

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Sid Weller

INTERVIEWER: Susan Birley

DATE: October 1983

SB: It's October 4th, 1983. Susan Birley interviewing Mr. Sid Weller at his home in Surrey. Mr. Weller I wonder if you could tell us first of all a bit about your early background, where you were born and raised, and where you went to school?

SW: I was born in Chatham, New Brunswick and came out to Calgary about 1910, my people did. I was only about 3 years old at that time so essentially I lived in Calgary and there had been a great deal of drilling up and down. . .well, how many wells they had drilled at that time. I know some were drilled back in 1903, back in the southwest corner of Alberta, where there were some oil seeps. I've always been interested in the possibility of hydrocarbons in Alberta and used to go very often to Turner Valley. I remember when Royalite #4 came in, I think that was about 1936. My wife's father, he participated in some wells and drilled some wells down there which furthered my interest in it, so that I've always had an interest in the geology of western Canada and specifically, with respect to oil.

SB: What was your education, were you trained as a geologist?

SW: I was taking geological engineering.

SB: At what university?

SW: At the University of Oklahoma. That was just in furtherance to my interest. I still believed that there was oil in Alberta. There were about 1,000 wells drilled in western Canada, that's a ball park number. They did have some little shows, one of which was being produced from the Sunburst field in Montana and we promoted one well down there which was no good. They'd found Turner Valley and I think they found something out around Taber and Princess. Then of course, they had found heavy oil around Lloydminster. And of course, we knew about the bituminous deposits up at Athabasca tar sands. So there was oil around there but where could they find it, where it was producible.

SB: So how did you first get involved in the oil industry, what was your first job that was actually. . ?

SW: The first job that I was offered there was. . .and I used a lot of pull even to get that, was an offer to dig ditches at the Imperial Oil refinery in Calgary. I think it was Macleod who was the manager then and I said, it's nice to have a steady job. Oh, he said, this isn't steady, this is just time to time as we need somebody. So I said, no way, I've got to eat steadily, I eat all the time. So then I went back to school teaching.

#033 SB: What year would that have been about?

SW: Maybe 1932, give or take. As a matter of fact, I've been told that one of the old schools that I taught in is now in Heritage Park in Calgary, just a one roomer. But I had 11

grades. You thin that isn't a full time job, with 11 grades. Then the Farmers Creditors Arrangement Act came along, which was modified bankruptcy for farmers, brought out by the R. B. Bennett government. I used a lot of pull to get that job and I was told I couldn't do it. So they sent me down to the post office building where Mary Orman was. She had been a court reporter, a lot of packing cases and some furniture and some acts of parliament. This is what I had to start with. So I had to organize that thing into getting it working. Subsequently I was asked to go around the province to see a number of these lawyers who were acting as official receivers, to show them how to set up an office to make it work. So then there was a change in government and I'd had a lot of dealings with all machinery companies, banks, mortgage companies and so on. And they offered me a job as a correspondent with Massey Harris Co. That means you look after credits and collections. You meet with and deal with an awful lot of people. I stayed with them until an offer of a job came up, wrong end of the business but it was in the oil business which was the Canol project. So I went up to Edmonton and saw Paul Lambrite, who was the project manager. He hired me on and I started there the 1st day of February, 1943. He hired me as employment agent, which brings up a lot of really amusing situations. They had a staff up there, now I'm going to speak of 2 companies really. It was really broken down into 2 parts. That part which was run and operated by Imperial Oil for the American government to supply oil to Alaska. Then about '44, the American government decided to hold back on that and Imperial Oil decided to continue on exploring so they set up Imperial Oil Ltd., Norman exploration. So one sort of melded into the other and it was sometimes a little difficult to keep people straight, as to who they were working for and with. My job, here's one that was a very embarrassing one to me, this is a pure reminiscence, I had an order come down from the wells that they wanted, and I've forgotten how many, something on the order of 40 steam engineers. Well, steam engineers were just a scarce commodity. This must have been about 1944.

#072 SB: So a lot of people were away at war.

SW: Oh sure. I went to the head of the unemployment insurance people. . . no, that's not the name, they looked after all employment. First I went for Alberta, no, Saskatchewan, no, so then I went to Winnipeg and I saw the head man for all western Canada and he said yes. So I had my ads in the newspapers looking for steam engineers, I had already hired 2 or 3. I had to get their permission to be able to get steam engineers who were then working. Then a telegram comes in from Edmonton, cancel order. You can imagine, my face fell about 3 stories right there. What was I going to do with my credibility from there on out. The fellow in the government office said, something bad has happened, what is it. I said, if you'll just keep it between us girls, after all this is a war time project, there was a big storm on Great Slave Lake and the boilers are at the bottom of the lake. So that's how I lied my way out of that one.

SB: Oh, that didn't actually happen.

SW: Oh no. But I had to keep up my credibility because I was hiring people over all western Canada.

SB: What did they originally want all those steam boiler operators for, what part of the

operation would they have been used for?

SW: I never asked that question, I don't know. Whether they had given any thought to the scarcity of steam engineers or not, I don't know. It's like picking strawberries in the centre of Highway 99. Zero.

SB: So you continued working for them in the same department did you?

SW: Oh yes, I was the guy that did all the hiring. Another crazy order I got, they wanted some boat captains, I think it was 5 boat captains. So I found 1, I think I found him in Vancouver, by the name of Sampson who was a pretty solid individual and had all his papers. He was a steam boat captain. So then I hired him and collaborated with him to pick up the rest of them. So we finally got the order filled for steam boat captains. Anything that went up there, I hired them. Cat operators, cooks, you name it, we had it. You have got the kind of background as to why they developed the Canol project?

#107 SB: No, that would be interesting to go into.

SW: In '42, they put through the Alaskan Highway. But of course, a highway presupposes vehicles. Even if you don't make any allowance for aircraft. And there was no fuel, no gasoline, and all Canada interposed between Alaska and the United States. So the first thing they did was to put through the Alaska Highway, then the United States government made a deal with Imperial Oil to further develop the oil which had been found at Norman Wells. They did it for \$1, that was Imperial's remuneration and the expenses of course, are for the U.S. government. The idea was to develop more wells at Norman Wells. One of the problems was that the field was underneath the Mackenzie River. Now the Mackenzie River there is about 3 miles wide and freezes solid every winter. When the ice goes out you have a hell of a time there if you're going to put anything in the river when the ice goes out. So they had to do directional drilling from the banks. The trouble was, the oil producing formation, I've forgotten right now what it was, is not very deep. There was a limit to the amount of angle you could drill your well at for directional drilling. So there was a limit on the number of directionally drilled wells they could drill out into the field because it was so shallow. I think they got up to around 4,000 barrels a day ultimately. Then they built a pipeline, that was Bectel, Price and Callahan, they built a pipeline from Norman Wells, from where they took the production, across to Whitehorse where they had installed a refinery which they imported from Corpus Christi. They refined the oil there to supply the trucks and subsequently aircraft when they were giving aircraft to the Russians. Something just under 8,000 military aircraft were moved up that road. And the Russians came over into Alaska and took delivery of the aircraft and flew them back to Siberia.

SB: And this was all to help quell the Japanese invasion.

SW: The Japanese diversionary raid and actual occupation of, first they attacked Kiska??? and Attu???, in the Aleutian Islands. One of the main towns, I'm going to call it that for want of a better name and I've forgotten its name, in Alaska, that kind of kicked off the whole thing. Because if you started shipping gasoline, as a for instance, up there by tanker, along the west coast, the Japs could sink them. So they wanted a sure source of supply. I think it was from Fort St. John on that they built the Alaska Highway. Then the

development at Norman Wells was to provide fuel for aircraft, trucks, cars, jeeps, you name it.

#151 SB: So were you actually based in Norman Wells at this time?

SW: No. As an employment agent I had to be based in Edmonton where people are, or where I had access to people. That is, I could quickly jump on a plane or a train or what have you, and go to Regina or Winnipeg or Calgary or where have you and do my hiring there.

SB: Did you ever hire any Americans or did employment laws allow you to hire people from outside of Canada?

SW: To my knowledge I didn't hire a single American. You see, there must have been hundreds of contractors working on various parts of that total project. Like Kansas City Bridge, they looked after all their people. Who they hired, I don't know. The way they told the story was, if they wanted 100 they would hire 300. There would be 100 working, 100 going in and 100 coming out. They had a terrific turnover of personnel. I thought the correct thing to do was to be very selective in the people I hired. Because they all went up on a one year contract, otherwise they had to pay their own way out. I could see no sense in going through all this, taking just the bodies because they were warm and shipping them up to Norman Wells and then have them come back out again. Can I appear to digress and give you a little example?

SB: Sure.

SW: There was on particular chap who came in to see me and he wanted to go to Norman Wells. There were 2 things that struck me about him, first, what a nice type of chap he was. And he had the most terrible looking hands you've ever seen in your life. His job, he worked in a slaughter house and all he did was skin animals all day long. You've never seen such hands in all your life. I hired him and within a matter of 2 months he was back out to Edmonton again. He wanted to go out there to get enough money to pay off some of his debts and get on his feet. So I've forgotten what his name was and it doesn't really matter. So I said, what in hell are you doing down here. He said, I was fired, I said, what for, he said, I refused to take orders, why, he said, that's my business. So it was a matter of a couple or three weeks later I was walking along Jasper Avenue and I ran into him. Just bumped into him. I stopped and talked to him, he just wanted somebody to talk to. What had happened was, he had gone up to Norman Wells and then he got a letter from his mother-in-law that his wife had taken up with a Negro. As soon as he came back he went straight home and found his wife in bed with a Negro. So he got himself fired. Now there's a pretty sad case. So this is just one of the many, many, many cases I ran into.

#198 SB: Were the people that you were hiring working with production or any specific field, or what were most of the jobs associated with?

SW: We hired drilling crews from Turner Valley. I went down to Turner Valley, I picked up crews down there, I hired bakers, stenographers, secretaries. As I mentioned to you before, boat captains, I can't answer your question. The thing was, where were the people, where were they available who were ready to go up there on a 1 year contract and yet were competent. Take a bull dozer operator, catskiner of some kind or another, you just

went where you could find them, that was all. So if I said, western Canada I would be pretty close to right.

SB: Were the wages competitive or was that usually enough incentive to get people to go up there?

SW: Yes, there was a little bit of a bonus for going north but don't forget there were salary freezes on all across the country at that time. All our rates had to be approved by the government. So yes, there was an isolation bonus and they must have found it attractive, yes. Because we kept up our full complement and I was just as strict as I knew how to be. Now remember I'd had a lot of experience at interviewing people when I worked for the Farmers Creditors Arrangement Act, and when I worked with Massey Harris. So I'd had a lot of experience in that line. Even the girls, I remember once when I was down in Calgary I always tested them. I'd maybe have 3 proposed secretaries in an office at a time, I'd dictate one letter. Shoe them all off to a different typewriter then I only wanted to see the copies. The original they can doctor up but they can't doctor the copies. So I not only appraised the person but in instances like that, I could actually put them to the test.

SB: So you must have been dealing with thousands of people.

SW: Oh, how many, that's all I did all day long. If I wasn't travelling.

SB: With the drilling crews that you brought up from Turner Valley, were many of them already working for Imperial?

SW: Some were, some weren't. You see, Imperial, in the development, was represented by Royalite Oil Company. So Imperial, no, Royalite Oil Co., yes. Then subsequently Imperial sold Royalite when they started the exploration play which resulted in Leduc. So I've been up to Norman Wells, the last time I was up there, when must that have been, about June '71. I'd been at a cocktail party over the weekend and my retirement was imminent and Jack Armstrong was there and he said, is there anything you would like to do before you leave. I said, yes, I'd like to make one more trip to the north. So on the Monday he phoned me up, he said, can you go tomorrow, I said yes. So the company aircraft was going from Toronto, over Norman Wells to Inuvik. We transferred from that to a helicopter I think it was and we went over to Tuktoyaktuk, and Richards Island where they had just made a big gas discovery. Then I flew from there back over Norman Wells and then back to Calgary. That was my last trip up there.

#261 SB: You had gone up though, when you were working on the project?

SW: Oh yes. I think it was only right and proper. It's all very well me trying to tell somebody about it but I felt I should have been there to actually see it. I know in every one of the camps and I went to a number of them because they had a number of rigs working and I'd hired all the cooks. So I'd told them some of my favourite dishes and every damn camp I went to, they didn't have my favourite dish for me, of one kind or another. From curry to what have you.

SB: So most people were living in camps then, there weren't any houses built?

SW: Oh no, there was the main camp right on the shore of the Mackenzie River and then everywhere there was a drill sight and they drilled I don't know how many wells, 40 or 50 wells, exploratory wells, additionally. And I don't know whether they were with Norman

Exploration or Canol, I don't remember. I think it was something on the order of 40 different wells. And at every one of those they would set up a camp. Of course, I stayed at the camp.

SB: Were people, say the geologists or whatever, were they allowed to bring their wives with them?

SW: Initially no. Initially there were no women in the camp. Then it must have been '43, and I say that with a question mark, they decided to bring women into the camp. So I got an order for so many typists, so many stenographers, so many secretaries, so many this, that and the other. So then we started shipping the girls up there. But the men were only allowed 40 lb. and that included their sleeping bag. But there was no limit on the weight of clothes that the girls could take with them. Some wives went up there, some of them single. One of the last things I threw out of my desk when I left Toronto was a group picture of everybody who was in the main camp.

SB: It must have been a big photo, or a lot of people in it.

SW: A lot of people in it. In the camp, of course, this doesn't take in the refinery or all these other things that were there, we didn't look after the refinery at that time but we did supply the natural gas to operate it, I would guess 70-75 people in the office. I didn't count them and I could have done but I didn't.

#308 SB: Could you estimate how many people would have been working at one time in the entire operation or would that be. . . ?

SW: I have made a mental estimate of that, and I'm considering both companies, Canol and Norman Exploration. I think at the high peak, this is when we had seismic crews out, gravity meter crews out, aerial geologists out, drilling crews, I would guess somewhere in the range of 12-15 hundred. That's a lot of people.

SB: And did you have much liaison with the Canol people?

SW: We were.

SB: Oh I see, so you were supplying. . .

SW: Now I think I see the gist of your question. Our job was to produce the oil and we were trying to find additional sources to it. Other than the home pool which they were now working on. That's why we drilled all these outside wells, all dry. Bectel, Price and Callahan, their job was to build the pipeline. Somebody else, Kansas City Bridge, put in any bridges that were necessary. They were over all the Canol project but we were all sort of compartmented because there was nothing that we couldn't do in the oil business so we didn't need any Bectel, Price and Callahan or what have you, we just did our own thing. And they did their own thing, they laid the pipeline.

SB: So there wasn't actually any separate office, it was strictly Canol. . . ?

SW: Oh no. Just by the very immensity of the job. . . you see, that pipeline was around on the order of 600 miles long, right through a range of mountains. I only heard this as a story and it may be nothing more than a story. There was one place where they had to build the pipeline across a glacier. The trouble is that glaciers are just slow moving water. So if you put a pipeline across there, in due course, the glacier will wipe out the pipeline. So the story I heard, and I can't verify it, I don't know, that they pulled oil off the pipeline and

had flame throwers there that melted the glacier and let it run underneath the pipeline and the reform down below. Whether that's true or not, I don't know but that is a solution. In this latest issue, I don't know where it is now, 3 or 4 guys made that trip, in the last year, from Norman Wells across to Whitehorse, over the old pipeline road. They went on these motor tricycles.

End of tape.

Tape 1 Side 2

SB: So were you actually employed by Imperial at that time then?

SW: When they wound down the Canol project, this was about October of '45, and I was transferred down to Calgary with Royalite. Imperial had drilled a number of wells in the western Canada basin. They were as convinced as I was, and always had been, that there had to be oil there somewhere. They had drilled 133 dry holes in a row. Now a lot of other companies had been drilling too so that the sum total must have been something on the order of 1,000 wells drilled in Alberta at that time. Gas, oh boy. My memory says that they burned 2.75 trillion cubic feet of gas down there. Do you know why they burned it?

SB: Vaguely, but if you'd like to. . .

SW: All right. Turner Valley, until the Brown's found oil on the west downdip side, like Royalite 4, there was naphtha came out in gaseous form, with the methane, the natural gas. So they put that through a separator and separated the naphtha from the naturally produced natural gas. And I have taken that directly from the separator and poured it directly into the tank of my car, and just gone merrily on about my business. But here were these immense quantities of natural gas. The percentage I don't remember now. And there was one place there called Hell's Half Acre. This was a place that all these various pipelines, with all this surplus gas, was being burned. You could not get within about a couple of hundred yards of it, the heat was so intense. One early airline pilot told me that he used to get altitude above Regina until he could see the reflection of the flares in Turner Valley and that was his guide. He just flew right there and then he could see the lights of Calgary. Imperial had got to the point, they had drilled all these dry holes and they were going to try to synthesize gasoline. I think it's called the Frasher-Tropp process. Gas, they had gas running out their ears. There were 2 or 3 ingredients that they had to have if they were going to put up a plant and synthesize gasoline from methane. They had to have a good supply of methane, they weren't worrying about finding that. 2, it had to be near a large centre, so that they could get employees. 3, they had to have large supplies of water. The area around Leduc fulfilled all of those conditions but they hadn't found the gas yet. But they had an exploration department set up in Calgary and they'd had a meeting of all the geologists where all the geologists rated the various areas in Alberta, western Canada for that matter, as to where they thought was the most likely place to find oil. There was quite a preponderance of geologists who selected the general Edmonton area.

#054 SB: Were you among the people that had been. . .?

SW: No. At this time they had tried to assess the western Canada basin and they had an exploration department. Jack Webb, who subsequently went to Frontenac Oil Co., he was the exploration manager. The chief geophysicist was Ray Walters. Ray had a nose as it were, for oil. Secondly they were going to drill some stratigraphic test, do you know what I mean by that?

SB: Yes.

SW: Okay. So they wanted a well in the Leduc area and they were just, I think it was about every 6 miles, they were drawing a very crude grid across the basin. They found a 1 point high at Leduc. So they were going to drill a strat test anyway. You see, so much of this stuff went on by conversation, it didn't appear in letters or anything. Now they drilled Leduc #1 and they got some free oil in the Nisku, which is in the Devonian. Usually they took their wells down to the Cretaceous. I've been able to verify this by Dr. Bill Rolf, he was head of exploration in eastern Canada. He sat in at the meeting where they were going to abandon the Nisku well because they'd gone through the Cretaceous. I think it has been kind of papered over but I've always understood that Ray Walters kind of dragged his feet and did not give the order to shut down the well. That's speculation on my part, I can't prove it even though Ray and I were very close friends. And before Leduc #1 was finished they sputted in Leduc #2. Because they had done some extra shooting by then and found out they were a little bit off the structure. So then they carried that on, the Leduc #2, down deeper. This is when they really hit the jackpot. There was a big reef down there and well, that was the big strike. February 13th. . .no, that was Leduc #1 I think, February 13th, 1947. I'd just come back from that incident with the steam engineers. No, that's not true, no, I was down on a hiring trip. That's right, for geophysicists, that's right. Before that time, the Imperial Board very reluctantly, after 133 dry holes, you could imagine their reluctance to keep on pouring money into well after well after well.

SB: Do you remember who were on the Imperial Board at that time?

SW: I know Oliver Hopkins was. They kind of ran the thing from eastern Canada. Who was the president at that time, R. V. Lesware???, I think he was president at that time. But I didn't have much occasion to be in contact with them until I got to eastern Canada myself, and then of course I got to know them all.

#101 SB: Did you know Ted Link at all?

SW: Oh yes, knew Ted very well. As a matter of fact, he worked Norman Wells, he was chief geologist for Imperial. And he'd sign anything, so the girls got together a purchase order, ordering each one of them a mink coat. He signed it. But a real character. As a matter of fact, he bought the property out there on Vancouver Island and he wanted to sell half of it to me. So you know, I knew him very well. Another quirk of his was that he was a bit of a nut on astronomy. Do you know Toronto at all?

SB: Not really.

SW: No. Grenadier Pond, it's sort of an offshoot from Lake Ontario. What must it be, 1/2 - 3/4 of a mile wide. This sort of a shape. This is the lake and Ted lived over here. He was also a great bug with the camera. So he'd see some sparking going on over there in the park

then he'd put his 4" telescope on them, then he'd attach his camera and he would take the most intimate pictures you ever saw. And he got a terrific bang out of that. I knew Ted very well. As a matter of fact, we were over to his place here and Marg phoned his wife just last week. Ted's dead now of course.

SB: Did he play a very major part in convincing Imperial to go on exploring in Alberta or did you know much about that?

SW: Well, I'm sure he did. Every geologist and he was chief geologist, just by the nature of the beast, he's got to be optimistic. Here was this huge basin of western Canada, from which substantially now hydrocarbons had been found except the Athabasca tar sands. And I'm discounting Turner Valley because it's production was going way down. We were importing oil from Sunburst field in Montana. So I'm quite sure he had a great deal to do with it. It's just the nature of the beast. If he ever became discouraged, well, he's out of work. So I've never heard any direct quotes on him but I'm sure Ted would just be pushing to beat the band.

SB: Do you remember, at the beginning they didn't realize it was a reef, did you hear anything about that controversy when they first realized it was a reef?

SW: They had not encountered a reef up until that time. This was the first time they had found a reef. It got to the point that we were making discoveries, which included Golden Spike, which was a beautiful reef. We had also discovered Redwater. First Redwater was owned by Shell and Shell gave up the whole thing. We picked up the land from the provincial government, shot that area out seismically and the most beautiful looking feature you ever saw. This was where I had a big river to cross. There were 2 sections, I had seen the seismic picture. In the interval Leduc had been found so we knew there was free oil there. Here's this beautiful seismic picture and there were 2 sections of land on it that I could have picked up for 10 cents an acre. Walker Taylor was the manager in the area and he wouldn't authorize picking up these 2 sections of land at 10 cents an acre. Now I was playing the stock market yes, but for 10 cents an acre. Well, they found oil there. These 2 sections were picked up by BA as I recall it and there were 36 wells on those 2 sections of land. I'd have been so immensely wealthy I wouldn't have known where to start. But my decision at that time was, I couldn't honestly use my insider information. Now I could have done it through somebody else's name but that doesn't smooth over my conscience at all. You follow my reasoning?

#162SB: Yes.

SW: So BA gets it.

SB: Do you remember any of the other people, say the geologists that were working on the Leduc #1 well or any of the crew that were on it?

SW: Now you're really scratching my memory. The tool push, what was his name, I've forgotten. And there were a couple of well site geologists on the hole. I don't remember. That was not my end of the business.

SB: Well, at that time what was your...?

SW: My job? Because of my business experience they took me over to the exploration department in about December '46. This was before Leduc. What they wanted was my

business experience. They told me I had more business experience than anybody else in the entire department. Where they dredged up the title from I don't know, they called me office manager. So Imperial was spending millions on these seismic crews, very, very expensive. I can give you many illustrations. I think we had about 4 recording crews from Carter Oil Co., which is an affiliate. And we had 2 or 3 or 4 that we had contracted for separately. Then we had gravity meters and so on. Then we started winter operations. That meant bulldozers to clean out the roads and clean out the snow so that you could keep moving from location to location. I arranged that first, I was given a free hand, snoop into anything you like. So every shooting crew sent in their daily report and I'm going to assume that you don't know anything about seismic shooting. You drill a hole and the depth of it depends upon the kind of country you're in. Then the shooting crew comes along and puts down maybe half a stick of dynamite or a stick of dynamite as the case might be. Then the recording crew comes along and they put out their geophones, bingo, bingo, bingo, spread out over about a mile maybe. Then it's all synchronized and they fire the shot. The effect is that every time one of those shock waves encounters a different density of rock, as the shock goes down, there's a partial return of energy to the surface. These can be recorded on the geophones. Those things are so darned sensitive that if a horse is running over there in a pasture they have to wait till he stops. But every day I'd get these reports in and day after day, arrived at the field at 9, returned to town 2:30. These crews were costing thousands of dollars a day and the explanation was always, WOH.

#217 SB: What did that stand for?

SW: Waiting On Holes. To be drilled by the drilling crew of the flailing rigs, to put the dynamite in. So being rather unorthodox, I said, to me, instead of the expensive part of the operation running the show, the flailing rig, shothole drillers, are running the show. Why not put 2 rigs on there, why not put 3 rigs on there. One time we even had 4 rigs on there. So by this time, the recording crew, they were going like hell trying to keep up and the drilling crew were going like hell to try and drill more holes than they could handle. And our costs went down to about 1/3 of what they had been for the amount of coverage. That's just one illustration. Another illustration is, I was negotiating with a contractor and he was going to put on another seismic crew. So I had drafted a new kind of contract and I gave it to him and he read it over and it was pretty thick, he said, but this doesn't cover so and so, and so and so, and so and so. I said, no, if we made it as big as the Calgary telephone book it wouldn't cover everything. To a degree I have to rely on you and to a degree you have to rely on me. Well, he said, we can try it. So the day came when he sent in his bill for the month and he knocked out about 10 days. So I phoned him, I said, I have heard what's happened but I want you to tell me. When they fired the shot he was driving a team with a sleigh. The horses ran away and they wiped out all his geophones. Now I said, if we had made a big contract, do you think we would have provided for that. He said, no way. Well, I said, I'm going to send you your bill back and I want you to bill us for it because in my opinion that is one risk of the business that you as a contractor shouldn't have to shoulder and Imperial will pay it. I know the big boss, Don Mackenzie

once said to me, you know, we sometimes wonder who you're working for, us or the contractors. I said, Don, as long as that question is in doubt then I'm achieving what I set out to do. I want to be as judicially fair as I know how to be. That's all I want to do. I wanted them to be square with me and I expected to be square with them.

#258 SB: Do you remember some of the names of the contractors that were working for you at that time?

SW: These were affiliate, that was Carter. Jack Macmillan was one and he had a partner. I know one Christmas they came over, I still have it, a big slab of marble with 2 pens on it and my name engraved. Heavy as the devil, all wrapped up. After they had gone I opened it up and I saw what was in it, I said to Jack Macmillan, good god, I thought maybe there would be a bottle of scotch in there or something like that but you guys didn't have to go to all that. They used to call me Finestone, he said, now look Finestone, that's a double barrelled one, when you're dead you can stick it up on edge and use it as a tombstone. Mickey Macmillan, yes. Now who his partner was I've forgotten.

SB: Were you involved, after awhile Imperial was drilling for themselves and after awhile they shifted over to hiring contractors mostly to do their drilling. Were you involved in that decision or do you know any of the reasons behind it?

SW: I don't know what aspect of the drilling you're speaking of but if you're speaking of shothole drilling, yes. I felt that our own boys, I did the same thing with the shothole drillers as I did with the recording crew. I kept pretty close tabs on them and I finally made the recommendation that we sell all our flailing rigs and hire them back as contractors. I further recommended that to give them a contract, I think, 20 shifts a month. Then there was one shift that we guaranteed, that they were supposed to keep their equipment in good shape. So that was an extra shift. Then we agreed on a minimum amount of footage and over that amount they would be paid a bonus, but they were to share that with the drilling crew. So we sold all our flailing rigs to them, the then operators and went on to this type of contract and our costs went down to 1/3 per foot of what they had been. Another thing I looked in to - you see why they call me Finestone - we were paying absolutely a hatful for bulldozers, to keep the roads open for winter operations. I just felt that there was an awful lot of fat in there somewhere. So the only people that I could think of would be to go to the people that manufacture them. So I went to Caterpillar, as a for instance, how much does a D-8 cat cost, what are your financing charges, what's its operating cost, what's its maintenance cost, and so on and so on, right down the line. Then you have to have an operator. I came up with a price of what it should be. Frank, he was the chief party chief, he became president of Athabasca tar sands, Frank Spraggins. You've probably run into that name. He got my letter and that very morning I said, this is all we're going to pay. But I allowed them a profit margin. I gave them a break down of everything I'd arrived at and a contractor came in and said, well Frank I suppose you'll want a bulldozer again this winter. Frank said, how about this. Apparently he had some very choice names to call me but he said, you know, he's come within 5 cents an hour of what it costs me. So we saved a lot of money there. But they gave me a sort of roving commission, that I could snoop into anything.

#337 SB: How long did you carry on in that position?

SW: That's a tough one. It was really in connection with it. The exploration department had a drafting department, the geologists had a drafting department, the engineers had a drafting department, the land department had a drafting department. Here were all these drafting departments scattered all over the building and around the country. Some different people had tried to organize it, they asked me if I would. I said, yes, on 2 conditions. 1, that I have absolute authority. 2, I will accept complete responsibility. So we finally laid out a brand new drafting department, photogrammetry??? department, photo reproduction lab, the whole bit. I think there were 84 bodies. Do you know what a base map is?

SB: Yes.

SW: They did not have a single base map. Here we were spending millions of dollars ever year, so one of my first edicts was, the first person who lets a base map get out of here, he's fired. Don't wait for me, just grab your coat and run like hell. So who's the first guy that comes in after that to look for one, Jack Armstrong. You know who he is. He was then #2 in the geophysical department. He went to get a base map and the draftsman said, no way. So Jack came storming in to me and I said, no way. You can have any copies you like, you can have them put together any way you like.

End of tape.

Tape 2 Side 1

SW: So I set a group to drawing base maps which are on linen. Then I put that on to transparent film, then I had one sheet made up with all the information about the land. So if you wanted to know about the ownership of land, all you had to do was take your base map and put the other one after it. Take a photograph and you had both. Now if you wanted the wells included or excluded and the pipelines included or excluded, by different players you could just put them all into the machine, take one print of the whole works and you had what you wanted. So you could have it in any combination that you wanted it. But the base maps remained with us.

SB: So that was quite an innovation I imagine.

SW: Yes. No, what had been happening was that people like Jack would come down there and he'd want a map but he'd always take the base map. So nobody had any base maps. So I laid down the dictum as I told you, and then set a group, now as I recall it, it must have been on the order of 6, 7, or 8 draftsmen who did nothing but make base maps. Others were working on the underlays, so then you could start putting things together as sandwiches. I still remember the first time Ray Walters came down there and he asked for a map. I said, how would you like it, oh he said, anyway you like. I said, that's not good enough. Ray was exploration manager by this time, I said, do you want garlic bread with it, do you want salt, do you want pepper, do you want land, do you want wells, do you want geology, what do you want. He said, just give me it with the land on it, fine. He said, oh god, I've been waiting for this day, I've been waiting for this day when we could start getting proper maps around here. But I really stubbed my toe on this thing because I found out, here were these draftsmen in from all over the building. Some were putting

out, others were not and I soon isolated the ones that were not. People thought that once you got a job with Imperial you had a job forever. I fired 4 of them one afternoon, bing, bing, bing, bing, right down the line. And of course, as it would turn out, I didn't know who they were, all I knew was that they weren't working. Every one of them had been appointed, hired, by the big boss because he played golf with their fathers. Well, as you can imagine, my reputation wasn't very good around there for awhile but boy, did it smarten that drafting department up. Now there were some boys who were still trying to work, I put through promotions for those. In the general shuffle, this is just an anecdote, I've forgotten his name now, a very nice chap, he thought that he should have had a particular job and he wouldn't take any orders whatever from his boss. So I said, fine, he was over in the reproduction section. So I went out at noon and bought him the biggest pair of paper shears I could find. I said, okay, you are now vice-president in charge of the trimming of all paper. Now I said, either one of 2 things is going to happen, either you're going to get very tired of trimming paper and you're going to quit, and if you do I will be very sorry. The other thing that could happen is that you could get smart and I'll have the pleasure of coming and asking for those shears back. So about 2 months later I went over to see him and I said, maybe this is the day you've been waiting for, I'm asking for my shears back again. Incidentally, of those 4 that I said I fired one afternoon, I met one of them on 8th Ave. and it was just outside ??? Jewellery Store and he came over and shook hands with me. Which surprised me a little bit. He said, you've taught me one thing Sid, that you've got to work in this world, I didn't know that before. So I saved one. The other 3, I never heard from them again. These are just little anecdotes of what has happened, and where and when and why. You must have some other questions you want to ask me.

#056 SB: Yes, you mentioned Jack Armstrong, what was his position at that time?

SW: He was . . . I know what he did. . . Ray would have been exploration manger by that time so Jack should have been the head of the geophysical department. He was #2 when Ray was head of the geophysical, so there had to be a step up in there. So he was head of the geophysical department. You talked about Dougie Layer, we were putting on. . Jersey does this every year, they get all their affiliates in from all over the world. Imperial was to be the host up in Banff. So I got all the boys together and said, as you know I don't have very high standards, all I want from you fellows is that we have the best visual aids that are brought in by any of the affiliates and that includes New York. So various people, Dougie Layer for instance, would bring in what he wanted to present. He wouldn't hear of any changes being made. He wanted it done his way. Okay, so we did it his way but we also did it our way and after we'd made a plate or visual presentation then we criticized, the head of each section all got together. What do you think of this, where can it be improved, what do you like, what don't you like, what do you suggest. And if need be we'd do it again. When Dougie Layer came to get his stuff I said, Doug, this is exactly what you asked for, now this is what we have done. From here on out the choice is yours. He chose ours. We had some very artistic boys in there, very clever with their hands. They were professionals of course, there must have been 50, that's close enough.

SB: So you carried on working in that department then until. . .

SW: Well, no, because that's when they had the trouble with Hudson Bay Oil and Gas.

SB: Oh yes. Would you like to elaborate on that a bit?

SW: A great deal of business is done, in the oil business, by agreements between companies. Farm outs, farm ins, joint operations, hundreds of them. If you farmed in some land you have certain obligations. If I farm in some land from you to me, I'm Imperial, you're Hudson Bay Oil and Gas, I've got to keep you informed as to what I'm doing on your land and why. Finally, Imperial hadn't been doing it, there was nobody set up to do it, fulfill the obligations imposed by the agreement. Nobody was paying any attention to it and all of a sudden Hudson Bay Oil and Gas blew the whistle. Imperial had to give up most of its Hudson Bay Oil and Gas land. Then they threw at me some big lessors, like the Canadian Pacific Railway. As I told you, there was nowhere I could go to find out how to handle this thing, I had to feel my way. I remember I went over to see the head landman from Canadian Pacific Railway. He showed me into his office, I said, I'm Sid Weller, I'm representing Imperial Oil and I've just come over to tell you we're a bunch of dirty SOB's, we have not kept you informed as we're supposed to by our agreement. I have elaborated what you haven't received, and what you should have received and what you will receive, is there anything else you'd like. He said, I'm going to have one hell of a time fighting with you. So from there on out I kept in touch with him. You see, we had something on the order of 3 million acres from the CPR. I'd have lunch with him every couple of weeks and sometimes I could tell him things that were going to happen before it was outside news at all. So when it came up before his management he knew all about it. All of a sudden he looked pretty darn sharp, he was right up to date when the thing came up, oh yes, I know all about that, it's this and this and this. We both understood that everything was on a confidential basis. That was our basis we worked on. and I might say, that Imperial saved an awful lot of money by it. Do you know what an offset obligation is?

#117 SB: Not really, no.

SW: We'll draw a line right across here. This is owned by one person, this is owned by somebody else. If I drill a well on here and it's productive then that sets up an offset obligation on here. So that the oil isn't drained from there to here. But it's got to be commercial. There were many time when I gave the CPR, there would be a potential offset obligation coming up here, but we were just on the thin edge of the producing horizon here. So I'd take him over all the maps, well logs, the whole bit, geological cross sections. So that he would know that if we drilled a hole there, it was a dry one. We could forecast that and then they could waive it so Imperial didn't have to drill it.

SB: So it saved a lot of paperwork and everything else.

SW: Oh yes. I know after I got all in southeastern Leduc, I built it up there with the various farm outs so that there would be no offset obligations. I called it a fire guard, I built that up over a term of years. After I was down, all contracts that they made in Calgary went over my desk and I read each one of them. I know this one came down and it proposed to make a farm out of a parcel of land that would set up a whole string of farm outs. It would break the fire guard. So I just sent it back, I said, no way, because it will set up this and

this and this and this farm out. There's no way we're going to break that fire guard. And I had to initial every contract the exploration department entered into before it would be executed by Imperial. I was kind of the control on all inter-company dealings. In my survey, I even found an agreement that had been made by O. B. Hopkins that gave this guy an overriding royalty on any oil that Imperial produced, I think it was in southern British Columbia. Now a perpetuity agreement is anathema. No way. So I got wise to this agreement, studied it over, I'd never seen it before. Then I had a Dun and Bradstreet check run on him, I found out that he was having marital problems and he was having money problems. So then I knew exactly how to deal with it. I got authorization to go and buy him out. It didn't cost very much money. But any perpetuity agreement is wrong. Any perpetuity agreement is wrong. What was it, one week or was it 6 days, it doesn't matter, before we found Leduc, we made a deal with Eric Harvie. Prior to that he had made deals, I think with Shell. I say that with a little question mark. My memory says that the royalty that was supposed to be paid by Shell over a term of 3 or 4 or 5 years, I don't remember, it started out as an overriding royalty of 2%, then 3%, then 4% and it escalated with the amount of time. Then Shell moved out, including giving up Redwater. I think it was 6 days before we found Leduc we made a deal with Harvie for his acreage. He always resented it and I think he felt sure that we knew we were going to discover something. Of course we didn't. You never know you're going to find anything until you get a hole actually drilled in there.

#175 SB: So at a certain point you were transferred to the Toronto office. What time was that approximately?

SW: What time? I went there in June 1st, '55. Then I was sort of a liaison with the government and I had to set up a contract department for eastern Canada, Ontario. I know. . . when must this have been, '56, that's close enough, there was a symposium on in Hungary. I could look up the dates I guess. Bill Landis from our Calgary office was there. But that's when the Commies went in there and took over Hungary. Bill was quite a heavy user of insulin. So our people out west were very concerned how he would get on. Because I mean, there was such a turmoil that nobody knew anything. So they phoned me and I'd set up some very good contacts in Ottawa. So I phoned one of my contacts there and I said, now here is the problem, who should I contact in what department. I said, I don't want to be driven around Katey's barn, I want some action. They said, you get hold of so and so, I think he was the State Department. As soon as I mentioned my name, he said, yes, I've been talking to so and so, I understand your problem, I'll get on it right now and I'll phone you in the morning. I thought, boy now we're getting somewhere. So then I got Calgary on the blower and told them what was happening and either the next day or the day following, I don't know which, they had Bill all isolated and he got his insulin and the whole bit. These are just little bits and pieces that drop into place.

SB: And you mentioned that you became reinvolved with the Norman Wells project when you were in Toronto. Could you elaborate on that a bit?

SW: Norman Wells has a refinery there. Of course, that results in product such as gasoline, kerosene, you name it, fuel for the boats that ply on the Mackenzie River. As soon as you

start involving money from the sale of these products, the federal government, my memory says they had a 1/3 interest, retained an interest in any profitability of what went on there. That meant that the producing department was involved in it and the refining department was involved in it, we're selling product so the sales department is involved in it. And you can keep on going around there. Pretty soon all of Imperial Oil is involved and there is no one place to look after it. So as it was a contract, and I was supposed to be looking after all contracts, I became the head honcho and I got a representative from every one of the departments, marketing, refining, you name it. At least once a year we had a meeting for our budget and if the refinery wanted to do something, that was in there, why they wanted

#226 to do it. If we were going to drill a well or wells, that was provided in there, why we wanted to drill it. Or had to put in more pipeline, what would happen there. And then periodically, from time to time, things would come up and we'd discuss this at an ad hoc meeting. Things would be brought up by Ottawa, why didn't we do so and so. We were bringing in a product from the States which was very expensive and I've forgotten what the devil it is. Your memory does get fallible after awhile. Ottawa wanted to know why we didn't make it up there. I said, I am not a refinery man but I can sure lay my hands on some very experts. So we set up a meeting, I arranged for some engineers to come down from the Sarnia refinery. I said, you know what you want, you know the questions you wanted to ask, here are your experts, go your best. The answer was quite simple, that the components of the crude at Norman Wells, you could not make the stuff they wanted. So you had to import it. They didn't see fit to believe it but it was the truth just the same. But I could reach anywhere within Imperial Oil, a company with such diverse interests and holdings, you could reach out. When we were going to operate in eastern Canada, we were going to go in Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Anticosti, New Brunswick. These people down there don't think, never have thought like oil people. So I said before we went down there I thought it would be a good idea if we invited 2 people from each province and have a get together at some place where they can ask any questions they like. So we got 2 from each province and had the company aircraft go down and pick them up, 2 from each province including Quebec. We had a big meeting for a week in Regina. After it was all over we arranged for half a day that they could have with the Saskatchewan government people. We weren't trying to hide anything. My theory was, if you let me talk to a knowledgeable person I'm not scared. It's the ignorant ones that scare me. I wanted to make them instant experts so they wouldn't do stupid things. For instance I wrote all the legislation for the, I did this personally, the petroleum and natural gas regulations for Prince Edward Island. They sent me the first proofed copy and I read it over and they'd made one change. So I hopped on the next plane, I've forgotten his name now, he was assistant to the Premier of Prince Edward Island. . . . So we got to know each other quite well and he said, well, how do you like it. I said, it doesn't depend on whether I like it or not, do you like it. You changed some wording on it in here, I said, if you use your wording, this is what it means, if you use the wording I had in there, this is what it means. Now once again, it's your choice. Oh god he said, we didn't mean that, I said, that's what you have said. So quick like a bunny they changed

back and I heard later, California Standard went down and got some land in Prince Edward Island and when they heard that Imperial Oil had written the regulations for down there they said, it's just as fair as it could be. So you'll think I've been doing some funny things.

#294 SB: Well, it sounds like you were well respected anyway, by the people that you were working for.

SW: I hope so, I think so. They all became personal friends.

SB: Are there any people that were in Imperial that stand out in your mind as being particular characters?

SW: Oh Ted Link was one. I told you about the girls and the fur coats. Another thing that Ted did, he was a real character, you never knew what he was going to do next you know, every noon he used to stretch himself out on the top of his desk and have 40 winks. The standing orders were he was not to be disturbed, period. So one day the president walks down and walked into Ted's office. So what does Ted do, starts buzzing for his secretary and he gives her hell for allowing him to be disturbed even if it was the president. A real character. Oh yes, the stories about him are legion.

SB: Did you see any general trends working for Imperial over that period of time? What were the major changes that took place within the company?

SW: One of the major changes, you're getting into areas now that are getting pretty hairy. First Imperial decided that the elephants had been found in western Canada. So they filed on land up in the Beaufort Sea, off Baffin Island, off Labrador, and off Newfoundland. I filed on that land for them. Millions of acres. I know, I saw it just the other day too, it's an underwater feature, it's on the order of 3,500' deep water. They have developed the technology of drilling at those depths and operating wells and the whole bit. This concept of building islands up in the Beaufort, you're read about that, companies have used islands before but not to the extent that they've done there. Now, I don't know what else to call it but a sort of steel corset they put over the island to keep the ice from getting in in the winter time. The technology is just going by leaps and bounds. I can give you an illustration. I was told that initially, they used to use hundreds of pounds of dynamite when making a seismic shock, now they're down to a quarter of a pound. They've so simplified their instruments, and they've improved them since then. There are a lot of echoes underground, the same as there are above ground and they can phase those in or phase them out or accentuate some. I don't even pretend to know how the technology has improved. Or how they can install well heads, or the equivalent, in 3,500' of water. This would be a lifetime's work to keep up with that.

SB: Are there any periods that were your favourite, or any favourite projects that you worked on or were they all about the same?

SW: Favourite projects. I always had projects. Favourite? I guess I was a workaholic. I'd wake up on a Monday morning and say, good, it's time to go back to work.

End of tape.

Tape 2 Side 2

SW: Aren't you glad everybody isn't as garrulous as I am?

SB: Oh no.

SW: Trans Canada Pipelines. They transport gas from western Canada to eastern Canada as you know. You must always, if possible, have an alternate supply in case something happens. So that leads to underground storage. So you get a field, let us say it's in the summertime when the pipeline isn't working to capacity. You keep on shooting your gas through but instead of selling it to the customers you pump it underground. This is money in the bank. If ever you get an excessive demand, you've got somewhere to get it beyond the capacity of the pipeline. Or if for any reason the pipeline is shut down, you've can draw some money out of the bank. Do you follow me?

SB: Yes, so you're pumping it back into the formation?

SW: Yes. So Imperial had been picking up a little bit of gas down there, a little bit of underground storage. . . and I've forgotten the name of the company, there was a company that was absolutely, utterly abhorred by all the farmers around there who owned their land freehold. Do you understand the expression freehold?

#020 SB: Yes.

SW: Okay. I remember pouring over this question, because I'd been thinking about it for a long time. The farmers were objecting to the smallness of the payments and the fact that, even after a gas field has been produced, there's still some gas left in there. So I remember, I was cutting my lawn one Saturday and I had the idea. How to take care of all these things. So on the Monday I wrote a complete memorandum on it suggesting a completely different approach. Instead of, I think they were paying two bits an acre a year, that we would pay \$5 an acre a year, and that we would set, before we injected any gas into the ground at all, we would agree with the farmer as to how much remaining gas there was in there and pay him for it. Well, it didn't happen quite as fast as I like to think it did but it seemed like almost the next day, the thing had passed the Board, the legal beagles had drawn up a new lease, we set out on a land blitz and pretty soon we'd picked up all the acreage we wanted. Then the provincial government, I don't know what you'd call it, set up a committee to look in to this whole thing. The head of the geological department for the University of Toronto was George Langford, who happened to be my wife's cousin. So he was heading up this committee. Now I've got to digress for a minute. I think George was 6'4" and my secretary was about 4'8" or 9". So George was coming over to see me. So they checked him at the desk, phoned through and I said, yes, I'm expecting him. So I sent Joan to meet him at the elevator. Then I peeked around the corner to see Mutt and Jeff walking down the hallway. Anyway, they finally came up with the decision that a producing company could not own and operate a gas storage. So here's all my work on gas storage just shot out the window. Except, we sold 50% of it to, who was the name of that company from Toronto and set up a new company called Tecumseh Natural Gas. Then the government wanted to charge some sort of tax on it and I was absolutely personally incensed at the Internal Revenue trying to grab. Tecumseh paid \$6

million for half interest and they were the operators. Of course, having been involved in it for so long, it was almost like a personal affront to me. I went scrambling back through the files, I'd set up a completely new filing system at head office there, as far as we're concerned. And we had every scrap of paper that we'd ever received on it and I took the position that this had not been a sale in the ordinary sense but was forced on us by the actions of the provincial government. They got a lawyer from Montreal to argue the case before the judge, whatever when the trial came up. They won the case and he said, he'd never had such complete evidence. So there's one of my favourite projects. It resulted in a separate company, Imperial made a lot of money out of it and is still doing so and it's still working.

#066 SB: I'd like to thank you for doing this at such short notice. I really enjoyed listening to your stories.

SW: Well, I'm surprised at Aub Kerr trying to write such a book. Did you get a copy of that print out on what Doug Layer did.

SB: Yes, I did.

SW: Oh, I was going to say, I have one there.