

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: E. O. Perry

INTERVIEWER: Nadine Mackenzie

DATE: October 1984

NM: This is Nadine Mackenzie speaking. I am interviewing Mr. Perry. Mr. Perry, thank you for having accepted to participate in our project. Can you tell me, when and where were you born?

EP: I was born in Liverpool, or Osestey???, Osestrey, I should say.

NM: Which year.

EP: Osestrey is a small place outside of Liverpool, that's where I was born, Osestrey. That's the way it's registered anyway.

NM: And which year was this?

EP: In 19. . . just a minute while I think here. . . 1903.

NM: What did your parents do?

EP: My dad was an engraver on tombstones. That's what he worked at, he came to Calgary and worked at. On putting engraving on the stones, that's what his work was. Till they went out ???, then we farmed. They went out to Morin and got land and started farming. That's would be about 1909 I think, was when they went to Morin to start farming.

NM: How old were you when they came to Canada.

EP: I would be 3 years old when they came out here.

NM: And then you went to school?

EP: In Morin, yes. That's right, Morin. It was just a village you know, when the railroad went through. My first year, my grandfather taught me because there was no school. So he learned me to read and write, that's right.

NM: And then where did you go to school?

EP: Morin. And then later on I came in to Garber's??? Business College here and took a course at Garber's. That was later on of course.

NM: How many years was this course?

EP: Well, I went to school until I passed into Grade 6 then I came in and took a course at Garber's and that was it. I didn't go to school anymore.

NM: What about your summer jobs? Did you have any?

EP: No, not really, when it was summertime I stayed at the farm and helped them to farm. So I stayed at the farm until I got into business. Then of course, I got into the butcher business first.

#031 NM: Why?

EP: There was the fellow there that was in the butcher business and he was going to go bankrupt. I had a little money so I bought an interest in it and I started in the butcher business and then I went into the grocery business and from that, into the machinery

business. That was what my main business was as years went by, was in the machinery business. I started just myself, then I wound up with about 20 employees later on as it went along.

NM: That's very good. How old were you at the time, when you started in business?

EP: About 16 I think.

NM: That was very early.

EP: Yes, I was 16.

NM: Your butcher business, was it in Calgary or was it in Morin?

EP: No, in Morin. I started in Morin, that's where I lived, in Morin.

NM: And the grocery too?

EP: And then I went into the grocery and then into the machinery business. I had quite a big business later on as it grew. Then I branched out to Drumheller so I had it in Morin and Drumheller then. That's the way it worked out at the time.

NM: How was Drumheller at the time, it must have been very small?

EP: Very small, it was just a coal mining town, it was small yes. It's like anything else, everything grew out there in that period of time, after the war finished, then things started to move there.

NM: Then what did you do?

EP: Well, I just stayed in that farm machinery business for quite a long while. I should have reviewed this, I didn't think anything about this until morning. I was in the machinery business out there for close to 40 years, maybe a little more but 40 years anyway.

NM: And what was your business mainly, what was it?

EP: Farm machinery, selling farm machinery, that's what I did. I was a salesman, I didn't have an area salesman, I did all my selling myself.

NM: Did you travel across Alberta or were people coming to you?

EP: No, people came in. . .of course, that's just around the Morin-Drumheller area, I didn't sell machinery down here or anything like that, just at Morin and Drumheller. That's where the business was.

NM: So people would come to you.

EP: They would come in there from Hanna and all around that area, to where I was. But that was at Morin. And then I later brought Drumheller out and had a shop there you see. So I had more people working for me. I just built up a farm machinery business, that was it.

NM: Very good. And then what happened?

EP: Well, our family had decided. . .I had a real good boy, Gordon was my son, but he died of leukemia and I planned on him taking over. When that happened I decided I'd sell out then after that. So I come into Calgary here. I had 2 sons and got into what they call the washing machine business, selling washers and dryers in town, for Allen, got him started, he's still running the business. So he puts washers and dryers in homes and what not, all the time. So he seemed to like it and it's gone real good for him, he's done real good.

#067 NM: So then you came to Calgary and what did you do then?

EP: Well, when I come to Calgary I did do nothing. I mean as far as working. I had a lot of things to look after, accounting and buying and selling of shares. I got into Ranger Oil. I

kept busy all the time.

NM: How did you get into the oil business?

EP: Well I just met Mr. Pierce and ???, they came up here. I was in this other company and I decided I'd just stay in it, in the oil business, with the crew that had bought out Maygill??? you see. So I'm still here.

NM: Can you tell me a bit more about Maygill?

EP: It was an oil company started up in Calgary and it went to Wes Maygill and it was just a small company to start with and it finally got absorbed by other companies, Maygill did. Then Ranger come in and you know, that's where Ranger took over you see, Maygill just disappeared in. . .

NM: It got absorbed.

EP: Yes, it got absorbed. But Maygill was started before it became Ranger. Going back into the time, it was set up as Maygill and it went by the boards.

NM: Do you remember, who started Maygill?

EP: No, I wouldn't want to say because there were 2 or 3 in that before we got into it and I wouldn't know, wouldn't want to say because my memory isn't good enough for that now, I'd have to look it up and say. It was Maygill but before it was Maygill, whatever it was. . . I couldn't tell you.

NM: And then you met Jack Pierce.

EP: Yes, and Mr. & Mrs. Pierce, Jack's mother and some people from the States, these other 2 fellows, they came up here looking for, they wanted to get in the oil business. So they got into this. . .well, it was Maygill. . .it wasn't being operated right but I don't want to put that in. It was not run right, so I got in then with them. That's my second go round then you see. But don't put that in, anything about that, because it wouldn't be right. But that's what happened. He wasn't running it right and it just disappeared, Maygill, into what is now Ranger Oil.

NM: So how did you help Jack Pierce?

EP: How did I meet him?

NM: Yes.

EP: I just met him here when he came up here to Calgary. He was looking for a business to get into, that's what they came here for, these people. And I just happened to meet them and that was it.

NM: That was it.

EP: Yes. I didn't know them, they didn't know me, it was just a matter of I met them here then, so I stayed.

#100 NM: How long ago was this?

EP: That's something else I'd have to look up. It's been quite awhile you know. I was still in business out in Morin then. It's over 20 years ago. Somebody here would know that, when they started.

NM: It's all right.

EP: I couldn't tell you that. I got in with them, that's all I know, that's a lot of years ago. But I've been here ever since.

NM: So you have seen the whole development of Ranger Oil?

EP: Yes, I've seen it from Day 1, yes.

NM: Did you travel too, or did you stay in Calgary?

EP: I stayed in Calgary. I've been over to England to our office over there, we set up over there. You know, like that, down to the States, but I haven't, no, I haven't travelled a lot. I have a place in Phoenix, Arizona that I live in all winter. I go down there and live there in the winter time.

NM: What a good idea, leave Calgary in the winter.

EP: Yes, that's what I do in the winter.

NM: So what was your role in the company?

EP: I was just a Director. I'm not an oil man you see. I've been a Director ever since they've started but I have no job, because I didn't need a job. So I just was a Director on the Board because my . . . I guess you'd have to say I'm a business, is what I am, more than anything, I'm no creator or anything like that.

NM: You're a business consultant.

EP: Yes, I've been, ever since Day 1, I started myself and built up that business and then got into Ranger, that's the second business. So that's the story. There's nothing fancy about it but I just seem to . . .

NM: It's a very interesting story.

EP: Yes. So that was it you see. No, I'm not an oil man but it seemed like I could. . . my main thing was selling, I could sell most anything else. So that's what I was doing.

NM: That's very important. Can you tell me, how was the business community in Calgary when you came?

EP: Very quiet then. At that time it was. . . well, we'd gone through them 30's and times were. . . the oil business, everything was down, put it that way. At that time because everything was pretty quiet. And then it started to grow with the oil business. The oil business and things started to change then.

NM: And you have seen that.

EP: I have seen it, yes, it was very dull, very bad then until that started. That was a pretty slow time then, that Depression they called it or whatever you wanted to call it, in the 30's, it took till . . . well, 1938 it was pretty bad for anybody in the oil business and then it got into '40 and got a little better then. But '38 was about the turning point, you know, to go from nothing, it started . . .

#139 NM: A boom.

EP: Yes. The beginning was in '38, it took into the 40's to do it, '42 I think, likely. But that was the time it was.

NM: There are so many ups and downs in the oil business and you have seen that too.

EP: Yes. It was pretty bad here for awhile. Of course, that's how I got into it because this other company were going to the wall, they had no money, Maygill it was then, and then it started to go. Mrs. Pierce, Jack's mother, and 2 other fellows and myself. Jack just came out of school then.

NM: So he was a young man.

EP: Oh yes, he'd just started, yes.

NM: So how do you foresee the future of the oil business here in Calgary, do you think it is going to improve?

EP: Yes. I really think it's going to improve, it's going to be a little while, not going to come in a hurry but I think it's going to start to go up again. I think we've seen the worst, I'm sure we've seen the worst. But how long it takes. . .

NM: It takes a long time.

EP: It does, it doesn't go over night. But I think it's going to get better. Canada has quite a lot of oil. We've had a very bad, I suppose I wouldn't want to say this for you to put in there but the government in Ottawa under Trudeau has been really bad for the oil business. I don't understand myself, from my side of the picture, I don't understand his views or what he did. It's far better for us to go down to Uncle Sam, to the U.S. and do business. It's far better for us to go to England and do business. It's far better for us to go to China, that's what we're doing. So he has to be wrong in what he's doing when all these other places are doing better. The way I see it and I'm reading all the time.

NM: I was going to ask you, what do you think of the National Energy Program?

EP: I don't like it.

NM: Nobody likes it.

EP: I say it's bad for all Canadians. You young people coming up here now, it couldn't be worse. It's not helping, it's a bad program he's got, that's the way I see it.

NM: And what do you think of nationalized oil companies, like Petro Canada?

EP: I don't like them. I have never seen in my lifetime, anything that's nationalized, or run that way, a success. I haven't seen it yet. You've got to have somebody that's trying to do things for themselves going in it. I can't see that, maybe I'm wrong but I can't see it.

#176 NM: They have a beautiful building.

EP: Yes. Well, they do a lot of things, they spend a lot of money in ways that to me, doesn't make sense sometimes, I'll put it that way.

NM: Can you tell me about Ranger's activities in China?

EP: Yes, we're going in with other companies. We're over in China because we think it's going to be all right.

NM: And that was last year?

EP: Yes. But that's all new there, as far as that's concerned. So I can't give no information on China yet because nothing . . .

NM: Nothing has come out.

EP: Well, no, there's nothing definite you can say that's right. You know what you think. I just think between you and I, they're going to get a lot of oil in China, I think they will. But you know, you don't know until you get it. You've got to drill it first.

NM: Who were the most influential persons in your career?

EP: Jack Pierce, the President.

NM: Anybody else.

EP: There was 2 fellows that come up, friends of Jack's that come up and I was the one from this area that stayed in the company. And I tried my best to get them in because I seen it

was the only hope we had. But you can't say anything about that because these other fellows, I wouldn't want to say anything about them. But they couldn't run it.

NM: What do you consider your achievements?

EP: You mean Ranger Oil?

NM: No, your achievements in your career for example?

EP: I don't know, I started in the farm machinery business in Morin, started in the butcher shop then into the grocery store, then into the farm machinery business. That's as far as Morin was concerned and Drumheller. And I had a good business and worked up a good business. But I came into Calgary and then of course I got into the oil business here, in Ranger Oil. It was Maygill then and they were in bad shape. So I got into the oil business and that's it. But I'm not an oil man you see at all, I don't know a thing. All I know about the oil business is what I learned from Jack here. I didn't study that or nothing. So I'm only a business man or a salesman. That's what I did in the farm machinery business and I bought and sold quite a lot of land out there at Morin, you know, on the farm. I got a real estate license, then I sold quite a bit. . . I bought land and sold it, when the farmers wanted to sell out. I'm just. . . nothing special about me at all. . .

NM: A lot of success. You gave a rock collection, a collection of rocks, to the museum at Drumheller, can you tell me about that. How did you get them?

EP: Really, it was other people that found different rocks, and then some that I had also found from the early days, that's all, that was in that area. It was nothing. And they built that museum up and it was better for them to have them than for me to have ??? I mean there was nothing special about it but this farmer and that farmer and then I picked up some, you know, in the early days. So I just . . .

NM: So you were interested in rocks already.

EP: Well, yes, nothing real special about it. But you know, I was out there in the early days you see, and you could get some of these rocks. I had a store you see, and kept them there, so I turned them over to the museum.

#238 NM: That was a very good idea.

EP: Yes, well, they've got them out there. They were from the early days, the homestead days, you can't find them now, they're gone now but they were here and there. Nothing special about it, except these different rocks which would be hard to get now but they have them at the museum there now, in Drumheller. That's where I turned them over to. Nothing special about that. They were no good to me.

NM: Do you have any plans for retirement?

EP: I guess you could say I'm retired now.

NM: Just semi-retired.

EP: No, I'm just the same. I go down to Phoenix, I've got a place in Phoenix and I go down there for 5 months, then I come up here for 7. So that's all, I just go down there and put in the time, play some golf and whatnot and put in the time because it's better weather down there.

NM: You spend the best months here in Calgary?

EP: 7 months, yes.

- NM: And this is the last question, what is your opinion on the oil business here in Calgary.
- EP: My opinion. I think the oil business is going to be steady but I can't see no rush in it. It's going to be steady, that's all I can say for it here in Canada. I can't see no big upturn or anything, I don't know what would do it. As far as I can see but I maybe can't see very far. But we've got lots of oil here in Alberta, that's one thing for sure. We'll be here for a long time, for a lot of people but I don't see no big rush. I can't see what would make it you see. We've got a surplus now and these other countries like England's got lots of oil. So I can't see anything to make it . . . I can't see no boom, put it that way I guess.
- NM: Right. So there will not be another boom soon.
- EP: I can't see a boom coming, no. But maybe I'm a pessimist I don't know. But I just can't see what's going to do it now really. Calgary's basically over built now, for a lot of people, for jobs. It's going to be pretty hard for a lot of people to maintain jobs here the way conditions are.
- NM: Lots of people are leaving.
- EP: Yes, well I can't see. . . they have to leave, what are you going to get them to do. You can't keep on building houses if people haven't got work. So I think it's coming to an end there. Of course, this has happened in Calgary before, they've had their ups and downs. And as far as the oil business in Alberta is concerned, it's going to go along the way it is for some time. I don't know of any booms, I can't see anything to make it boom at all. So I don't know really.
- NM: Thank you very much for this very interesting interview Mr. Perry.
- EP: I don't think I'm very interesting but anyway.