WT: I guess I worked three or four years as a grain trackman. And I was appointed then as an assistant grain weighman. And an assistant grain weighman helps the shipping weighman when he is loading a boat. You would check the flow of grain, and you would do all kinds of things for him. When there was no boat at the dock, you helped out on the track. I used to go out and open doors for the trackmen. I loved this exercise. I could get good exercise. It's tough work opening the doors. I kept in shape that way.

NP: Tell me about opening the doors. I mean it's not the same as turning the knob and pulling the door open.

WT: [Laughs] No. The boxcar door, the old cars—when I started there were no modern cars at all—they were all old wooden cars, 36 feet long. Some of them were 40 foot 6, were wood. After that, about the time I started, they started to build a bunch of all steel cars, 40 foot 6 long, 9 foot 2 wide, and 10 foot something tall. I remember these things as if it was yesterday.

NP: Now, why do you remember those numbers. Did you need to know them?

WT: Well, I did it for so long!

NP: Did you have to know that?

WT: Oh yes. You needed to know the size of the car to estimate the amount of grain in it. If you don't know the size, they all varied.

NP: See, these little things that people don't know. They just think you look at the car and put it in the car shed. Who needs to know anything to do that?

WT: Well, that's why I say, in those days, there was a need for a GC, both inspection and weighing. But I don't know nowadays. People say, "Isn't it a shame the GC is no longer viable?" I don't know. I can't express an opinion.

NP: Time will tell, I think. You were starting to tell me about getting the door off.

WT: Well, the door was sealed. If you have ever seen a boxcar, there is a hasp and there is a pin in there and the seal goes through the bottom of the pin. So you can't take the seal out without breaking the seal. So the trackman—and as the assistant weighman I would go and help him—I would break the seal.

NP: How did you do that?

WT: I had a bar.

NP: A specially designed bar?

WT: It's a crowbar, just an ordinary crowbar, about four or five feet long, pointed at the end. Once you got the hasp open, if he hadn't already been there to record the seal number, you hung it on the door, so that he could see it when he comes by. And if you didn't say anything, he knew the seal was intact when you first got there. That's the way it was supposed to work, but it didn't always work that way. Then you start to open the door, but none of those old doors opened freely. They were tough. You'd jam the bar, the sharp point of the bar, into the wooden grain door, which was inside, and you pried the doors open. And they squeak and squeal. *Argh!* I tell you it kept me in shape. You just open the door wide enough that the fellow could put his--.

We all carried a ladder, the road lineman carried a little ladder, an 8-foot ladder. I think I still have one at camp. But anyways, you would put it against the grain door, and you climb up. And with a flashlight, you would look inside and estimate the depth of the grain. And you'd be surprised how accurate you could become with practice.

NP: So you need to know some math.

WT: Well, we had a book that computed it for you.

NP: You don't happen to still have one of those, do you?

WT: I don't think I do, no. I wish I did. Golly, I threw all that stuff out.

NP: I've seen pictures of people inside grain cars with a sampling stick. Was there any sampling done at that point before it was unloaded?

WT: Not generally. It wasn't normal practice to do that. Those probes you are talking about, after the car is loaded, they will probe it three or four times at this end of the car and three or four times in this end of the car. This is the inspection job, not mine. And they would put it in their sample bucket and take it in. The inspector would grade it.

NP: Did you see them do that?

WT: Oh yes.

NP: Then you might be the person who can answer my question. There is this series of photographs I came across when I was at the CGC in Winnipeg when I was going through some of the material, and they had the fellow with the probe, and they had a little mat. What is that little mat?

WT: So when he gets his, say, six samples—three here and three here—he'd probe, mix them all up, and then he would pour the amount he needed for a sample into his bucket and throw the rest back.

NP: Makes sense.

WT: Well, it should.

NP: I was thinking what's that prayer mat doing inside this boxcar? [Laughs]



WT: He would mix it up on that mat and put it in his bucket.

NP: A representative sample.

WT: Yes.

NP: Where were we? I always like to ask this question, just for personal interest. Now, the wooden car doors, where did they find themselves?

WT: You are talking about the inner doors? That's called a grain door. Where did they find themselves?

NP: Yes, after they were taken off.

WT: The car shed crew threw them back into the empty car. And they went down the track, and the grain door repairmen that worked for the railway would take them out. And those that had been chopped and damaged, he would discard. But the others, if they were in good shape, he would pile them, and every once in awhile when he had a carload, the railway would send an empty car going west anyway, load it grain doors and send them out west again.

NP: So no truth to the fact that a number of houses in Thunder Bay were built with old grain doors?

WT: Oh, there were a lot of those old grain doors around in chicken coops. Oh, there is truth. During the Depression you have no idea how desperate people were. To get some grain doors and be able to take them apart and come out with all this nice lumber. It was rough lumber but better than nothing. No, it's true. A lot of people used grain door lumber.

NP: You said that you were the shipping-weighman assistant? Did you move then to become the shipping weighman?

WT: No. Your next step is grain weighman, and you do the receiving.

NP: Take us through the process where that person's job comes into being. When do they have to step up to the plate and do their work and what is it?

WT: The receiving weighman?

NP: Well, both I guess. Let's do the receiving weighman and the shipping weighman.

WT: Well, the receiving weighman is the junior weighman on the floor. A staff at an elevator, average, there's a shipping weighman, a receiving weighman, an assistant weighman and two trackmen—usually 5 people in the weighing division. But a smaller elevator would have less, a bigger elevator would have more.

NP: I'm going to ask you to go through each of those and tell me what the responsibilities are and what distinguishes them. But before we do that, like with the inspection staff, they were moved from elevator to elevator?

WT: So were we.

NP: I think for reasons of keeping people honest probably and maybe to spread the work more evenly because some elevators were--.

WT: That's the main reason because some elevators were extremely busy whether you were inspection or weighing, say at Pool 7 or Searle, you worked steady. But at Paterson's or P & H, you would work for a couple of hours and then there would be no more cars to do.

NP: So did the weigh staff get moved, too?

WT: Oh yes, oh yes.

NP: So what was the stint?

WT: I'm the guy who did the moving when I became the weighmaster.

NP: Okay, we'll do the weighmaster later. So let's talk about those positions that you just mentioned and what they do.

WT: Well, we talked about the trackman and the assistant weighman. We are just starting in to the receiving weighman. This is the initial stages of weighing grain. But I have to digress a little bit to say here, there was no formal training. You just progress from one job to the other. I mentioned to you earlier that my boss was Ross Teeple. Well, he was keen on doing the job properly. He said, "Bill, let's draw up a manual." I did most of it. He and I drew up a manual, and I think the first thing we wrote about was auditing. A big responsibility of the weighing staff was auditing grain elevators—huge job. Every elevator, every year. Big job.

NP: But if we go back to the receiving weigh person's job--.

WT: Yes, we should do that. I'm sorry. Keep me straight.

NP: Well, I have to keep me straight, too.

WT: My mind wanders. Things are coming back to me I haven't thought about for years. But anyway, the receiving weighman should be taught by the shipping weighman. In fact, the shipping weighman got an extra \$20 a month to be in charge of his staff at his elevator. But none of them took it seriously, except me. When a car is coming up, he should be out on the scale floor patrolling the floor. This can be pretty cold in the winter.

NP: Where is the scale floor in an elevator?

WT: It's the third last floor, the third floor from the top. Down below it is the distributing floor. That's where the bin tops are. Then above that is the--. Well, it goes quite a ways up to the garner. The garner is on the top floor.

NP: The garner is--?

WT: The garner, the grain goes up the leg into the garner, and then you let the grain down into the scale. But anyways--.

NP: So the receiving weigher he--?

WT: The shipping weighman should have trained him and get him started on good habits and so on. Nobody ever did it. That's what bugged me about government. So Ross Teeple and I started to draw a manual for all this. The receiving weighman he just weighed grain when cars were being brought into the elevator. That is all he did.

NP: I've been in an elevator now more frequently than in the past. How did they know that a car was being unloaded because they are way up top, and the car is being unloaded down at the bottom?

WT: The elevator was responsible for making out what we call the shunt. It was a work order. It listed the cars in the order in which they were to be unloaded and the legs they would come up on. It was all there. And the trackman would go in, and the foreman, whoever made it out, and give enough time for the trackman to go in there and put his load lines down.

NP: What's a load line?

WT: That's his estimate of the amount of grain in the car. If he didn't do it that way, he could go in there and if the shunt wasn't made, out he could write it on the ticket. They had some tickets on the car. I suppose this is what Bill Kelso put on out in the yard. I don't know. But we could write the load line on there, and the elevator would very kindly write it onto the shunt. But anyway, we had to make sure that the load line information was there. From then on it was very straightforward.

NP: So how did you know there was a load coming up? Was there a light system?

WT: Oh, yes. There was light and phone. They made out this shunt. The first car would be for #1 receiver. The second car is #2 receiver. You knew. You didn't have to ask anybody. When you heard grain hit the leg and come into the scale. Here's this car here. It's coming. When it was all up, you'd press a button, give you a green light, and then you balance it up. Do you know what the scales look like?

NP: I've seen that. But balance it up, I have no idea what you mean there.

WT: The scale, mechanical scale, had a beam and a hanger. The hand weights, we had 8-pound hand weights, 4-pound hand weights, 2-pounds, and 1-pound. The beam was calibrated to 1,000 pounds. It was equipped with type [inaudible] from 0 to 1,000, in multiples of 5—0, 005, 010 and so on—all the way up to a 1,000 pounds.

You had the shunt. You knew which car it was. The trackman downstairs, he knows. He's got a shunt, a copy of the shunt. So they can't switch. They can't send up the wrong car because this is what they said they were going to do. And they did it. We never had trouble that way. When the car was all up, of course, you would weigh it, and this is where our staff was never taught properly. I learned that to be accurate you had to count those weights on the hanger, these 8-pound weights. For the average car, there would be 11 of them. That's 88,000 pounds. On top of that there would be a 2 and maybe a 1. So you knew you had 91,000 and some odd pounds in that car.

You had a scale ticket. It's soft, like blotting paper. You put it in the--. You punch it. It would read 91. Then you run the poise until the beam was in balance. Then you punch it so you've got it right there. And now you write it down on your sheet. The government weighman's sheet went to head office. And this is where the statistics come in. They then charged that elevator with all this grain that was brought in, and in the course of a year they'd subtract the shipments, so that when it came time to audit, there was a

balance. We got to the receiving weighman. Oh, then you've got the shipping weighman. The shipping weighman, he was the man in charge.

NP: Can we just take a break for a second? **[Audio pauses]** We were starting to talk about the shipping weighman's position and how and when he comes into action and what he does.

WT: Well, he was in charge of the weighing staff at each elevator. He got a little bonus on his wages for that position. He was supposed to be a supervisor. Very few of them did.

NP: I have a question about that. Why was the shipping weighman the supervisor, not the receiving weighman?

WT: He was always the senior man. When you are going up the promotion ladder, you start weighing as your receiving weighman.

NP: Is that less complicated?

WT: Yes, simply because when you are recording the weights on a boxcar, the most you can have is two drafts per car. You may have to weigh in two scale drafts. So it was simple recording that. You would add them up, and that was the weight of the car. But on a boat, you weigh ten draughts, and then you tally. You have to be quick. You have to know. You know, nowadays people can't add. In those days, you didn't have computers. I could run up and down there and get the answer. I'd check with the elevator weighman. We'd each do it twice to make sure we were correct. And do you know, that in all the time I weighed grain, I only made one mistake? I don't know how I missed it, but unfortunately, we were at an elevator where the fellow--. The elevator weighman didn't do any adding. He waited until I called it out, and he would say, "Yep, that's what I make it." And he would copy down my answer. [Laughs] The shipping weighman was busy when there was a boat at the dock.

NP: What information did you get in advance of actually loading the grain onto the ship?

WT: We had an order: date, place, time, everything, name of vessel, and what you are going to load on it. The first thing we would do is I would get my assistant to make out the scale tickets. You may go through 200 scale tickets to load a vessel. Yes, where was I?

NP: Well, the scale tickets. So you got an order from the elevator manager?

WT: It was very straightforward from then on. They'd start sending the grain up, and then you would weigh it at the boat. Well, it would go to the shipping bin. This is where the assistant weighman came in. He made sure that the grain got to that boat, make sure it wasn't being diverted somewhere.

NP: How and why might that happen?

WT: Well, you can bet it happened in the early days. A little hanky-panky going on. But it never happened to my knowledge.

NP: Describe exactly what the hanky-panky would be, even though you never actually saw it. What could actually happen?

WT: I've seen a couple of cases that I couldn't prove. We audited an elevator in Montreal. I had audited it a number of times over the years. There was always--. If they had a customer, they would sometimes allocate a shipping bin to that customer and he would haul with his truck. But the elevator may fill it up with up with say 10,000 bushels of grain. There would be five truckloads there. The truck would come along and load it at their convenience.

So every time we were at the elevator, these shipping bins were full. But nobody was coming for the grain. I was curious and I tried to find out when it's going. I couldn't get answers. I, to this day, I believe they were taking overages. They could create overages. They'd unload a boat, and a few thousand bushels would be unaccounted for, and that is where it would go. They would keep it there.

NP: So diverting it in that fashion.

WT: And I think they were selling it. I cannot prove that. So this should not be reported. But I reported it to my bosses and, typical government, nobody did anything about it.

NP: How many elevators are there in Montreal?

WT: There were five in those days.

NP: Okay, we will talk about it. Whether we restrict it or not, based on that. Now, is there a potential for diverting as you are loading into a ship.

WT: There is a potential, but you have to know the spouting system. One of my jobs here in Thunder Bay was to inspect those spouts. That's quite a job. You have to actually go down the shipping bin in a chair and check these spouts because sometimes a spout will go through a house bin, and it will develop a leak. And the elevator will never know it, or they won't say anything.

I do know—this is a true story—one of our guys discovered a leak going through a house bin, and the guy later on, one of the elevator men, later admitted they'd been aware of that for years, and after every ship was loaded they'd shake the bin out and get the leakage back into the elevator. It's been weighed out of the elevator, but now they got it back for nothing.

NP: Would that shortage eventually show up when the ship is unloaded?

WT: Yes, but if it didn't get a lot, it wasn't noticed because each elevator got a handling allowance. It used to be 30 pounds for wheat for 1000 bushels--. [...*audio skips*] And they did not have to account for that. It was supposed to compensate for dust generated, which is weight. That is weight that just disappears. But you had to be aware of all this stuff. You had to watch these spouts. Prior to Ross Teeple coming along, and myself, nobody ever looked at it. Ross Teeple and I inspected every elevator, and you'd be surprised what we found. Nothing serious.

NP: The shipping weighmaster, is there anything else you want to say about that position, before we move on to the other ones you mentioned?

WT: No, not really. I could say lots of things, but nothing of importance. I don't think it will help you.

NP: So what can go wrong when you are either doing the receiving weighing or the shipping weighing? What has gone wrong?

WT: Lots of things. They could telescope two cars. Now you have lost identity. Some guy out in the shed could open the next car coming in while there is still grain in the pit. Now you've telescoped. Or the guy on the scale could when he is weighing off the last draught for the car, the garner is closed, but when he is running it out, he could inadvertently open the garner for the next car. Now it's mixed. Now it's lost. So there is all kinds of things can go wrong.

NP: What do you do in those cases?

WT: Well, we used to give it to the office and get them, no sorry. [Tapping] I'll stop. [Laughs]

NP: You and Mr. Parrish. We interviewed Bill Parrish.

WT: Oh, I know Bill well.

NP: And he ended up saying, “Oh, I’m a bad boy!” We were talking about what happens when you--.

WT: There is room for error. There is room for mishaps. Believe me.

NP: So what has to happen? Paperwork?

WT: Seems to me we would give it to head office and let them settle it between the grain companies. It usually wasn’t our responsibility. We would just report the fact. We’d give them the combined weight. This is what we got out of both cars. If they were both owned by the same company, it didn’t matter.

NP: If you were working, in both instances in receiving and shipping, were you working with a weighman from the company, the elevator company?

WT: Yes.

NP: Who actually pulled the levers and started--?

WT: Yes. The elevator man.

NP: Good work, because if there was any problem, then it was their problem.

WT: Very often, you get so close to these people, you help each other. Many’s the time, if the elevator weighman was busy, I’d go and let the car down for him into the scales. It would be in the garner, and we’d get the horn that it’s all up. The red light was on. So, I’d go and let it down and start putting the weights on and weigh it. But that was his job. It wasn’t my job. I shouldn’t have done it, but I just couldn’t stand around doing nothing when there is work to be done. [Laughs]

NP: We have the shipping weighman’s job. What were the other positions in the weighing group?



WT: The supervising weighmaster—the person would be in charge of the weighing staff at a group of elevators. Once again it had become a meaningless job. A lot of the guys didn't do much of a job. In the weighing and inspection, the guys at each elevator, it was really up to them how efficient they were going to be. If they chose not to be, then there's not much you can do about it.

NP: Although the supervising weighman, that would have been his job to make sure they did.

WT: Oh yes, but very few of them did, very few of them did.

NP: All of those fellows would have been their friends.

WT: Yes! Oh yes, very close. But when I first started, most of these shipping weighmen were Englishmen. They had been in the First World War and they'd got these government jobs, and in England, a government job was white gloves, tie, you know, they'd dress, and the dirty old elevator! That's what some of them wore. They thought they had died and gone to heaven when they come to Canada and got these fabulous government jobs.

NP: Were there any characters on the weighing staff?

WT: Oh yes, we had a few. Let me just think? Maybe I was one. [Laughs]. I don't know. Yes, we had some notorious people.

NP: And it doesn't have to be in a bad way. But were there certain people who were revered or everybody loved to work with them because they were certain kind of people?

WT: From my point of view, the people I revered were the people who did a good job. Ross Teeple, my boss, was the best. He lived, ate, and slept his job.

NP: Do you recall how he got into the business? Had he been there a long time?

WT: He was in the Navy during the war, and he applied. He had veterans' preference. Our management recognized his talents because he went ahead fast!

NP: Was he your age?

WT: Probably a couple of years older, but yes, roughly the same.

NP: So you had the supervising weighmaster and then Mr. Teeples, what was he?

WT: He was over them. You see, we had four supervising weighmasters—two over in Port Arthur and two in Fort William—and over them was--. Originally Ross Teeples was in charge of the Port Arthur group, and a fellow by the name of Harry Williams—he's dead now—he was in charge of the Fort William group. But eventually—I don't know how it came about, I can't remember—but Ross was in charge of the whole thing. He tried his best to do a good job. He did everything humanly possible. He made himself a little unpopular. I think I did, too, because we used to put the pressure on the guys to perform properly. But it didn't always work.

NP: Would anybody ever be let go?

WT: Not at that level, not at the upper level.

NP: But in the non-upper levels, would they ever be let go and if so for what?

WT: No, government, you just muddled through. I don't remember anybody being fired for incompetency, or anything like that—typical government.

NP: Mr. Teeples' position, did you move into that position, or did you move to Winnipeg?

WT: No, I moved to Winnipeg, and I went way over him in my category.

NP: When you did the audits, was the auditing staff here?

WT: It was our own weigh staff that did the auditing. They'd make up the crew, maybe two or three crews, in the winter when it was pretty slack here. I was usually in charge when we went away. I'd run the audits down east. But the early ones, somebody else did. I'd be away for three or four months without coming home. We used to go from one elevator to another down there. It was tough, when you are married, and you've got a family. It's tough! I don't mind [saying] that was tough.

NP: Did they also send weighing staff, like they did inspector staff, up to Churchill?

WT: Oh yes. I've been up many times.

NP: So when you were working on the line, sort of, you went up?

WT: Did I go up? I might have gone up as a supervisor. I know what I did go up there for was to test scales. I was a scale mechanic—at least a scale inspector.

NP: Was that after you moved to Winnipeg?

WT: No, no. They sent me on a course while I was here. I was a busy boy. I don't mind telling you. [Laughs] I tested scales, I conducted audits, and I supervised staff.

NP: Remind me again of what year you moved to Winnipeg.

WT: 1967

NP: Before you go to Winnipeg, I have some other questions I want to ask. Since the weigh staff here did the audits, I would like to have you give a description of what an audit is. But before you do that, could you say why they even bothered doing audits? What was the reason behind audits?

WT: Good question. The statistics division kept rigid track of every pound of grain weighed into and elevator and out and the balance should be in store. Now what was your question?

NP: Why did they do audits?

WT: All right. It was to keep the elevators honest. It's simple. If there was a huge overage, you could bet there was something going on. But very seldom do I--. In fact, I never heard of a case where the Commission, the Board of Grain Commissioners, laid any charges for somebody's figures being a way out. I don't remember. I started out by telling you awhile ago that there was a case that I reported that I was hoping that they would enlarge the investigation and find out what was going on, but they didn't. Nobody cared!

NP: Was there any repercussions to finding overages? I mean, obviously, not court cases.

WT: There may have been, but it wouldn't have been at my level at that time. The head office in Winnipeg and the commissioners, themselves, would decide. And they wouldn't consult me.

NP: So it might be a situation where it is really, as you say, keeping people honest. That just being there kept them honest.

WT: Yes, it could. I'd like to think that, but I have my doubts. [Laughs]

NP: Do you know if the auditing function is still operating?

WT: Oh yes, I would think so, unless the Commission staff—weighing and inspection—are totally abolished. Are they, or are they still effective?

NP: I have not asked. It's such a sad time there that you really don't want to ask this kind of detail.

WT: I don't know what will happen if the staffs are abolished, especially the weighing staff because--.

NP: I think inward weighing is no longer or inspection, or at least no inward inspection--. Anyway I'm passing off possibly inaccurate information. That would really make a difference to audits.

WT: I don't know how they can conduct an effective audit if they haven't got those inward figures and outward figures. I don't know.

NP: Well, I'll check that out. So what happens in an audit? Take us through that process.

WT: I told you they make out a shunt form for the work to be done unloading, the same thing for an audit. You make out a shunt, which is a piece of paper, saying, "Bin 101 will be transferred to Bin 102, and it will be weighed on the way there." The bins are kept sealed. When we go into an elevator, we put a seal on every bin. We are supposed to inspect that, to see that the seal has not been broken.

NP: Every bin had a top that you can seal?

WT: No this is the bottom—the lever down the basement. Our seal consisted of a long wire with a lead that fitted into the seal, and you'd squeeze it with your pliers. You'd had to break it to open it up. The elevator foreman or distributor, whoever does those

things, would make out a shunt showing they are going to transfer these bins. “This one’s on 1-shipper. This one’s on 2-shipper, and this is on 3-shipper,” and so on.

We’d do that until every bin has been run. This is where the inspection would get their samples. Inspection was obligated to sample it. They got the copy of the shunt and confirmed that it’s proper grain, the right grade. To me, an audit was a well-thought-out procedure, if everybody did their job. If the guy, the trackman downstairs didn’t go to the bin when he was opening it and check to see that the seal was intact, he wasn’t doing his job. And there were lots like that. But I kind of lost my thought. Ask me a question.

NP: You were saying, they would have the bins sealed, and then they would transfer from Bin 1 to Bin 2.

WT: And weigh it on the way, until the entire elevator had been audited, weighed.

NP: Here’s a test of your memory. Which elevator in town had the most bins and how many were there?

WT: Which elevator had the most bins? Well for years—let me just think now—for years it would have had to have been Pool 7. Yeah, it would have to be Pool 7.

NP: So, it would have to have been lots, lots of bins. We are not talking about 15 bins.

WT: [Laughs] A couple of hundred.

NP: Any idea of how long it would take to do that audit?

WT: Oh, it depended on how much grain was in the elevator. If it was almost empty, you could be done in two or three days. But usually, an elevator would spend a week. I’ve spent a month auditing an elevator. Down in Quebec you’re full in the winter, and there are no boats, not shipping. Why they would audit when it was full--. It seems to me that if somebody just let the Commission know when the elevator was almost empty, send a crew down quick, and get ‘er done!

NP: So the intention was to do the audit when there was the least amount of grain in the elevator?

WT: That helps, yes.

NP: So when would that be here?

WT: Before they started filling up for the winter. When navigation ended, that's when we hit the audits around here. We would be busy over December. The last boat would be the middle of December. Today you load right through to January. But in those days, by December the boats were just about done.

NP: How did the elevator companies react to auditing?

WT: I think a good manager would like to know how his operation was and this would tell him. But others who didn't understand—a lot of them didn't understand--look upon us a nuisance. Elevator companies don't like the GC. They never liked--. This is the licensing authority. This is the outfit that makes them toe the line. And they were natural enemies. You never saw open fighting, but there was always a tension. It wasn't a bad situation. I got along with them. But they didn't like us. It's the elevator companies that are getting rid of the weighing division and the inspection division now. They figured we were never needed. That's what they figured. But I differ. And I've seen both sides of it.

NP: Meaning?

WT: Well, when I was in Winnipeg, I managed six elevators. So, I know what it is like to have the government come and audit me.

NP: How are you feeling? [Laughs]

WT: I'm fine. I'm fine.

NP: Having fun? [Laughs]

WT: Yes, I'm enjoying it! You make it very pleasant. I don't mind telling you, I was not looking forward. Mind you, this part of it is not difficult for me, but it's when we get to Superior Grain that it's going to bring back some bad memories. I hope I can level with you and tell you exactly what went on at that time, but we will see.

NP: Now I'm going to ask questions about the elevators here.

WT: Go ahead.

NP: I love elevators! [Laughs]

WT: So do I.

MM: Me, too.

NP: I haven't announced, I should, we have my trusty assistant Monika McNabb here. I should have acknowledged you at the beginning, Monika. I was so pleased that you mentioned Northwestern because there is so little that I know and so few people that I've found that know anything about those elevators at that end. So I'd like to take you on memory tour of those elevators, starting at the Electric.

WT: This will be nostalgic.

NP: So we'll start in Westfort and we will start at--.

WT: Lakehead Terminal.

NP: But was it Electric Elevator at one point?

WT: At one point, but that was before my time.

NP: Do you know if it had a different name at the beginning because that is a really weird name for an elevator?

WT: It was always Lakehead Elevator while I was here.

NP: So I might find my information there.

WT: It had changed ownership many times, and when I was there Purves Grain owned it. Bob Purves was a personal friend of mine in Winnipeg. I knew him very well. He was an aviation nut like me. So, we had a lot in common.

NP: What do you remember about that elevator?

WT: What do I remember? I remember very well. I spent days in it. As you probably know, I think parts of it were wood. Was it not? The workhouse was wood.

NP: Interesting you should say that because—excuse me if I insert myself into the interview—but Victor Bel, who was the bug guy, he told us a story. He told us a story about it. He talked about the wooden stairs. That were so worn that the knots were up. He also talked about the bugs they grew as fishing bait—mealy worms. You would see them crawling around. The guys would say, “Yes, we like them. They’re great for fishing bait.” But that’s all I know about the Electric. So part of it was wood.

WT: The superintendent was John, big man. John. Hm. Well, it might come to me. The foreman was a fellow by the name of Otway. The weighman was a short Scotsman.

NP: Must have been a Mc-something. When the names come fine. If they don’t, that’s just extra gravy.

WT: Anyway, it was a small elevator, as elevators go. If it unloaded 25 cars in a day, it was doing good.

NP: Who were the owners of Lakehead?

WT: Purves Grain when I was there.

NP: Oh, at that time. Purves for Service. I saw--.

WT: I dealt with them quite a bit in Winnipeg. Bob Purves had an office right near me. We used to have lunch together once in awhile.

NP: Do you know why it was called the Electric?

WT: That was before my time.

NP: I had heard that it had a long shaft or something, from one end to the other that made it unusual, but I can’t really recall.

WT: If it’s a long shaft, it usually means there are pulleys on the shaft that run different pieces of equipment and so on. But it wasn’t like that. I don’t remember. I think that might have been changed.

NP: Do you know when it came down?



WT: While I was in Winnipeg.

NP: So that would have been--?

WT: '66 to '76 sometime, somewhere in between. When I got back from Winnipeg, it was down.

NP: And Mr. Purves, did he just abandon it?

WT: I don't know the details. I just don't know. No [inaudible]

NP: Anything else unusual about the elevator?

WT: Well, they shipped the grain out on the gallery. Remember that? On the river and on the lake front, the shipping bins are in along the side of the dock. The ship docks there, and the spout goes in the ship, and you load it. Well at Lakehead they had to drop the grain onto a belt that went out on a gallery, and then into a spout and they loaded the boat.

NP: Was it always designed that way or was there something that was changed?

WT: Well, I don't know. I have no idea what it was. At the beginning it may have been deep enough water there. But you couldn't get in too close.

NP: Next-door to that we had another elevator.

WT: Oh Northwestern, yes. That was Federal Grain when I was involved. The superintendent was--. Oh God, my memory is terrible.

NP: All of these names would be on record somewhere?

WT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

NP: In Winnipeg?

WT: I don't know who you would go to. Do they think the city of Fort William would have a taxpayers' list to show who they would send the bill to?

NP: They might have.

WT: I don't know. I don't know.

NP: Any distinguishing feature about that elevator?

WT: They weren't particularly fast. Maybe they could unload 40 cars a day. I don't know.

NP: What determined how quickly they could unload?

WT: The capacity of the legs, the capacity of the conveyor belts, how many unloading scales they had. I think Northwestern had two. They would have two belts in the work shed going into the elevator, into legs, and then up to the scale floor. That usually limited the number of cars they could unload in a day.

NP: Just because you spent time in that area, did you ever hear stories of an elevator that burnt down years before, the Black and Muirhead?

WT: Well, it was on the Island here.

NP: That was the Dwyer. But this is very early.

WT: That was before my time.

NP: Oh, very much before your time.

WT: I don't, I don't remember that. I guess the next one down the river would be Paterson's, which was one of my favourite elevators. I loved to work there. The guys were always pleasant. Percy Poulton was the superintendent.

NP: How was that spelled?

WT: P-O-U-L-T-O-N. Poulton. His son, Bill Poulton, worked there with him. Bill passed his grain inspection exam. You can check with your husband on this—your dad, not your husband.

NP: No, my dad is no longer with us.

WT: Oh, okay.

NP: Is he around, Mr. Poulton junior?

WT: No, no, no. I don't think he would have survived. He was a sickly person. I don't know. But, when they tore the elevator down, he went somewhere else to work. I don't know. I think BC. I think that's where he went. And then coming down the river, was Pool 5.

NP: Before you leave Paterson's, were you working then when they still had what they called the synagogue?

WT: The synagogue? Are you talking about the storage annex? Oh, yes, yes. I remember when that was built. You see I lived in Westfort. It was built in the late '30s. When construction finished, my dad sent us over there, each with a claw hammer. There were piles of nails where the grain-door men had taken the grain doors apart and just threw the nails away. We picked up all those nails and brought them home and straightened them. And he used them. Yes, I remember when that annex was built.

NP: It was pretty massive.

WT: Yes. It had a few problems, I understand.

NP: In what way?

WT: I think it leaked a little bit at times. They might have overcome that. And then it was slow because there was only one belt going out filling it, and one belt coming back. So it was very slow.

NP: A circular staircase inside, somebody told me. Were you ever inside?

WT: If I was, I would have gone through the gallery and the upstairs belt, in that way. But I can't remember.

NP: So you move down and you come to Western.

WT: Western Grain. Les Irwin's brother was the superintendent there at first when I first started, and his son Jim Irwin, he was the foreman. And I can remember Joe Cotter was the foreman.

NP: It was built in several stages.

WT: Three separate elevators. Three separate elevators. I think the first one was tile, built of tiles about so big, brick layers. The others were poured concrete.

NP: Does that create a problem or complications for weighing?

WT: The tiles are never as lasting as concrete. There are always problems. But they still last a long time. The slip-form that they used to build concrete elevators, it was a non-stop operation when they were building. They'd have a form on the outside and a form on the outside. They would jack them up slowly and kept filling them full of concrete. The cement never dried where they were pouring, but by the time the forms got past it, the concrete would harden. Slip-forming was the accepted way to build.

NP: Then we had--.

WT: Then we had what was the Fort William Elevator Company, and that became Sask Pool 10. When it was the Fort William Elevator Company, a fellow by the name of Cam Perry was the superintendent—a very prim, proper guy who wore a tie and gloves all the time.

NP: Was he from here, or from Winnipeg?

WT: I don't know where he originated from. He was the superintendent when I was involved.

NP: It has two workhouses on either end.

WT: On either side.

NP: Is that a--?

WT: That's uncommon. Was it two, or is there just one there? No, there's just one at Pool 10. Pool 11 is the one I was involved with, next. It's an abandoned one now. It has two. One is a tile building and the other one is--.

NP: Like two elevators. But I am thinking of the workhouses—a receiving workhouse and a shipping workhouse on either end.

WT: No, no, there's receiving scales in this house and receiving scales in that house, and there's shipping scales in each one and they work as one elevator, but they are two. You are right. They were built in two sections. And that elevator, I know like the back of my hand. I have been over every inch of it!

NP: That's the Superior Elevator.

WT: Yes, including underneath to inspect the foundations.

NP: Before we leave Pool 10.

WT: That's Western Grain now.

NP: Yes, Western Grain now. Before we leave there, hm, what was I going to say?

WT: It gets worse. Wait until you're my age. [Laughter]

NP: I'm seeing that elevator in my mind's eye. Oh, I know what I was. I am looking at both of those elevators—what you are calling Superior and then the Fort William Elevator, Pool 10—both of them have--. Like one of them has Fort William Elevator Elevator E and Fort William Elevator F.

WT: That's when the Fort William Elevator managed by Cam Perry, they eventually took over Fort William E, Elevator 11. For awhile, it was operated by Manitoba Pool shortly after the war, Manitoba Pool took it over. Or was it Reliance? It was Reliance Grain. I remember Don Smeaton was the foreman.

NP: That's spelled how?

WT: Don Smeaton. S-M-E-A-T-O-N. They weren't there for very long, just a few years.

NP: Because there was Consolidated. It started out as--.

WT: Yes, I guess that's who built it. I think, Consolidated. We used to call it the old Cons. You got that right.

NP: So somewhere in there Fort William Elevator managed it for awhile.

WT: Yes, and I can't remember the order in which they did it. But Cons built it and run it for years—Consolidated Grain Company. And then it seems to me that Reliance was in there for awhile, and Fort William Elevator Company was there. I just can't help you because I don't remember the order in which this happened.

NP: You know, we are trying to track all this down and get it all straightened out and those two elevators are very confusing. So tell me about the Superior elevator construction. You said you've been through it from top to bottom and even in the basement.

WT: Well, the most easterly house is modern construction, but it was built, I don't know, during the First World War [inaudible]. It's been there a long time. And the other one is a tile building and it's been there longer. I don't know what year it was built. That one, if I remember rightly, had flat-bottomed bins. They didn't run out. You had to send men down to shovel out the bottom of the bin. I can't remember. I really don't remember much about that. I knew it at the time. The other one was conventional. But each one only had one receiving scale, or did they? The annex on the west side may have had two receiving scales. I forget. But anyway, yeah, I knew that elevator like the back of my hand at that time.

NP: Then we move downstream, I guess.

WT: Elevator D. Elevator D, that was owned by the CPR. I think it was built by the CPR. It became Federal Grain eventually. They called it Federal D. Yeah, yeah. It was huge. It had huge storage capacity and some tile annexes and some concrete, pretty old. It was one of the old original ones in Thunder Bay. I worked there quite a bit.

NP: Let's hop across the river to Searle and--.

WT: Okay. The Searle was a fairly modern building. It had pretty high capacity—legs and belts and so on. Les Irwin, the superintendent, operated it to capacity, believe me. I was surprised when Searle gave it up because I always thought they were one of the most efficient operators. Mind you, they always had a big staff. I really don't know why they couldn't make it go because Searle still had sufficient country elevators to provide grain to this terminal elevator. I don't know what happened.

NP: Well, we do.

WT: Well, we do know what happened. Do you?

NP: Because we interviewed Mr. Searle, down on St. Simon Island in Georgia.

WT: Wow!

NP: So you might want to listen to that interview.

WT: Yeah, I would.

NP: Or Bill Parrish's interview. We have his. His was a great interview. Now, it just had to do about deciding to get out of the grain business altogether.

WT: They kept the country elevators, didn't they? No?

NP: No, they got completely out of the grain business.

WT: Did they? That's like the Paterson's. They closed down the terminal, but they kept the country elevators.

NP: The Searle Elevator was fashioned apparently after a building that, I think it was the first or second Mr. Searle, going back, saw in Milan, Italy. So he wanted it to be a showpiece, not just an elevator. When you think about the look of that elevator, it is different. It is more elegant than the others.

WT: Yeah. Very efficient in that there was a storage annex at each end of the workhouse, so you could send grain either way. Yes, it was an efficient elevator.

NP: Next door was what started out as the Grand Trunk Pacific.

WT: Oh, yeah. The Grand Trunk. That was Grand Trunk Pacific. That's exactly it. It was huge! It has ten scales on the scale floor—five receivers, five shippers, side-by-side. I spent a lot of time there. It's old. The bins, when I first started, were open top. You'd go up there and the dust, you couldn't see ten feet in front of you. If there is a top on the bin, they put the spout on the opening to the

bin, and it kind of contains the dust. But those open-top bins they pour [inaudible] and the dust just billows out. Boy, I must have inhaled a ton of dust out of those places. But anyway, I got COPD, and I attribute it to the grain dust. However.

NP: Were there studies to support that?

WT: No. Nobody even paid any attention to it. They didn't. I don't what we were supposed to do. Nobody supplied masks, but some elevators supplied those cloths that you hold on with a metal. If you haven't seen them, I've got one in the workshop I should show you. Would you like to see it?

NP: At some point, yes.

WT: Okay, when you are ready to go, I'll go out and get it. I still use it. But not for dust. I use it when I'm spray painting or something.

NP: The Grand Trunk Pacific then--.

WT: We did Elevator D, Grand Trunk, next one down would be Ogilvie's. But along there somewhere, I think during the war it was torn down, there was Elevator B. I don't know anything about it. I had never been in it. It was gone by the time I was in the business.

NP: That was on the other side.

WT: No, it was on the town side.

NP: No, no, no, but I mean down farther than Ogilvie's towards--.

WT: It was at the foot of Victoria Avenue.

NP: Ogilvie's, it was a more unusual setup because it was also a flour mill, right?

WT: Yes, yes, yes, huge.



NP: And it had a conglomeration of bins because it was I think 1902 the original bins were built. So, what was it like to weigh out stuff there?

WT: Oh, it was antiquated—little wee scales. Now, only our most competent weighmen could go there and ship to a boat because these little scales, I think they held--. The average scale would hold 90,000 pounds. These, I think, were 28,000 pounds. If you want to get going, just let me know. We can make time later on. I'm enjoying it. Yeah, the scales were small, and the legs had been speeded up so that you got a draught of grain. There's two scales and you caught a draft of grain, if I remember right, every 32 seconds. Let me think. No, it wasn't that.

It was fast! One draft here! Let it go! And one draft here! And every ten drafts you have to tally. So if you can imagine tallying a column five figures wide, ten figures long, mentally, no calculator, and getting an answer. That is where I made the only mistake I ever made in addition. I was out by I think five pounds or something. And the elevator weighman, he was busy. He didn't have time to do all this, so he would just take my figures. And it worked for a long time. But once I made a mistake, and my boss, who was a good friend of mine, came to see me with the sheet and the mistake on it, you talk about embarrassing. I prided myself on not making mistakes. However. That was the toughest place to work for a weighman. These little draughts coming a mile a minute.

NP: That's the one elevator I can remember my dad walking to and from because we lived quite close to there. Now you mentioned briefly the little elevator on the Island that burned.

WT: What did we use to call that?

NP: There were two names as far as I know, the Dwyer and the Gillespie?

WT: The Gillespie, yeah it used to be the Gillespie, yeah. When I was a kid in the '30s we lived down on Vickers Street there, just for a couple of years. Then we moved back to Westfort. I have been to the top of that elevator. We used to go into the basement, and if you crawled inside the spout, into the bin and reached up on the wall, there was a ladder. Dark as hell! We would climb up that ladder. Stupid when I think about it! I'd climb up that ladder and I looked out the top from that elevator many times.

NP: And I've discovered by going through some records that it burned in 1928, the workhouse, I guess, would have burned. You were talking about the bins that were there until just a month ago and now they are gone.

WT: They're gone, are they? I haven't been around there. So there was four storage bins or six.

NP: Something like that.

WT: Wasn't very many.

NP: Then we had Elevator A, B, C, and E.

WT: E. Yeah, Empire.

NP: Well, the ones you were talking about before on the river—the wooden ones.

WT: Oh, that was E on the river.

NP: Yes, and then they were all gone by the time you--.

WT: You're talking about down by Victoria Avenue. Yes, they were gone. They were there when I was a kid.

NP: You remember that?

WT: Yes, but I never had anything to do with them.

NP: What do you remember about them as a kid?

WT: Not very much. You don't pay much attention as a kid.

NP: Don't you think it strange that we had these big, looming structures and we didn't pay any attention to them?

WT: I tell you, I still say I'm a child of the Depression. I had better things to think about.

NP: Yes, and then you talked about what was at the mouth of the river.

WT: Yeah, the Empire. Yeah, I worked there many times. A wooden workhouse much like the Electric as you call it.

NP: Does it make much difference if it was a wooden workhouse rather than concrete one?

WT: Well, they were dusty and dirty, and you couldn't clean them. They were never efficient, all slower. Empire was pretty slow. It had quite a few scales and along the waterfront.

NP: Who was running that, do you remember?

WT: I really don't remember the grain company.

NP: It burned down while you were still here?

WT: No, no, no. That's interesting. You should look into this. They tore it down as far as I know when I moved to Winnipeg. They were having trouble to get the annex down and they were going to blow it with dynamite and there was a hue and cry to try to stop them. So, without saying a word, one night, I understand, they went down there and blew it up. Now you guys can complain all you want.

NP: There was a fire because I have seen pictures of the fire. So I wonder if the fire resulted from the explosion?

WT: No, no, no that was just the annex. I thought they had torn the workhouse down, the wooden workhouse. Maybe it burnt. Okay, I was away. I was in Winnipeg.

NP: Well, you know, we are coming to 20 to 12:00, so I don't want to get started on the Intercity and Current River ones.

WT: I don't know those as well, but I have been on everyone of them. I've either tested scales in them, or weighed grain, or done something in them.

NP: So you would have known Mr. Kasner. He was responsible for introduction of the metric system to the weighing. Syd Kasner from Winnipeg.

WT: He just come along about the time I left. I don't know him well.

NP: Did they do the metric conversion when you were--? Or did you get out before that?

WT: '76. The metric, I was involved in conversion to metric, and I think it was a complete farce.

NP: Okay, we will come back to that.

WT: I'll tell you one quick story. I was at a meeting, a high-level meeting on conversion, and I listened to what they were saying. They were talking about all this million of dollars to change the scales, change all measuring devices to metric. And I said, "What is it you are trying to achieve?" They said, "Well when we weigh grain, we have got to weigh in metric because the customers demand it." I said, "Fine." And I had a \$10 calculator. And I said, "Give me some bushels." And he gave me a few million bushels. I punched it in and in about three seconds I said, "Here's the metric conversion. Why change everything?" You know, if it's the customer you want to give him metric. Give it to him. It just didn't make sense to me.

Now, I blame it on the Liberal Government. They are the ones that brought it in. You know, nowadays, everybody myself included, I've got two sets of tools out there, one metric and one SAE [Society of Automotive Engineers]. And all mechanics have that. That's millions of dollars spent to get a duplicate set of keys for no useful purpose. I just don't understand. That's my argument.

NP: Well, maybe you would like to listen to Mr. Kasner's interview. [Laughs]

WT: I remember Syd.

NP: Anyway, I think we will close off for today and set an appointment for next round.

WT: Okay.

**End of interview.**