PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Harold Farney

INTERVIEWER: David Finch

DATE:

DF: Today is December 20, 1999 and we are with Mr. Harold Farney at his home at 287 Pallisbriar Park S. W. in Calgary. My name is David Finch. So Mr. Farney could you start by telling us where things began for you? Where were you born?
HF: I was born in 1910 at Abbyville, Kansas.
DF: And what month?
HF: February.
DF: So you're almost 90 aren't you. What were your parents doing there?
HF: I was raised on a farm and went to school in a one room schoolhouse to start with. As a matter of fact I took eight grades in a one room schoolhouse. And then moved into the big city of Abbyville for high school.
DF: Great. Now what got you interested in geophysics or the sciences.
HF: I was always interested in sciences. But I didn't have the education for it for one thing and I didn't think I'd ever get into it but it was a windfall as far as I was concerned. During the Depression everybody played what they call hardball here, we called it softball down there, same thing. I was pretty good at it as a pitcher and so on. So GRC, that's Geophysical Research Corporation came to town and the boss had married a local girl and he had to organize a ball team. He went down to his wife's hometown to play and he got beat. So he couldn't stand it so he asked one of the fellow's, he said, if I knew a pitcher I'd give him a job. And this fellow says I know one. So he called me at midnight, he said, can you be there at 8:00 in the morning, I said, I sure can. There was no jobs, just no jobs and of course at that time, I only had a high school education and I thought this was the greatest opportunity. I didn't know at the time that it was a life's work at the time and I enjoyed it so much.

#031 DF: But you knew nothing about it when you got into it.
HF: No, nobody else did though. It was only four years old you see. It originated in 1949 in Germany and that was a one trace equipment. They brought it over to the United States and mounted it in the back end of an old Buick car, this was 1929 and I guess just experimented with it. And it developed fairly fast because. . . .
DF: Were they finding anything with that one trace?
HF: No, just experimenting to see if they could get reflections or refractions or whatever you know. Anyway by the time I got around to it this Geophysical Research Corporation had been formed and we had a six trace camera at that time which was considered big. And of course, six geophones and you just shoot and try to correlate from one mile to the other and hope. And there was no automatic controls or there was no nothing on the

instruments so you had to take a shot for every bed that you wanted to record.

#044 DF: So what did you start out by doing?

HF: Well fortunately again, because I applied for a labour job because I figured I knew how to do that and the boss didn't want me tired so he put me in the office which was a great break. I started out and got halfway up the ladder at once and fortunately was lucky enough to keep that position.

DF: So what were you doing in the office?

HF: I was a computer.

DF: What was your boss' name?

HF: W. B. Kindall. He was one of these big rough and tough old you know, that if you blinked, he'd fire you. Nice fellow too, but in those days that was the way it was. Anyway to make a long story short I went through the ranks there for about a year a half and the crew moved from Kansas to Oklahoma because they couldn't work in Kansas, it was too cold in the wintertime. And so they moved to Oklahoma and they cut the crew away down and that left me without a job. So I spent about three months looking and writing letters and what not and then I was able, in about 1935, to get on with Philips Petroleum.

#064 DF: Doing what there?

HF: Well, I started out as a computer there in '35, in '36 I was made a Party Chief. I realized that I didn't have enough education but I was handling the job all right. As a matter of fact they would send out fellows from the Colorado School of Mines, they were the only place that were offering anything in geophysics at that time. That was Ray Sparks you know. And they sent a young fellow out to be my boss and I trained him. Anyway it was a great experience because I just . . . .well in the first place I enjoyed it. The only thing I didn't enjoy too much was the moving. We moved 14 times in 22 years. That's when I came to Canada.

#074 DF: So you were in 1936 a Party Chief for Philips, what did you do next?

HF: Well, I was a Party Chief until. . . .Philips was up and down this way at that time on seismic and it was about a 6 or 8 month deal and they cut the crews down, so I went back to computing. This time I was lucky again because I got to work with Dr. Courtier, who was the Party Chief and I done all his work. So I think I worked about 2 ½ years with him and he would let me do the work, which I was happy to do because I was learning it all the time. And then I signed up for a correspondence course in radio. That's a two year course, which I have a diploma for but it's downstairs in the store room. Anyway then I was sent to South Texas for a short time, down in the Rio Grande valley and then back up to Guthrie Oklahoma, with an old boss that I'd known before who used to be with GRC. He and I got along very well. Then I was transferred to Norman, Oklahoma and I had the opportunity to take some courses from the University of Oklahoma there. Especially in. . . .well, I took my one course that Philco put on. Do you remember the old Philco company. They were promoting their equipment and they put this course on which was right up my alley also and then I took a course in mapping with a stereoscope and that sort of thing.

Well from there. . . we're getting into a long interview here. . .but I went with what was then Kerr-Lin which turned out to be Kerr McGee. After seven years with Philips I felt I'd kind of hit the end of the road and I knew Dean McGee very well because he was Chief Geologist when I first went to work for Philips. So I got on with them in 1941 just about the time of Pearl Harbour. Then I was with them for about 1 year and a half, they just had one crew. I was doing two jobs actually, well not two at the same time but I was a computer or observer, one or the other. Then they decided they didn't need a crew so they laid it off but they didn't lay me off, they put me in the Oklahoma City office. As it so happened, I was next door to McGee, they only had one floor in the building at that time, and I heard him talking one day to my old boss with Philips and that was about the time they were coming to Canada. And he said, no we don't need Farney very bad, we've got him doing some rework down here and I could hear all this you know, the doors were open. Pretty soon he got through talking and he said, do you want to go to Canada. This was 1942 and so I said. . . .I hardly knew where it was you know, and I said, sure because you didn't say no, you didn't want to go. And so we arrived up here in the spring of '42 and they had us down in Drumheller and worked for about two months down there and then moved to High River.

#124 DF: So let me ask you a couple of questions here, you were married by this point?
HF: Oh I was married and had a child when. . . .
DF: When you moved?
HF: Well, actually when I went to work for the GRC.
DF: Oh, really, so what year did you get married?
HF: I got married in 1931.
DF: Okay. And who did you marry?
HF: Clara Van Cicle.
DF: And where did you meet her?
HF: In high school.
DF: Really, great. So when you came to Canada to Drumheller, what were you doing there?
HF: I was working with the boss as Assistant Party Chief, Chief Computer, whatever you want to call it.
DF: And for what company?
HF: That was Heiland Exploration.
DF: Where more or less from Drumheller were you shooting?
HF: Mostly north and a little bit east. We shot all around there because it was pretty much an experiment. We had a contract with Shell and they were spotting around too, to see what they could find. We were there, I don't know just how long now but I would say about six weeks and then we moved to High River. It was still with Shell in the summer of '42.

#140 DF: And where were you shooting in the High River area?
HF: Mostly east and a little bit south of town.
DF: Did you ever do any shooting in Turner Valley?
HF: Not at that time. Later I did.

DF: Can you tell me about that, I know it's out of time line but. . . .?
HF: Well, that was after I formed Farney Exploration Company and we done quite a few lines out there for various companies, one for Royalite. We did quite a bit of work for Royalite and also we did some for Sun Oil out in the same area.
DF: Wasn't mostly that field just explored by drilling and not geophysics?
HF: Well, originally it was, definitely. There wasn't such a thing as seismic at that time. Well, you know there's some spots in there, there's seven miles of overthrusting and you can imagine what an earthquake that would make. But anyway, what they were trying to do was find another Turner Valley, which of course, we didn't find. The summer or '42 we did discover Jumping Pound. Shell did, of course, we were working under contract.

#156 DF: Did you shoot seismic there?
HF: Yes.
DF: And they drilled on your seismic information?
HF: Yes, mainly. Of course they didn't have any other. At that time we were just working dips because you couldn't follow a bed very far. Cec Cheshire, he was the Chief Geophysicist then for Shell.
DF: So how long were you in High River?
HF: About August I think. And all of a sudden they got a job in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. So they said, we'd like you to go down there. So I on loan from Kerr McGee all this time you see, so in the fall of '42 I beetled off to Cape Breton Island and I ran a crew over there for a short time for Dr. Whitehead who was a professor of Geology at MIT at that time and he got the idea there could be oil in Cape Breton so he organized this oil company but he was wrong.

#174 DF: How did you get to Cape Breton?
HF: Well, I went on a train, but the crew drove up from Louisiana. The headquarters of the company was in Shreveport. I went up by train until I got to Boston, that was on a Sunday and trains didn't run across the border on Sunday. So I had to fly from there to Moncton, New Brunswick and get on another train. We was up there about. . . I think I was there about five weeks and Dr. Whitehead was looking over my shoulder all the time. Our results were horrible.
DF: Why was that?
HF: Well, it's all solid sandstone for one thing and we didn't have the equipment to drill through it to get our charge off down there. And when you'd shoot one it would go up just like a shotgun barrel. We didn't get much energy down and sometimes we'd get the odd dip, what looked like dip so you had to use your imagination a lot trying to interpret it. But Dr. Whitehead said, that's exactly what I thought it was. I was just playing one Sunday and then I thought, I'll draw up a bunch of these dips and see what I come up with. First thing I knew he was looking over my shoulder and he said, my gosh that's just like what I thought it would be. Of course, whether it is or whether it isn't I don't know to this day. I tried to explain I was just toying with it but he wouldn't believe it because it happened to tie into what he thought.

#195 DF: So where did you shoot these lines?
HF: We were in the town of Wycogama. It's right on the lake you know, Cape Breton Island is kind of a horseshoe with the lake in the middle.
DF: Brador, I think that's the name of the lake.
HF: Yes, there's a town of that name too.
DF: So you were shooting along there.
HF: Yes. Well, there's one big mountain on Cape Breton Island and while we were there one of the military planes crashed on it. Anyway I was there five weeks and Kerr McGee wanted me back in Oklahoma by this time so I left the crew there and went to Oklahoma. And they I think lasted about a week or so afterwards and then they moved out too. That was a great experience and of course, in 1942, it was war time. I've got some old movies of the loading of all these boats in the Halifax Harbour which I shouldn't have taken.

#212 DF: That's right, under war time conditions.
HF: I never done any harm with them so. . .
DF: Good. So where did you go next?
HF: I went back with Kerr McGee to Oklahoma and they sent me out. . . .first of all they said, move your wife and son to Hugad???, Arkansas because that's where you'll be going. That's just a wide place in the road really, an old sawmill town is what it was, the company owned everything. But anyway, when I got here then my wife and son were now there, he was in school, he was in second grade or something and they said, well, we've got a job to do out in western Oklahoma, we want you out there for awhile. So out there for I went for about 3 or 4 weeks and then they said, come back to Oklahoma City. Finally I did get to Hugad. I hadn't been there very long until the boss walks in and he said. . . .no, he called I guess and he said, we need you in Colorado. Get on the first train, of course there weren't very many planes in those days, get on the first train and get to Colorado as quick as you can. So my wife said, I'm not going to take this trailer any farther, we're going to drive. So we ended up driving, it took an extra day that way but when we got there the fellow said, what are you doing here, we weren't expecting you for 3 or 4 days. We done a little job there east of Boulder in the foothills and was there most of the winter of 1942 as I remember. I had been paid better by Heiland than I was with Kerr McGee and I couldn't quite figure this out. So I propositioned McGee so he said, you know, there was tow other fellows that he considered in the same bracket as me, he said, if I give you a raise I've got to give these guys a raise and I can't do all this. So Mr. Freeman with Heiland heard of all this and he said, what are you doing working for this cheap outfit for anyhow, why don't you come to work for me. So then I went to work for Heiland instead of Kerr McGee and eventually came to Canada although we worked in southwest Oklahoma for quite awhile. Then in '45, they sent me to Canada again and then back in the wintertime to Oklahoma. The next spring, this would be 1946, they said, do you want to go to Canada. I said, yes, I want to go to Canada but I'd sure like to stay this time. So they said okay. So I spent then with Heiland until '46, actually the spring of '47, just before Leduc came in and a friend of mine that I had worked with at GRC, he said

one day, why don't we start a company. He was an instrument man and he said, you can take care of the office and I'll take care of the instruments. I never even had an idea but he had the idea.

#272 DF: What was his name?

HF: His name was. . .gee I can't give you his first name, we called him Keg, Keg Smith. Anyway, so he said, what you do is quit your job and come into Calgary and organize things and I'll stay working until you get it organized and then I'll turn in my resignation, so I did that.

DF: So where were you at this point, were you out in the field somewhere?

HF: I was in Wetaskiwin.

DF You were in Wetaskiwin. And the family's following you all these places in the trailer.

HF: No I didn't have a trailer. Never did own one except for luggage and that sort of thing. Where was I now?

DF: So you were going to start the company and then when you got it going he was going to quit.

HF: Yes. But when it come time for him to quit he said, my wife Helen doesn't want to invest our life's savings and here I was out in the deep water and no way to get back. So in a more or less hurry up deal made a deal with a fellow who used to be with Heiland who has some seismic drills and a friend of his and we formed what was known as Northwest Seismic Surveys Ltd.

#297 DF: And what year was that?

HF: 1947. Incidentally it was the second contracting company to be formed in Canada.

DF: The first one being?

HF: CEC. That's Cheshire Exploration Co. Anyway I knew people in the States that I could run my face for a set of instruments you see, so I went and had them build the instruments and when I got back up here, I had a deal with these other two chaps that I would have control of the company, one share more than anybody else. When I got back up, one of the fellows, his mother had money and he said, well we can't do that because mother's lawyer says we've got to have this three way split. Well at that point there wasn't much I could do but go with it. So I did but it just didn't work out. We made money the first month we operated and they figured that they had a gold mine so after about six weeks they started pressuring me to get out. Actually I was the only one that knew anything about geophysics of the three. But at that time Imperial Oil, they just wanted crews, they didn't care if you. . . and then everything went into the main office.

#324 DF: So you didn't have to interpret or anything, you just had run the lines.

HF: Well, we did but when they started out with them, they didn't. It was the Royalite branch of Imperial at that time. Anyway they got me out. I never had a happier day in my life as when I got out.

DF: So you weren't there but just a few weeks then?

HF: No, a few months. So I decided that I wanted to form my own company and I could run it

the way I wanted to. By that time I knew make money at it so I formed Farney Exploration. Then I of course, had to have another partner because I didn't have enough money.

DF: What year was this?

HF: The spring of '48. I had a law firm that I was dealing with, they believed in it so they put in enough money for me to get started which was not very much but I only had to give them 20% of the company so we never looked back from then.

#347 DF: How much did it cost you to set up a company in those days, like to buy the equipment and the trucks and so on.

HF: Well, it depends on how much of your face you're in.

DF: What do you mean by that?

HF: How big a debt you could get in.

DF: Okay but do you remember how much it cost to set it up?

HF: About $25 or 30,000. And that would include the trucks and the seismic equipment and the whole kit and caboodle. Of course, you could buy trucks for $1,900 a piece you know. And then when I got my first set of instruments I got it on a rental purchase basis from this old friend of mine who had amalgamated with another company in Dallas. It was one of those deals where you half of the rent, apply it against the principal and the other half didn't. Well, there was a little catch there because any credit that went across the border, there was 15% tax by the Canadian government. So I ended up paying half plus 15%. Of course, there was just a gap in there that you couldn't make any money at. They old Middleton Tait Insurance Co. here, I was getting my insurance through them and they kept pretty close track of me. One day Mr. Tait said, how are you doing, I said, I'd be doing fine but this load is killing me. So he said, it looks like a good deal to me, how much do you need, I said, I need $15,000. Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll loan you $15,000 for a year and if you can pay it off in that length of time, I'll only charge you $1,000 interest. Well I jumped at the chance and got the things paid off in the States and he was good at his word and so was I and so I finally got the first. . . and from then on it wasn't difficult because you had something to work with. Of course, instruments were developed more and more all the time. Because of the exchange there, every time I'd buy another set of instruments I'd get better instruments. So eventually I built it up to five crews in the wintertime, four in the summer, five in the winter. Then 17 years later I was approached by Teledyne, well it wasn't Teleldyne at the time, it was. . . I was going to say who it was, I can't think. . . anyway they sold out to Teledyne. They were just in the process of doing that at the time. I thought well, I've been in business 17 years now, this is the first chance I've had to sell, maybe I should take it. This was 1965. So I sold and then they sold it to Teledyne, which was the best break that any of us had. They bought three companies all at the same time up here and put them all together.

#411 DF: So that was a good turn for you then. Tell me some stories about those 17 years when you were in business, where did you get all those employees, did you train them yourself?

HF: I trained them myself.
DF: You did eh?
HF: Well, I started out with some fellows that I had worked with in the States and then from then on we trained them. There's still one of the fellows that we picked up in the Peace River country that's still in the business, well two of them as a matter of fact. One of them is in business for himself.
DF: So you were picking up farm boys?
HF: Yes. Picked up two of them in the Fairview area and they were just solid as rocks for years and years. This one fellow, every time I'd go out to see the crew, he'd keep me up till midnight asking questions. Now he has, well I don't know whether he still does or not but he had. . .I designed my own emblem for the company and he asked to use the same one.

#430 DF: So you were teaching them yourself, did you have any textbooks that you were using or did you write something up yourself or you were just teaching by experience?
HF: By experience mainly. Questions and answers.
DF: Now you had taken some correspondence courses in radio work and so on.
HF: Mapping. Well, enough to get my engineering license and everything. [phone rang]. . . Now where were we?
DF: Well, we were talking about those 17 years when you ran your own company, did you have long contracts.
HF: Yes, I was fortunate to have one contract with Imperial Oil that lasted 7 years straight. I started out with Royalite and they were owned by Imperial. I had two crews with Royalite for some time but not as long a period, I think about 2 or 3 years, then they sold out to the Bronfman brothers.

#454 DF: Did you do much work up in the north?
HF: Quite a bit. We worked right up to Norman Wells at one time, in the wintertime. But I have never seen a crew so unhappy. I had a little airplane that I used to fly up and back and I flew up there and when I left the Party Chief cried, he wanted to come back so bad.
DF: What kind of airplane did you have?
HF: I had three as a matter of fact, the first one was a Stinson and then I traded it for a Cessna, bought a new Cessna in 1952 and then in '55 I got a larger Cessna, the 180.
DF: When did you buy your Stinson?
HF: '47 I believe it was.
DF: Did you fly these planes yourself?
HF: Yes, until. . . the reason I got the pilot at all was because I had a job with a scintillation counter that required a lot of low flying and I didn't like low flying. So I hired him and he was also a flight engineer so we kept him a long time.
DF: What kind of instrument was that you mentioned?
HF: Scintilometer.
#487 DF: And it's an aerial method of doing seismic work?

HF: No, not of doing seismic, it's mainly a great place to discover ground water. That's what it does the best, but what it was, you'd fly reasonable low over the area and it had a recorder in it that would record the ups and downs of the readings. That's what they use for uranium you know. It's especially good at that. At one time the government had a 5 cent an acre, you could get all this land up north for 5 cents an acre providing that you did an equal amount of some kind of exploration on it. Well, companies heard about me having this scintilometer so anything to spend that 5 cents. So we did a lot of work, fly up back and forth across a section, a mile apart.

DF: Grid it out.

HF: Yes, and record and everything. As I say we just did a marvelous job recording ground water. That's mainly what we got. It satisfied the government so everybody was happy.

#517 DF: Who else did you work for in the north?

HF: I worked for Sun Oil for awhile. I worked for Amerada and Texaco.

DF: Any adventures with those planes?

HF: One, the old Stinson quit on my over the bush, the gasoline froze up so I had to find a place to land. There was a frozen river, the Athabasca I believe it was so I glided over there and set it down on the river and got my gas line thawed out and took off and went on to Edmonton. My flight plan was so that I didn't even have to tell the D.O.T. that I'd had any problems, which I'd had plenty. I'd never made a dead stick landing before but you learn pretty fast when your life depends on it.

DF: Was it tricky making that dead stick landing?

HF: Well, you have to go in a little faster than you would normally. And of course, things that I couldn't see was the snow drifts on the river and so I went in and I did it perfect I thought. And I just hit the river and I hit one of those snow drifts and up I went about 30 feet in the air. And then I was out of power so held back on the wheel and wait for the bump.

End of tape.

DF: Okay, so you were by yourself when that happened?

HF: When I got ready to go after putting some Zorbit in the gasoline tank, the engine was running fine but then this time, the skis had frozen fast to the snow and it wouldn't move. So then I had to take my little hatchet and go out to the riverbank and cut some brush and take my mittens and claw down and stick this brush under each ski. Finally got it broke loose and I got away.
DF: What did you put in to thaw the gasoline?
HF: And outfit used to make little cans. . .they called it Zorbit, and it would thaw out . . .
DF: A gas line antifreeze?
HF: Yes. There was a long time we used that in the gas for cars up there too.
DF: Because it can get cold up there.
HF: Yes, it can. This was just south of Lesser Slave Lake and you know there's nothing but timber up there. Timber and a river.

#013 DF: Did you ever fly into Fort Simpson?
HF: Once. I had a pilot with me then but I was doing the flying because we would take turns. I guess the only scary incident we had really, when I was doing the flying, he was with me, but it don't do any good when you don't have the extra wheel in to have an extra pilot. We were coming back from the Peace River country and we got over to Drayton Valley and the weather socked right in and there was no airport at Drayton Valley at that time. So we kept coming and following section lines until, actually we came to Calgary and I had to fly around a microwave tower out north of Calgary, that's how low we had to fly. When we got in, I got in at the airport and I couldn't get out, my back was so tense, I couldn't get out of the plane. That's about the only. . . well, I had another scary experience, when I had my wife, I don't know whether Don was with us. . .no, he came down in a big plane later. We went to Kansas in '49 with this old Stinson because I figured I'm a great pilot, I can do anything, which is the way people get killed. I got trapped above some cloud and I wasn't licensed for it. . . in North Dakota and ice started to form on the wings and I didn't realize that I was gradually pulling back, I thought I was flying level and all of a sudden it went into a spin. And as quick as it went into a spin, I'd been trained to know how to get out of a spin and I kicked it out of the spin. By that time I was below the cloud. The Lord interfered a little I think. That was a scary experience. My wife was with me then. We had a thermos bottle in the back and it ended up on her lap. So the next morning, I had to land in a farmer's field because it was getting dark, that was at Saanich, North Dakota, and the farmer saw the lights when we came in and he came out into the field and picked us up. So I tied it down and left it that night, went into the hotel. The next morning I needed gas and didn't know where I was going to get it. So I said, any place around here I can get some gasoline. Well, this farmer says, there's a crop duster over here, he'll have some gas. So I went over there and there was no place to land except on the road. So I had to land on the road, taxi up to his little bailiwick and buy some gas from him and take off again. My wife wasn't very happy about some of that trip.

#051 DF: Now how did you get around in the north when you weren't flying, did you have

track vehicles, just conventional trucks. . . ?

HF: We had both, to start with it was conventional trucks. Then for some of the work that you couldn't get in on conventional trucks, we had the track equipment. Mainly made by. . . well, we made our own. As far as tractors were concerned we took Fordson Tractors and put an extra sprocket head of the big wheels and then put the tractor on the whole thing and it worked reasonable well. But then I got some of these Bombardier Trailers with air tracks on them to pull with this tractor.

DF: And how did that work?

HF: Pretty well. Except of course when it got muddy in the spring, nothing would go then. We had one Bombardier had skis on the front and tracks on the back. It was a real lemon, it was always broke down. So we never used it anymore. As a matter of fact, there was a forest fire coming and some big guys went in and pulled the darn thing out and I said, why.

#068 DF: Was this about the same time Bruce Nodwell was building his vehicles?

HF: He was starting.

DF: Starting at that same time. But you were making your own, just modifying the Fordson?

HF: Yes. Little Ford tractors. I've got some pictures of them some place around here. They worked exceptionally well for that day and time. Of course, we had to have light weight drills. Well there wasn't anybody making a light weight drill. So we wanted to make an auger drill. So I had to. . .I've got a pattern that's around here someplace on the auger drill. A drive off of a small regular drill, I took the draw works off of it and mounted it, and then had this special gadget that you used to drive the auger. Seismic Service Supply built them for me and I think it was just, I guess, 2 or 3 years. The trouble with it was it didn't circulate any water at all and it would get gummed up. Sometimes you'd twist them off. But that was all in the learning stages.

#081 DF: And you were running these off the PTO's on the tractor?

HF: No, we had a little Wisconsin engine that we mounted on the front.

DF: And did you move camp with these track vehicles or what did you do for camp out in the bush?

HF: Eventually of course, we were using these camp trailers. But we pulled in, in a bulldozer.

DF: Anything else from those years of running your own company, anything else stand out?

HF: I'm sure there's a lot of them but I can't think. One where we were working for Amerada up there and they had just developed a new plastic cable for seismic work. It looked beautiful in the summertime but in the wintertime it would get as brittle as glass and when you bent it, it would break. So that wasn't very satisfactory. Another problem we had, I guess they still have is with fox. They see that bright coloured cable and they go along and nip it off you know.

#097 DF: Really, foxes would eat it eh.

HF: Well not eat it, just bite the thing in two.

DF: What colour was it?

HF: Orange. So they had to develop a cable business too. And it had to be something that didn't smell good for the fox. Those wires were very fine you know. When they nipped them or just cut one in two, it was a devil of a job to get it back together.
DF: Not easy to splice?
HF: No, it wasn't then, I don't know how they do it now.
DF: What else did you learn in those years of contracting? How did you get the contracts, were you always out selling?
HF: I did most of it. Later on I hired another fellow from the States who was good at selling a small company. I'd take care of the large companies, he'd take care of the small ones. His real name was Ronald Davis but everybody called him Dolly.
DF: So how much of your business did you get from the majors and how much from small companies?
HF: Well, the small companies were always small, short jobs. And the majors at that time were good contracts. I would say with one exception, Sun Oil. I couldn't get along with them. Other than that, Amerada was a good one, of course, Amerada was my old company really. It was GRC at one time, or they owned GRC and I knew quite a few of the fellows.

#118 DF: So you were here before Leduc, did you do any seismic work that. . . ?
HF: Unfortunately no. Texaco, I was working for them and they run lines practically to Leduc and quit. I don't know whether we would have found it with the method we were using or not because we were just shooting on every mile corner and it's pretty hard to correlate that stuff. It's got to be very good records or you can't. I did find a structure out at Ponoka on an Indian reserve that turned out to be a structure but it was dry. I had the opportunity to work with a lot of good people. Dr. Howells was with Texaco at that time and Dr. Hugh Beach was also with them. Howells been dead many years now. I don't know what happened to Beach, he was transferred to the States and I kind of lost track of him.

#133 DF: So how is it that you came to stay in Canada?
HF: How did I come to stay. I liked it. That was mainly it. And the opportunity was so much greater here than they were in the states at that time because the competition wasn't anywhere near. Here all the contractors got along with one another, down there they fight because everybody is jockeying for position.
DF: And why was there no jockeying for position here?
HF: Because there was plenty of work. There was later on, when I sold out in 1960-65 it. . .
DF: Tougher times then.
HF: Yes, tougher.
DF: Did you have to be more competitive in that period?
HF: Yes and no. Some of the companies then were going for what they call a turnkey job. I never would go for that because you can lose your shirt in it. You get into a bad going and they say, well more power to you, go ahead and lose.
DF: Describe for us what a turnkey job is.
HF: Well a turnkey means you take a job for x number of dollars and you do it. And of course,

you're taking all the chances. First of all that the drilling is good, secondly that you can get results, all these things. That's about the time that I wanted to get out because they just. . . Well, I bid on one, up at Mayo, up in the Territories and I worked a month or so just on that bid, because at that time you had to just take your equipment in, like bulldozers and things like that, and figure you're going to leave them when you get through. Oil tanks and all that sort of thing. So I figured it out and finally I came up with a price and they said, well you're too high. So I said, that's the closest I could figure and still make money I think, so anyway they gave it to a larger contractor for less money. But then they went back, when things started to get tough, they went back and started to beg for more money. And they had to keep divvying up to keep the job going. So one of the supervisors told me later, he said, we could have taken your job cheaper than we got that one. I was glad they didn't take mine as far as that was concerned. Because that was a long way from home at that time. Well, it still is.

#166 DF: So did you become a Canadian at some point?
HF: 1965.
DF: And what made you decide to do that?
HF: Taxes.
DF: How so?
HF: Well, they had passed some sort of a law in the States, where if you made over $20,000 in a foreign country, you were liable for taxes down there. Of course, Canada wouldn't stand for that, you had to pay both countries. Well, that was about the time I was getting ready to sel out and I couldn't have sold at all under those circumstances because I would end up in the hole. So I just took out my citizenship. I was six weeks without a country.
DF: How so?
HF: I had to resign my U. S. citizenship to get in and the I had to wait for the Canadian citizenship to go through. Now you can get dual citizenship, no problem. But at that time you couldn't

#179 DF: Did you do a lot of work in the Peace River area?
HF: Yes, considerable, mainly for Imperial Oil. East of Peace River, south of Peace River, Grande Prairie, all of that area there.
DF: Did you find anything interesting there.
HF: Yes, but we didn't take the credit for it actually at that time because Imperial was taking everything and doing their own interpretation. So we shot it but what they got in the end, we never did know.
DF: So they had you doing work for them, their own crews, they'd bring it all in to Calgary to the main office and . . .?
HF: Peace River, then Calgary. They had a big office in Peace River at that time.

#192 DF: Why did you last so long in the contracting business, lots of others went under?
HF: Well, I hope it was good management. I think it mainly was because we did excellent work and we were dedicated to do that. Of course, then management comes in later. I

think that basically was the reason because one of my partners, I'm not going to give his name, in my first venture with Northwest Seismic Surveys come to me after they run out and they decided the needed me. So he come back and he said, Harold, if you'll come back with us, there's so much work out here, we'll just milk the industry for all it's worth and we'll get rich in a few years. I said, no thanks I want to be able to hold my head up and walk down the street.

DF: Good for you. So excellent work was part of it. You said you only had five crews at a maximum, was that part of it too, because some companies really expand.

HF: We didn't want to do that because five was almost too much. We had a good bunch of people, as a matter of fact, such a good bunch of people that I used most of them for pallbearers when my wife passed away. They were very reliable but you can only get so many of those kind of people. So when it got to the point where I had to stretch that I said, no that's not profitable anymore because then your reputation goes down. And I think in the contracting business like that. Although maybe not anymore, I don't know . . .it's a cutthroat business anymore, but I think integrity had to do as much with it as anything else.

#218 DF: No when you sold out, was that the end of your career or did you work in. . . .

HF: Well, I worked two years with the Teledyne company. I'm trying to think what the name of it was before they sold to Teledyne. When I sold, I sold to Independent Exploration Company in Houston and then they sold the whole kit and caboodle to Teledyne. Of course, I knew they were about to do that before I did the other. Three of us had gone together and formed a company called Magnetic Reductions, which was a playback system for, at that time, one of the few in Calgary, the only one I guess. It was Nance Exploration and Geophysical Consultants and myself went in together. We built a building that's still standing out at 62nd Avenue S. E. and we had Magnetic Reductions in the basement and then when we all sold it at the same time we put the geophysics up on the top floor. I don't know who owns it anymore. I bought the land and got the architect to build that building. There was a farmhouse on it at that time. We had to move it off. Just two blocks east of Centre St. on 62nd Ave.

#243 DF: What else have you enjoyed about your career in this industry?

HF: The people mainly because they're a very good bunch of people in those days because they all stuck together. You had friends all over the country that you had worked with at one time or another. That of course, doesn't exist anymore either. People keep the job 2 or 3 weeks and they're through.

DF: So how did you meet these friends, through the associations and so on?

HF: Working on the same crews with them. We'd land in a town, we didn't know anybody so we'd all hang together because we didn't know whether we were going to be there a week, two weeks or two years. I know when we moved into Guthrie, Oklahoma and my bass said, now, be careful you don't buy very many groceries because we're not going to be very long. We were there a year. And then moved into Childress Texas one time and they said, well, we've got a long job out there. We were there four days.

#261 DF: What have you enjoyed most about. . . .did you keep learning about the science?
HF: Oh yes. And I kept reading as much as I could on it. And of course, working with I think, about 5 or 6 fellows with doctorates, that helped me a lot because they weren't trying to teach me but they were.
DF: Right. And did you bring in all the latest technology as it became available?
HF: As much as possible, yes, financially possible.
DF: Now it was all analogue during your period wasn't it?
HF: Yes, there wasn't any digital. That's when I sold. Where a set of equipment went from about $30,000 up to over $100,000 and I said, this is getting to be a little bit too steep. And then of course, I had the offer at the same time pretty much. Everything was going to computers. When we sold out down there, in Texas, they had a mainframe computer, that's the only computer we had and everything had to go down there. Then they had mistakes, mistakes, mistakes all over to start with.

#278 DF: Tell me about this Magnetic Reduction Company, what was that all about?
HF: It took the tapes from the field, they were analogue tapes but they were magnetic. And we would the compile cross sections and what not.
DF: So another level of interpretation? And you did that for the companies as well? Did you do that for the majors, didn't they usually do that in house.
HF: Not all of them. They got a lot of work from us but they also had their own equipment. Everybody at that time had a different brand of equipment.
DF: Were they compatible or were they slightly different, doing different things?
HF: They were slightly different. There was Carter Oil Company lab in the States built a lot of instruments that Imperial bought and they swore by them. I had to buy one of the sets myself. That was one of the first magnetic tape machines.
DF: Did you figure out a way to move the information from the paper record to the magnietic record?
HF: Well, we didn't put it on paper.. . . .well, we did too I guess.
DF: But the early stuff was on paper wasn't it?
HF: Oh yes, as a matter of fact, some of the earliest, they used what they called a string galvanometer and the records were black with white lines on them. Because they would shine through that wire, there was twelve little wires in a space about this big that you could hardly see.

#301 DF: 3/4 of an inch?
HF: Less than that and the there was a harp about this long and when the current would get it, it would wiggle and they'd shine a light through that. And of course, our timing system wasn't very good about that time too. When I first went to work for Imperial, they said, we want to mount a clock in your camera and I said, what for. They said, well, to check the tuning fork. And they had just a plain old watch and they'd take the back off of it and shine a light through to the balance wheel and it would make shadows on it. And they mounted that, I had one of those things for a long time. You could tell, it was pretty close,

if the tuning fork was off, it would tell you.

DF: Pretty simple system eh?

HF: One of the things that I mentioned, in the early days, the galvanometers instead of being electrically damped, were damped as Nuge Oil and they were boxes that looked like Ford Model T coils and they had a little wing on them so the oil would damp as it moved. It had a mirror of course, it would shine a light onto the record.

#321 DF: And what kind of oil was that?

HF: Nuge oil they called it, I don't know what kind of oil that is, but that's what they called it.

DF: So that was the dampening system?

HF: That was the dampening system for the galvanometers. We used oil in the geophones, just regular motor oil, different weights, depending on the time of year. There was another thing too about the early days. Geophones wouldn't stay in their frequency because they had a little spring on each end, just square with a hole cut out in the middle, and four screws. And that would be up at the top and one at the bottom. Those springs had slots, you could move them about that far with the screws and every Saturday that was a job that we had to do, we had to get all our phones on frequency because they'd get jarred off.

DF: How so, just carrying them.

HF: Handling them. And they had to be set real carefully. The boys would generally set on the back of the truck and try to set them up as they went down the road and if one fell over, well, it could knock it off frequency. So we had to check those every weekend. That was just part of the job. Take them out, spray gasoline on them, get all the oil off, set them on a brick and then we had a little double throw, double switch with a flashlight battery on it and we'd pull the coil to the top of that switch, throw the switch and it would record in the camera, the frequency. Sometimes if you'd get a contrary one, you could fool for 2 or 3 hours just on one geophone.

#351 DF: Just trying to get it back in shape eh?

HF: Yes. Some of them didn't get off frequency very much and others did for some reason.

DF: Any other details of that early instrumentation. What kind of charges were you using, how much dynamite?

HF: Well, of course, that depended on the area. All the way from say, 5 pounds up to 50 pounds. And they weren't as sensitive then as they are now, so they had to use more dynamite. Some places we didn't have drilling equipment to drill deep enough. All these were variables.

DF: The drilling equipment, was that usually your own or was that something you contracted out.

HF: When I was in business for myself I contracted all the drilling because that's an industry on it's own . I contracted the Seaman Brothers for awhile. They had seismic drills.

#367 DF: Were those percussion or rotary?

HF: Rotary.

DF: None of the early ones were percussion, like water well.

HF: Real early ones. The only thing that I ever worked with in those, was when they would

get in an area that they couldn't drill with rotary. They they'd pound them down with the old splitter.

DF: You mentioned the Seaman brothers, which ones of them did you work with?

HF: Don mainly.

DF: Can you just tell me a little bit about their story, were they not all three involved in that in the beginning?

HF: They were all three involved to start with in the seismic business and then Doc and B.J. got into the big hole thing. And for a long time, Don took care of the seismic end of it.

DF: By big hole, you mean drilling and oil company work and so on? Yes. But they all three started out as drilling contractors?

HF: Their father owned the machine shop, that's how they got started. I remember the day that one of the instrument men came into my office and he said, do you know the Seaman boys, I said, no, he said, well, they're going places and they did.

#386 DF: Yes, they did, didn't they? Don Seaman is on my list of people to interview but I thought of maybe getting all three of them together to talk about those very early days.

HF: I don't know whether you could get Doc or not but you could probably get B.J.

DF: Yes, but that would be a good story, wouldn't it, get them talking about the early days.

HF: Yes, they had some great experiences. Don was just an exceptional guy to do business with. I never did do any business with B.J. or Doc really. But Don's a good type.

DF: Do you have any regrets about your career, anything you wish you'd have done, places you'd have gone overseas or. . . .?

HF: Not really. Jobs would come up occasionally where you could bid on them overseas but I never went for it.

DF: There was a fellow who used to do a lot of cartoons about the geophysical industry?

HF: Yes, Chief Edwards.

#404 DF: Do you know anything about his story?

HF: Yes, quite a bit, he worked for me for a little while.

DF: Did he? Where did he come from?

HF: One of the reserves, I think up northwest somewhere, I can't remember just exactly where. As a matter of fact downstairs I've got a painting or two of his.

DF: Do you have some of them, could we take pictures of them after the interview?

HF: Yes. He made a mural for us. We lived in Britannia for awhile and when we built that house, we had one wall in the family room, I said, you know, I'd like a picture. You couldn't buy anything big enough so I propositioned him and he'd never done a big one either but he did a good job. Brought his sleeping bag, he wouldn't sleep in our bed, he brought his sleeping bag and bunked right in the family room. He did this picture in about 30 hours. Unfortunately I had him put it on the wall, instead of put in on canvas on the wall. Well when we got ready to sell the house, we couldn't move it. So I had a photographer come out, made a picture about so big which I have down in the family room here so I could preserve it. And you know, the people who bought the house painted

over it.

#433 DF: That's too bad. What did he do on the crews?

HF: He was a helper. He never was very much interested in the crews, he was always interested in his art.

DF: do you know whatever became of him?

HF: He died. He had problems with alcohol for one thing. I don't know how come he got in jail but he was in Lethbridge jail for awhile. He wrote me a letter when he was down there. He's made some portraits of Canadian Prime Ministers and he was trying to peddle those. The Chief was. . .his name was Harold you know, he said, just call me the Chief.

DF: How long did he work for you?

HF: 6 or 8 months I think.

DF: Any stories about him.

HF: I can't think of any. Typical type. There's lots of stories but I can't think of any. He was a good guy, I liked him very much. He was his own worst enemy. Anything else you want to know?

DF: Well, thinking back over your career, I've given you a couple of weeks to think about this, anything else you'd like to say.

HF: I'd say you're lucky you got me, just before the good Lord did. I've kind of wanted to do this for some time because I figured I'd had experiences that nobody in Canada had. Which I'm sure of that because I started so early in the industry, the industry was less than four years old when I started.

#477 DF: That's amazing isn't it.

HF: Yes. One of the things I was going to mention. When I got this job to start with, with GRC, they started me out at $125 a month and boy that was a lot of money in those days, at least I thought it was. One of the fellows called me over and he said, Harold, you know, you've got a real good job but it won't last, probably 3 or 4 years, we'll get it all done.

DF: 3 or 4 years eh. Any other changes you've seen, you've basically seen this whole industry. Anything that just surprised you about the development or . . . ?

HF: I think the most surprised was when they developed the transistor. Texas Instrument did that you know, and I went to a convention, I think it was Houston or Dallas and they were demonstrating the transistor. They had a radio with all the transistors in it, submerging it in water and all that sort of thing, and it would still play. That was the greatest thing that ever happened. It was so much more stable than the vacuum tube. We used to have all vacuum tubes in the instruments. You get that many amplifiers with all those tubes, one would give you a little trouble and it was a devil to find. Some of the guys would just kick them and hoped that worked. The old plugs that we had, they were called Jones plugs and they were a big plug with wide prongs and the didn't always make good contact. If you'd pull the amplifier out and shove it back and forth a time or two, sometimes it would come back to life.

#524 DF: Just because of the contacts. Well, that's still an interesting thing about the

electronics industry. If your computer doesn't work, you just turn it off and turn it on again. Sometimes that's all. Isn't that funny.

HF: That's right. Transistors are kind of funny animals anyway.

DF: Aren't they. Well, Mr Farney we are so pleased that you did stick around to be interviewed and we hope you have good health. I'm glad to see you've recovered from your. . . .

HF: Yes, that was a pretty close call I had.

DF: Time in the hospital with pneumonia. So at this time, I'd like to take the opportunity on behalf of the Petroleum Industry Oral History project to thank you so very much for letting us interview you today and we'll end the interview at this time.

HF: Thank you very much.