

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Jean Angus  
INTERVIEWER: Nadine Mackenzie  
DATE: March 19, 1984

Nadine: This is Nadine Mackenzie speaking. Today is Monday the 19th of March 1984. I'm interviewing Miss Jean Angus at her office at West Coast Petroleum. Miss Angus, thank you very much for having accepted to participate in our project. Can you tell me when and where were you born.

Jean: Thank you Nadine. It's very nice to be included in these interviews and I'm very grateful for your consideration of my old background. I'm one of these very dull people that was born in Calgary.

Nadine: A true Calgarian.

Jean: A true Calgarian. There doesn't seem to be that many around any more.

#008 Nadine:Where were you parents from?

Jean: My parents are Scotch. They were from Airdrie, Scotland. My father came to Calgary in 1912. That was the year that you read all about, the first Stampede. And my mother came out after the war. My dad was in the 31st battalion and my mother came out to marry him in 1920 after the 1st war and they've stayed in Calgary ever since.

#013 Nadine:Where were they living in Calgary?

Jean: Where, on the North Hill, just at the top of Centre St. and we have pictures of the house when it was built in 1925 and there was a field of oats behind it. So it'll give you an idea, the city has expanded so much since then.

#016 Nadine:Things have changed. Where were you educated?

Jean: At Stanley Jones School and Crescent Heights High School which are both on the North Hill.

Nadine: Was it an Elementary School and then Junior High.

Jean: Senior High School and one year at Balmoral High School which is also an old school on 16th Avenue on the Trans Canada Highway.

Nadine: What did your father do in Calgary?

Jean: My father was a cabinet maker. He worked for Revelstoke Sawmills.

Nadine: Were you the only child?

Jean: No, I had a sister who died when I was three so I've pretty well grown up alone.

#022 Nadine: And after High School, what did you do?

Jean: I went to work. My father was very ill when I was 17 so I quit school, I wanted to go to university but I wasn't able to as he was very sick so I quit school and went to work. And I first worked for a company that was a jobbers agent and it was very interesting and I learned a lot. And from then I went to work in a law office which I thoroughly enjoyed.

#028 Nadine: What were you doing in the law office?

Jean: We were doing oil and gas work, that was where I first became interested.

Nadine: So that was your introduction. . . , introduction to the oil patch.

Jean: Right. Actually we did more work for oil companies than when I went to my next job because at that time we were doing work for a great number of different companies. All their financing and operational agreements and that.

#034 Nadine: So you must have learned a lot about the legal aspect of the oil patch.

Jean: Oh yes. I liked the legal part of it.

Nadine: And how long did you fill this job for.

Jean: Six years, I was there for six years. And then I decided, it seemed I was going to be single the rest of my life so, in law offices unfortunately they don't have . . . , they didn't have pension or medical coverage and I thought it looked like I was going to have to be taking care of myself so I thought I'd better find something else. And I guess I had maybe been doing something for Pacific and I phoned and asked if they were hiring any secretaries and they said to fill in an application form. So I got it and sent it over and they told me what they were looking for and they had apparently been looking for someone with a legal background and I was very fortunate to obtain the position of working for Mr. George McMahon who has been president of Pacific Petroleums.

#047 Nadine: Was it difficult at the time to find a post?

Jean: No, not very. It seemed to be there was lots of jobs. That was in 1956 when things were. . . , the old boom had already begun at that time.

Nadine: How was George McMahon, can we talk about him?

Jean: Oh yes, he was a very fine gentleman. I had worked for him for 13 years till he retired and moved to Nassau because he was ill and I thoroughly enjoyed every day of working. It was the kind of a job where you were anxious to get to work to see what was going to happen.

#054 Nadine: So this was interesting then?

Jean: Very interesting. Very nice people. And all the people in Pacific in those days, I think we only had, compared to what it ended up, about 450 employees and they were lovely people, interesting people. It was a very happy company.

#058 Nadine: Where were the offices?

Jean: On 9th Avenue there was a Pacific building and the Petroleum building.

First they built the Petroleum Building and then the Pacific Building. They were the first two buildings that were built after the war and we thought they were big buildings then. They were, I think it was ten stories, was the top floor.

#062 Nadine: And what was your work for George McMahon, you were his secretary?

Jean: Yes. The things that girls do for bosses. Being president of the company you know, there's a lot of things funnelled to other people. There was a lot of personal things involved, they were very community oriented people and they encouraged the staff to become involved in community activities, in educating oneself to learn more about the petroleum industry. And anyone who was sports minded was allowed time off, particularly curlers or golfers or anyone like that.

#071 Nadine: Was it to keep you healthy?

Jean: Yes. I guess they didn't think about it in those days. Like they have all the health units in the big offices now. But it was more community involvement. Mr McMahon was involved in the football club. He was the president for quite a number of years, the Stampeder Football Club. He was also involved in the Stampede.

#076 Nadine: So were all the employees getting involved too?

Jean: Yes. And he looked after everything in the Stampede parade from out of town so that took a lot of work getting that organized. And they were interested in Mount Royal College, he was instrumental in getting the Calgary Inn built in Calgary. And also he was interested in Heritage Park and he put quite a considerable bit of money into the boat, the Moyee. They came from, Mr. Frank and Mr. George McMahon's hometown was Moyee, British Columbia.

#085 Nadine: So that's why the boat was called. . . .?

Jean: No I think the boat was called Moyee, I think it had that name but it just seemed to be a coincidence perhaps. His home south of Calgary on Fish Creek Park, he had 160 acres of land there where his home was built and it was called Moyee Farms which was also maybe coincidental.

#089 Nadine: What was his background?

Jean: His background?

Nadine: Yes, what was his family doing?

Jean: Well they started in the oil industry in 1939. Earlier in that time both he and Mr. Frank had done a lot of work around the Flathead area and also in the north. Their father had had mining interests in British Columbia and it was Mr. Frank's dream to build a pipeline from the north. So it was kind of exciting seeing all this come to pass with the building of the gas pipeline from northeast British Columbia down through to California.

#098 Nadine: It took a lot of negotiation. . . .

Jean: Oh yes and they were connected with an awful lot of people in the United States. Bankers and . . . , they seemed to have the capacity of having through their life, contacted or become friends with a great number of influential people. And this is how, in those days financing was very difficult to come by in Canada and most of it had to be done through New York.

#104 Nadine: So was the money coming from the States?

Jean: For the pipeline. Yes, they wanted to build a TransCanada Pipeline originally and there was a lot of government problems about it in the 1950's and the Federal Government didn't seem to think there was any necessity for a pipeline to Eastern Canada so they built the pipeline to California. Then later of course, TransCanada became a partially government funded project.

#111 Nadine: It seems that Mr. George McMahon did a lot for Calgary?

Jean: Well as I said, he was very interested in community activities. Besides his other interests he was also president of the United Fund. He was sort of instrumental at the time in getting the United Fund together. His feeling was that there should be only two collections a year instead of at that time, there were numerous charitable groups that had separate things. And they thought they should have one for welfare things and one for medical things. And also with the building of McMahon Stadium, it was because he was interested in football, he approached the Provincial Government and the City. And it took several years to get the Stadium built. It was to be part of the University of Calgary. At that time the university wanted them to contribute money for library facilities and as he wasn't interested particularly in library facilities, he was more interested in athletic facilities. Finally they got approval to build a stadium and Mr. George and Mr. Frank put up \$300,000 each towards the building of the stadium.

#131 Nadine: That was a lot of money at the time.

Jean: Yes, it was quite a bit of money at that time. They felt that maybe they could put something back into the community that had been good to them. And their idea of setting up McMahon Stadium Society was that, in 15 years after all the money was made up for the building of the stadium, it cost more, it was originally to cost \$300,000 but I think it cost 1,500,000 or something. They raised non-interest bonds for the balance and their farm at Okotoks was pledged as collateral for raising this money. Anyhow their idea was that, first of all, the stadium would be used for the football club but that other things, including the money that the football club would pay for the use of the stadium would be turned over to the University in Calgary. Probably for medical completion, there wasn't much medical, or there was no medical facilities at that time. Anyhow they felt that the monies raised which amounted to roughly \$60,000 a year on rentals for the stadium should be turned over to the University of Calgary. So it means that the income from the stadium is roughly \$60,000 a year which is like an ongoing grant to the University. And you don't see anything about that in any of the publicity about. . .

#152 Nadine: No, it seems nobody knows about that.

Jean: So this is why they started the McMahon Stadium Society and there's two representatives from the city, two from the university and two representing the McMahons on the Board. And it's quite a bit of money but now I guess it just goes into the general coffers instead of being specifically shown to go the medical part.

#158 Nadine: George and Frank McMahon were mostly businessmen, were they not?

Jean: Yes, they had both gone to Wentworth College and Gonzaga University in the States but neither one of them really completed their education that they had intended to go for. Mr. George had a Business Administration Degree from Gonzaga University, I think Mr. Frank was taking Engineering. I kind of think, I'm not sure but I really don't think he ever finished it, he was more interested in getting out and doing things.

#165 Nadine: So he was a doer?

Jean: He was a doer, yes. He was a dreamer and it's pretty nice when you have dreams come true. When they started Pacific, I think it was in 1939, they had some acreage they had purchased in Turner Valley and that's where it all started and we always felt it was pretty wonderful that a small company, a local company grew to the size that Pacific did grow, in competition to the big companies, Imperial and Shell and those other big companies. It was very interesting that it should grow to that part.

#174 Nadine: You worked for 13 years with George McMahon. Can you talk about the people you met through him?

Jean: Well they had a lot of interesting people come around. Mr. Frank was the one that was more interested in horses and we met a lot of interesting people.

#178 Nadine: He was raising horses, was he not?

Jean: Yes and of course the one that everyone has heard about is Majestic Prince that won the Kentucky Derby. We were all pretty excited about that and through that we have met people like E. P. Taylor and a lot of other people involved in racing. Also their school pal was Bing Crosby who used to come up and visit them and go hunting. They were both interested in hunting, they had a hunting lodge northeast of Calgary. And he would bring some of his pals including Phil Harris and Bob Hope who also went hunting and at different times they took part in the Stampede and Bing Crosby also had a part interest along with another friend of Mr. Frank's, Wilder Ripley, who was also a local oilman, in a racing stable.

#192 Nadine: Were there any other people?

Jean: Oh they seemed to have contact with, gosh people all over the world.

There was a chap, used to come from Britain, Viscount Earley. I'm not whether you become. . . , his wife was the Marcioness ??? of Reading I think, was his final title. Are you a Viscount before you become. . . , or is the Marcioness the wife of a Viscount.

#201 Nadine: I don't know, I think the wife of a Viscount would be a Viscountess.

Jean: Oh, and what would he be when she was the Marcioness?

Nadine: I think he would keep his title.?

Jean: Oh, and there were the people from Eastman, Dillon. Very nice people there. They were the people that did most of the financing for Pacific. There was Boots Adams and all the people from Phillips Petroleum that came around. The connection with Phillips started when we built a refinery up at Fort St. John and as Pacific had not at that time gone into the marketing, they. . . , Phillips went halfers on them with the refinery at Prince George and handled the marketing end of things and we had some sort of loaned people from the Phillips company in Bartlesville who were marketing people. That's how the tie-in came originally with Pacific and Phillips. And then when they opened the service stations they wondered what they would call them and since they were using the design of the Phillips stations and Phillips was called Phillips 66, I said well why don't you call it Pacific 66. So that's kind of how it got the service stations called Pacific 66.

#222 Nadine: So that was your idea?

Jean: It was my idea and I guess nobody ever thought of that.

Nadine: And nobody gave you credit for that?

Jean: No, well I imagine something like that would have involved anyhow.

#225 Nadine: Was George McMahon travelling a lot?

Jean: He didn't travel as much as Mr. Frank. Mr. Frank was away a great deal and we had an office in New York. West Coast Transmission had an office and a couple of the girls from Vancouver worked in the office. They went down for a couple of years at a time. And Mr. Frank's secretary, Edna Reskey, went a lot with him. She would be away a great deal of the time, spent mostly in New York and then latterly, when Mr. Frank started taking more time, he had a time in Florida that he would spend the winter in Florida. Between. . . , so he moved between Florida and Vancouver.

#237: Nadine: Then George McMahon retired, did he?

Jean: Yes, Mr McMahon retired in 1968 and moved to Nassau. He had had a very bad flu which he got at a Canadian Football League meeting in Montreal and he was in the hospital in New York for about six weeks. And he was very ill at that time, they didn't think that he would get better. So the doctors told him if he ever got the flu again there was not much they could do for him. So he decided to buy a home in Nassau which they had been to on several occasions on holidays so he and his wife and the two younger children moved to Nassau. His four older children were, the two boys were at university and the two girls

were married in Vancouver at this time. So he would come home in the summer and as soon as it was warm enough here and spend the summers here and then when it would get cold, about the middle of September or first of October, the first snowfall he would take off again. Anyway he was quite poorly for quite a few years after that and he felt it was fortunate when he came home, it was just a week before Stampede, and he was very ill and was in the hospital here for about five weeks before he died. It was on the Wednesday of the Stampede week that he died too. I think he was happy to come back to Calgary to. . . , to end his life. But he was a very kind man, a very terrific boss.

#268 Nadine: Hard worker.

Jean: Oh, I wouldn't say he was a terrific hard worker. He was a good administrator. He was a very good boss in that he treated everyone from vice-presidents to mail boys with the same respect. And everyone was very fond of him in the office. He seemed to have the faculty of getting the most out of people.

#275 Nadine: In a very nice way.

Jean: In a very nice way, yes.

Nadine: As a secretary you were a witness to a lot of negotiations. Can we talk a bit about that.

Jean: Well there were always things going on. It seemed they were very interested in building things and getting things incorporated. There was Saratoga Processing, there was the. . . , when West Coast Petroleum first started, it was West Coast Production. It was the old Peace River Natural Gas Pipeline. They seemed to be interested in getting things going and the organization. Once a company seemed to be going and running smoothly then their interest seemed to fail and they wanted to go on to build something else. They were involved in the pipe mill, Alberta Phoenix Pipe Mill in Edmonton. And the people that were involved also in that were from Dusseldorf, the Phoenix [Rhineror ???] Company in Dusseldorf was interested in the Pipe Mill. They were also involved in the distillery here, Alberta Distillers. So they kind of had their fingers in a lot of pies and so there was always something very interesting going on. At one time Pacific had four aircraft, there was one went twice a week to Fort St. John ferrying people back and forward. And there was always a plane going to either Vancouver or going to New York. And that was exciting times.

#306 Nadine: I'm quoting you here saying "in those early days there was no clear division between Pacific and West Coast Transmission".

Jean: Yes, in the beginning, Pacific and West Coast was in the Pacific building and a lot of the engineers worked part of their days on Pacific jobs and part of their days on West Coast Transmission.

Nadine: So like a big family then.

Jean: Yes, right. And most of the people that were directors of the one company were also directors of the other company, and officers too. Then they opened the

office in Vancouver and it was mainly through the urging of Premier Bennett. He felt that if they were going to do business in British Columbia, run a pipeline through British Columbia that they should have their head office in British Columbia which is really fair enough. Both companies, well West Coast Transmission is a federal incorporated company, Pacific was a B. C. incorporated company. And so part of the staff moved to Vancouver in 1960 when West Coast Transmission opened it's office out there.

Nadine: This is the end of the tape.

Tape 2 Side 1

Nadine: Miss Angus, who was the most influential person in your career.

Jean: Oh gosh, that's kind of hard to answer Nadine. I think probably the first boss I had who was a gentleman called Dave Drinnan, when I first started to work when I was 17 was maybe the most influential. He expected a lot of you, he expected things to be correct and so I learned very well and very early to do things right and do them interesting and use a little bit of ingenuity in setting up letters and projects and things and I think it stayed well. I feel also that what I learned in the law office, I worked for Dick Matthews, who was a very brilliant lawyer and I think I learned an awful lot there. That's how I really got the job at Pacific. I think the nicest boss I ever had and the one I respected the most was Mr. George McMahon. It was a wonderful opportunity to have had the opportu-

nity to work for someone like him.

#014 Nadine: What do you consider your achievements?

Jean: Well, for a girl I guess, to be secretary to the president of a large oil company is kind of an achievement. I sort of felt at one time I had the best boss and the best job in Calgary, maybe it didn't pay the most money but there's many other things to be involved with a job than dollars and cents.

#019 Nadine: Would you recommend to become a secretary nowadays in the oil patch?

Jean: No I recommend for girls to become either a land clerk or become involved in the accounting end of things.

Nadine: Why?

Jean: I think secretaries as such are not going to be more than telephone answering and copy typists eventually. One time we had a . . . , at Pacific, I remember, Art Smith worked for Pacific for a time. He had to resign when he was an M.P. in Ottawa because of, they felt it was a conflict of interest. But he used to jokingly say that some of the girls at Pacific had more to say than lots of vice-presidents at companies that he had worked at. We kind of learned how to deal with people and you learned who to talk to and who not to talk to and when to keep your mouth shut. And there was lots of confidential things went through in those days, it's kind of fun to see things growing.

#032 Nadine: Let us go back to your extra career, you are a former director of the Calgary Sport Women Association.

Jean: Oh yes. I have never excelled at anything really you know, I've never been top at anything but I've always been interested in lots of things. And I got involved, probably through being at Pacific and having contact with people in the media and Pearl [Borgel??] and Bea Green started the Sports Women's Association. Pearl Borgel was the first radio announcer in Canada that covered sports. And she felt that a group, something like the Booster Club in Calgary that did the same kind of thing for girls would be good because we always felt that if you got boys interested in sports and athletics it kept them out of other trouble. So the same went for girls. So Pearl rounded up 7 or 8 people that were involved with youngsters in various activities and I became involved with them and spent 8 or 9 very happy years on that board. And we had a dinner meeting once a year and we had very good lady speakers and it was very difficult in the 1960's to have women that were highly regarded in the country. We had Judy LaMarsh as a speaker, we had Ellen Fairclough who was one of the first M.P.'s in Ottawa, a very fine lady. We had Charlotte Whitten who was the mayor of Ottawa and we even had Princess Alexandra when she was out in Calgary and it was the group that Princess Alexandra was here asked us if we would like to have her as a speaker and of course we were thrilled to pieces. And after having that it sort of started dwindling down because that's a hard act to follow. But we had a lot of fun with it and we would have 4 or 500 ladies at our dinners each year which was pretty good.

#056 Nadine: And you are also a long time fan of the Calgary Stampeders Football Team. You helped to form the first cheerleading group.

Jean: Oh, that was also another reason that I enjoyed working for Mr. McMahon because I've been going to football games since I was 10 and so when I was involved with the football club it was really fun. I enjoyed being involved with the little bit that we did. And we had a Female Football Fan Club and the coaches would come to the meetings at the Stadium and explain to the girls how football worked, so that was great. And then I went down to the brewery one day with Jim Finks who was the general manager, and we said, we were talking about having a cheerleading group and the brewery, we called them the Callettes and the brewery very kindly gave us \$1,500 to buy their uniforms. So that was the first group in Calgary and the coaches wives trained the girls. One of them, Joanne, and I can't remember which of the coaches it was now, the last name, he's either with Philadelphia or somewhere now as the head coach. It was in the year that Bobby Dobbs was the Calgary coach and his wife Joanne also helped us. And this other girl had been with the, what do they call the, the gals down in Texas, the first group that you hear so much about, oh what was that group of girls. Isn't it terrible, I'm sorry, I should have thought about having all this on me. Anyway she was a member, Kilgore Rangerettes or something, that was it. And she coached the girls, so that was kind of fun. Then we had the Miss Grey Cup contests every year and that was kind of fun. And the year that I was chairman was fortunately the first year that one of the Calgary girls became Miss Grey Cup so I was very pleased about that. So it was through Mr. McMahon of course, that I got involved in those kind of things.

#085 Nadine: The Petroleum Club still does not accept women. How do you feel about that?

Jean: Oh, it doesn't really bother me. There's lots of other things that girls can go to. Actually [Des Canderick ???] goes to the 400 Club and we're the first ladies group that they have allowed to be part of it. I don't know, if girls were allowed to be in the Petroleum Club I don't know how much use they would really get of it.

#090 Nadine: I'm thinking about female geologists, for example.

Jean: Right. They maybe are restricted a bit, but I don't know how often business wise it would do the girls that much good. I'm all for, really it is kind of silly but. . . .

#095 Nadine: Especially in 1984.

Jean: Right. I'm a women's liberationist to the point that I think that girls don't really get a fair shake in a lot of things but I'm not one that objects to carrying coffee and those kind of things. I think there's other much more important things than that part of it. And I'm pleased that girl lawyers and girl engineers are doing so much better, I think it's wonderful. And I don't see why they can't.

#100 Nadine: Are you planning to retire soon?

Jean: Oh, one part of me would like to and another part of me, I don't know, when you've worked all your life it's kind of hard to.

Nadine: This is something I have noticed in the oil patch, people are hard workers and they go on working.

Jean: Mind you, I think it's going to have to come. If there's much more unemployment, any one of us, maybe by the time we get to be 60, I think in the next few years they will be putting us all out to pasture. When I started at Pacific the retirement for girls was 55. And then they decided a few years ago that women would want to work longer than that.

#109 Nadine: Looking back at your career, is there anything that you would do differently?

Jean: Career wise I've been very fortunate. The only thing I sort of think I did wrong is that I didn't get married when I was 18 and have about 6 kids but then I would have missed a lot of things too maybe. One never knows what you're doing for right or for wrong. No I've been very, very fortunate, I must say. I've always had very nice people to work with and that's half the battle isn't it?

#116 Nadine: Absolutely. And this is the last question. Miss Angus, on the whole, what do you think of the oil patch?

Jean: I think it's great. Very interesting, very exciting. And it's always going to be exciting and it's always going to be needed.

Nadine: So you will recommend to people to go and work in the oil patch in Calgary.

Jean: I think so, I think so. It's more interesting than manufacturing I guess. There's an awful lot of related things connected with the oil patch too isn't there.

Nadine: But for you it has been great.

Jean: I've thoroughly enjoyed it yes.

Nadine: Thank you very much for this very interesting interview.