

Tape 2

Transcribed by Carol Wilkinson - 639-6880 - on 3/31 and 4/ 1/99.

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Interview with Mr. Courtney Lasselle at his home in Tigard on May 11, 1978

In this interview he talks about the Canning Industry in Washington County, OR

This is a copy of a Washington County Historical Society Tape.

Good Evening.

CL How are you, Lloyd?

Lloyd Very good.

CL Sure glad to see you up here this evening.

L Well, first off, I would just like to ask a few personal questions. Is that all right? Your age?

CL Well (laughing) I'm no kid for sure, I'm 65 - I'll be 66 next July.

L Uhm. Have you grown up here in this area? Most of your life?

CL Well. Well, in Oregon for most of the time. I was born down in Albany, Oregon, and then moved up into the Garden Home area, right over here very close, and my folks - they lived there for awhile, and then my father took a job with the California Cannery and he moved - we moved down to the San Francisco Bay area for, oh, three or four years, and then the way things happened, he moved back up here, and in the meantime my mother died, so I moved back up with a brother that lived in Eugene. I lived in Eugene for a couple of years, and then finally moved back up to Portland and I have been in the Portland area ever since. I moved back about the time I was starting - when I was a freshmen in high school, and then I went through high school and went to the University of Oregon and graduated from the University of Oregon, after a kind of an intermission in there during the depression when money was kind of hard to get, but I finally graduated from the University of Oregon.

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L In your initial comments, you alluded to your father going down to the Bay area to work in the - in the cannery business. Is that how the family got its start in the cannery business?

CL No, my father was in the fruit business all his life too, starting in about, oh, in the early 1900's. He had a dried fruit packing business at - down at Albany and, of course, dried fruit, practic ... principally prunes at that time, um, that business kind of , as you know it, gave way to canned foods, the dried fruit business gave way to canned fruits and canned vegetables, in about , oh, around 1920's, and the 20's and 25. And so at that time, then, with the dried fruit moving out, he went out of business down there in Albany, and then the opportunity came along to work for the California Canneries down in the San Francisco Bay area. He started out working for them in the - eh, raw fruit department, buying fruit for them.

L Was that the predecessor to the cannery business? Was the dried fruit?

CL Well, I think you take a look at preserved fruits generally - I think you go back into history -- clear back in to times they had dried meats, and dried things like that long before they ever had any canned vegetables. Things were dried and salted - brined - before they were canned.

L Um is that go ahead.

CL I think that's just the evolution of preserving fruit.

L Was there quite a few dried fruit operations up in this area also?

CL Oh, ah, back at that time there were a number of them. In fact, Hudson House, at one time, was in the dried fruit business. There was an H. S. Gile Co. down at Newberg was in dried fruit, and one of the bigger companies that was a west coast company was Rosenberg Bros., and my father also, when he came back up from California and moved back up this way, he worked for Rosenberg's for awhile, in the dried fruit business.

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L Where was this operation then?

CL That was in Portland. Originally they had a plant in Portland here, and then later on they moved that plant down to Dallas, Oregon.

L All right. When your father moved back up, up to the Oregon area, or ... did he become involved with the cannery operations up here then?

CL Hm, yes, to a degree. He worked for awhile, kind of as a fire... for the old Graves Canning Co. which had plants, eh, small plants scattered around here in the country. They had a plant out here at Sherwood. That's where the Sherwood plant came from. They had a plant at Woodburn; they had one down at Lebanon, and they had one over, I think, at Tillamook, over on the coast where they canned blackberries, and that cannery went out of business and my father kind of picked up the Sherwood plant and ran it for a

C couple of years. And then that Sherwood plant was eventually bought by R. D. (Bodle ?) Co. and National Fruit Canning Co., and then the company my father organized, the Portland Canning Co., bought the plant from them, and then, at the same time about, in about 1936, we also took over the old C. D. Minton, what was left of it, cannery at Forest Grove, and rehabili.. rehabilitated it and put it back in business, as the Portland Canning Company. Those two are both parts of the Portland Canning Company. Now back, that was in, eh, the early 30's, in fact he started in 1929 - I think Portland Canning Co. was incorporated in 1930, but at that time you had Oregon Canning Co. at Newberg and, of course, you had Ray Mailing at Hillsboro. We had the little plant there in Forest Grove, and one at Sherwood. There were a number of cold pack plants around, in other words plants that packed frozen berries -- that was just getting started then, and it was all in, in institutionalized sized containers for selling and re-manufacturing as preserves mostly. There wasn't too much retail business; in other words packing in small packages to be sold to the consumer of frozen foods, at that time. And there were a number of those plants around here in the area too. There was J. B. Chandler right here at the bottom of the hill. That came a little later -- in the late 30's and early 40's. Then there was R. I. McLaughlan Co. over at Beaverton. There was a little plant that started during World War II out at Banks, eh.. There was a start -- one over at Scholls, that I think was the start of Hudson House really, in the frozen food business. Ehm ... so there were a number of right here in this area besides, of course, over in the Gresham area you had the Lewis Packing Co. and Scenic Fruit Company, eh - I 'm trying to think -- Gresham Berry Growers, of course, at that time, over there.

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L I get the impression that the -- most of the canning operations began during the 20's, or had their inception here What began the canning industry? Who ... in other words, who invented the canning operation or the method of canning? .

CL Well, of course, you go back to Louis Pasteur for that. He's the one that first figured out the pasteurization which canning is. That goes back to - what was it - the Napoleonic Wars - I think. He won a prize for figuring out a way to preserve fruits and foods for Napoleon's armies, if my history is correct. I may need some correction there, but I believe that's right. But, eh, of course, then you come in the late 1800's on the east coast you had companies like, oh, I can't think back -- Underwood, I think, was one of the real old canners. Then, of course, at that time they made these -- the word "can" comes from cannister which was -- eh, tin cannister which was hand made -- they used to hand make cans and they left a little hole in the top -- and they were all cut out by hand and soldered up by hand. The little hole in the top -- they left it to put the fruit or vegetable in through, and then they soldered the top, all except for one little holes to let the steam, eh, get out 'til they got them hot -- got the cans heated up, and then they would close them up tightly to create a vacuum in there, and then continue cooking them. Of course, you sterilized everything In a partial vacuum and sterilized, and that's what kept the.. the food from spoiling.

- L So this canning, this canning business was just brought across to the west coast, then?
- CL That's right. It started on the east coast. In fact the big advance in canning was really in California in fruits and vegetables. California still is Mr. Big when it comes to canning. Down there the plants are gigantic, and they plant down there they can like, I've forgotten the statistics right now, but I suppose they can 30 or 40 million cases of things like cling peaches and fruit cocktail. Things like that. Very big pack. Up here, in the northwest, originally we canned quite a few pears, and then at one time before freezing became popular, we used to can quite a few berries up here too. I remember we used to can red raspberries, boysenberries; canned lots of evergreen blackberries in No.10 cans. That was a pretty big item It still .. it still is for a certain -- or at least was up to a few years ago -- I've kind of got away from that now, but the army used to buy pretty big quantities of canned blackberries for making blackberry pies. But , eh, the trend though, of course, was freezing -- very few can berries any more. I think there are only one or two canneries in Oregon now that can any berries. But yet pears were big items up here, still are, and plums at one time were a real big pack up here, but they have kind of aren't favored any more as a fruit like they used to be, and the pack has dropped off quite a bit. Of course, the berries when they started -- and they have gone into frozen more, and all your berries practically are frozen now. But the bigger items now in canning here are your vegetables, particularly beans. At one time Blue Lake beans was , I think, the biggest vegetable pack in the west coast -- in Oregon -- the western part of Oregon. Again, I don't have the exact statistics, but possibly I think beans were even bigger than peas. They used to can lots of peas over in eastern Oregon but I think beans were the biggest vegetable pack. And corn is a big pack yet in vegetables.
- L Hmm. You were All right. When was the first cannery in operation here in the Washington County area? To your recollection.
- CL Well, I actually couldn't say which would be possibly the first, but I think the Ray Mailing Cannery over at Hillsboro, which later on became the General Foods Birds Eye Plant over there -- ah, I think that would most likely be one of the earlier plants in this area.
- L I would like to know a little bit more about that -- that operation over there. It was really one of the dominant industries in the City of Hillsboro and Washington County. Ah, was, now Ray Mailing is two people, am I right?
- CL That's right. There was Mr. Ray and B. Mailing, and eventually I think it ended up that Bert Mailing owned it outright and it was B. Mailing Co. At the end. And then B. Mailing Co. was sold out to the Birds Eye Snyder Division of General Foods. Well Birds Eye Snyder Division and General Foods, I think, bought Birds Eye Snyder, and became Birds Eye Snyder Division General Foods, and then later they just dropped the
at the end and it became Birds Eye Division, and now I think they have even, well

they still use the Birds Eye brand, but I think they speak of General Foods now, even completely. And also at the same time there was a Ray Brown Co. over at Woodburn, which also was taken over by Birds Eye Division.

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- L How did Mr. Ray and Mr. Mailing become involved in the canning business? Did they have expertise in that area, or what was their situation?
- CL Well, actually, right off hand I don't know. I I I wouldn't know how they did really become involved here.
- L Did you know either of these two men?
- CL: Bert Mailing - I'd met Bert Mailing. I didn't know him near as well as I did some of the other people that followed the his number one assistant over there -- eh, Art Reiling. I knew Art Reiling real well. He was well he ended up as the Manager eventually for Birds Eye in this area, and I knew him much better than I did Mr. Mailing. However, I had met Mr. Mailing.
- L What was your general impression of Mr. Mailing -- the few times that you had met him?
- CL Well, a very energetic man, with ideas, and, of course, to be in any part of the agricultural business, I think you have to be someone that is willing to take big risks, because there is risk in the farming all the way through, and there is risk in markets, and also in your supply of crops in the canning business. But he was very successful, so I think that he necessarily had to be quite smart and had to follow markets and everything else that goes into the canning business quite astutely.
- L Do you think he had a training in that area or just - he just
- CL No, I think he was just a good business I don't know, but I think that at one time he was connected with the railroad business in some way I've got that recollection. On the other hand, Art Reiling -- he just grew up in the canning business. I'm pretty sure of that. In fact, his son is still in the works for North Pacific Cannery which is the sales agent for the Stayton Canning Co. and some of their cooperatives.
- L Was that what made .. eh .. the company so successful -- was a good manager?
- CL I think so -- good management -- and, of course, having other good employees, I think, comes along with good management -- the ability to pick good people.
- L Eh, I've heard of Mr. Mailing's physical appearance. He was quite

CL He was a big man. He was big and quite a little bit on the -- I don't know how to put this -- you know, kind of a husky man, and a little bit on the -- I was going to say on the fat side, but I don't know -- but he was big, you know.

L Hm. All right. What were some of the other initial canners? -- I think we have touched on a few of them.

CL Well, if you go on south, go down to Salem, of course, is one of the big canning areas. When you get down there you have the Paulus Brothers and the Paulus Cannery, that was one of the big ones. Then there is Star Fruit Products -- that was one of the older canneries in Oregon. Em ... Reid & Murdoch down there, which was started by Northwest Canning Company, I think -- the old Northwest was the newer Northwest Canning Company, but there is the Northwest Canning Company down in Salem that originally started down there, and then it became eventually Reid & Murdoch, and the same cannery is there now as (Truett)? Bros. -- but it went through several different owners, and W. T. Allan was one of the old time canners in the area. In fact, Allan Fruit Company still has a plant at Newberg, and now they are in (Brand)? Or Class A. Cherries for ice cream is the only fruit item I think they handle. They have branched off into the Allan Machinery Company which makes canning machinery now. It is just recently here that Kenny Allan, who is the son of W. G. died here, oh, about a year ago, and now I don't think there are any Allans left in the business. You

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L Pardon me.

CL Go ahead.

L I was just going to .. ah, you mentioned that canning was really big in the Salem area. Was it on an even par up here in the Washington County area, pretty much? Was it that big of an industry?

CL I think, I think, Salem -- Woodburn and Salem area -- was a much bigger area than Washington County area. However, Washington County area, later on here, we had Hudson House which was a good sized cannery at Forest Grove, and you had Flavorland came along later which started out as Sunset Packing Co. And that was actually started right after World War II. I think Cribbener's Cannery up at _____ is a frozen operation, still is frozen, but that was one of the food packers. Then, of course, there are two Portland canning company plants here in Washington County. And then I mentioned Allen Food Company which, at one time, handled more than cherries -- they were down in the Newberg area. The Springbrook Packing Co. down there in the Newberg area too. So there were a number of canneries around in this area.

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L How did you -- how did yourself get involved in the canning business then?

CL Well, like my father, as I said earlier, he took over this Graves operation and, er, eh, the plant there at Sherwood, and it was during the depression, 1930, 1931, 1932, so I was going to school now and then, and so I just worked there in the plant, and then when I graduated from college, I had been working in the plant, I knew something about the canning business, and they needed someone there, so I just kept with my father there in that business, and I was there from -- starting in 1930 when it was formed, working summers and whenever I could while going to school, and I was there up until it was sold in 1966 to some eastern interests, and then I stayed on with them for five years, and then they re-sold it, and I stayed there another, oh, not too long, after they sold it the second time, maybe a couple or three months, and then they brought in some new management. So that left me out of a job, and then I went to work for Northwest Packing Co. In Portland, and I worked at Northwest Packing Co. for about a year, and then things changed around there and we came to a parting of the ways and so then I was out of work for about a month -- a month and a half -- and I went to work for Claremont West over at Cornelius, and I have been there for the last six years.

L Hm. Hm.. You mentioned that you got your start during the early 30's, and that must have been in the middle of the depression.

CL Right at the start of the depression.

L Was the depression really hard times on the canning business?

CL Oh, boy! I'll say it was! I can remember \$6.00 a ton for plums, for instance, 20¢ an hour for labor to start with, and everybody was happy to work at those wages and work as long as they could, to get that money -- it was really tough times, but on the other hand, why a dollar went so much further than it does now. You could buy things with a dollar, like -- I can remember, I think, em, .. you could buy a Ford car for about \$500.00, and I know my dad bought an Oldsmobile for \$914.00 -- gee, we thought that was quite -- quit an outlay -- that much money for an automobile, and that was quite an automobile in those days. Well now, I think, the cheapest car you can get now is about \$5,000.00, then you start putting on the extras. So you can see, money went a lot further. It was harder to come by, but, of course, it went a lot further. But, eh, we had a struggle. Lots of years we didn't make any money there. It took a number of years to get thing off the ground and going.

L People must have really flocked to the -- to the canneries in search of employment, then, during this time.

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CL Well, that's right. In fact, in our operations I never did see it, except during the war, when it was really too difficult to get help. Sometimes late in the fall, after school has

started and the kids went back to college and things like that, then it was difficult to get help. But back in the 30's it took so much more help than it did later on. We used to have every -- like every box -- every -- all the fruit came in, in lug boxes, if you are familiar with those boxes you know, lug boxes - they all had to be hand handled, and they were all hand trucked. They were stacked on to a truck to bring them in out in the orchard, and they were trucked in and they were stacked off, and stacked up and then handled with a hand truck around six or eight, ten boxes at a time. And then, after -- all the empty cans originally were handled one at a time., you know, because you got them into a line. So it took a tremendous amount of help, and as things progressed, with the coming of World War II, you didn't have the help available, so you started in figuring out how to save that help, and then that's about the time you had the innovation of the lift truck, gasoline and propane powered and electric powered lift trucks became popular during and right after World War II, and that eliminated a lot of help. No more hand trucking. Then can handling went all into automatic can handling, and to pelletized cans that were automatically fed into can runs, and high speed fillers, high speed closing machines, continuous pressure cookers -- all that kind of equipment came along, so as the wage rates went up the price of canned goods stayed pretty much down. In fact, five years after the war, we were selling canned goods for a lot cheaper than we were during the war, because of innovations in mechanical handling. So that, I think, brought about a complete change in the canning industry. We have named all these plants. Now you have in Oregon -- you don't have one tenth the plants, but still you are handling just as much, or more, of products -- you are handling more products because the plants are bigger, they are higher speed, they are more efficient, and so there is still is the market here. Although the market for some things is very definitely changing, and one in -- comes to mind real quick is the Blue Lake bean industry, for instance. Originally the bean industry grew up in Oregon around the pole Blue Lake beans which is a premium, high quality bean, but it was all handled by hand. It was practically planted by hand, and it was strung up by hand originally. Later on they got stringing machines that would make the trellises for the beans to grow on. They were all hand picked and originally put in bags, of course, and later on in tote bins to be handled with lift trucks. But with the advent of the mechanical bush bean harvester, the Blue Lake bean, although always good quality, just faded out because the cost of producing it became so high as compared to mechanically harvested and handled bush beans, that people just couldn't, wouldn't pay the premium for them. So, as a result, instead of having a number of small growers growing pole Blue Lake beans, you have some very large growers growing hundreds of acres of bush beans which are, like I say, they are planted now by machines that plant very high density plantings, eh, maybe 15 to 20 rows to the ton, you have machines that go out there to harvest them, mechanical bean harvester, very similar to a combine. There's a big reel out in front, takes a 10 or 12 feet, foot swatch right through the field, that takes all the beans off mechanically. They go into a truck in bulk; they are hauled great distances at high speeds, and run through big plants. So all that eliminated the small cannery.

Another thing is strawberries. Now the strawberries have been changed for different reasons. Again, our quality is the best in the world, but strawberries have been changed because of growing in cultural practices and varieties. In California they produce tremendous tonnages per acre. They are expensive to grow down there, but they produce great tonnages, and approaching 50 tons now, and they are looking at the possibility of 100 tons to the acre. Those berries also have been bred and lend themselves to fresh shipping, and they can ship them all over, in fact all over the world I'll say, because they are shipped some of them clear to Europe now, and to the orient. And so they get such high prices for those, that they process berries down there, which is the berries at certain times when they can't ship them due to weather conditions and so forth, they go into processing -- that's kind of a bi-product with them, and so they process those berries very cheap. Up here in Oregon, our tonnage that we get from berries up here is around 10 tons are real good crops, and originally when we first went into business with the old Marshall berry, we got maybe 1-1/2 tons lots of years -- you never averaged more than 1-1/2 tons, and 2, 3 and 5 tons was a fantastic average. But the same -- at the same time, those berries all had to go into processing and compete with some of the California, and I missed Mexico -- Mexicans also were shipping berries in here in later years very cheap. We had to compete with them, so you see the berry acreage dropped from, I think, around 19,000 acres in Oregon with a production of around maybe 120 million lbs. down to around 5,000 acres with a production of 40 million lbs. So our production isn't near half, and, of course, with the increased tonnage per acre, our acreage is only about a third, but it's producing half of what we used to at least, so there is a big change come by, come around, in the agriculture here, in the Washington County area, because Washington County, I think, has more strawberry acreage in any county in Oregon. And so you can see that does affect our agricultural economy a little, the bush beans and the strawberries in this area. At least it has changed it quite a bit. Strawberries, of course, they're gone, but you have moved into more of the cane berries - that is the blackberries and the black berries, marion berries, and things like that, which Oregon is still, at the present time, has pretty near monopoly on those berries.

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L Mm .. we have covered quite the whole chronological time frame of the canning business. I would like to go back to the very beginning, ah, when the canning business first began, and, we are talking about the increase of mechanization, and the mechanization of canning, and you mentioned that, at first, it was labor intensive. How many people were working in the mills or -- I mean the canneries, at the very beginning.

CL Well, I can remember out at Sherwood there where we were running say, in beans, we were running around on a three shift basis and at peak capacity in that plant we would run around 15,000 cases a day, and that would be around say 200 tons at the most a day, and we would have on the payroll around 300 - between 300 and 400 people to start with. At the end out there, we were running about the same tonnage or more, and I think we got it down to where we were using 200 people.

End of Side A.

Side B.

Continuation of taped interview with Mr. Courtney Lasselle at his home in Tigard on May 11, 1978.

CL (continuation)

Eh ... at the end up there we were running about the same tonnage or more, and I think we got it down to where we were using about 200 people and ... and I think now that that would be considerably below that since I ... well ... in the last several years, as I mentioned earlier I haven't really been in the canning business. The company I work for now makes concentrated fruit juices, so

..... down there on beans we were running around 30 ... 30,000 cases a day I think we got up to and we were still using only about 10 men in that plant -- about 250 - 300 people.

L These people we are talking about, were they mostly ah ... women, ah ... young people, old people? What was the make-up?

CL Well, we had quite a few housewives and people like that working -- a little older people, that were working in the plant. They worked every summer. There were people, women, that wanted to earn money during the summer and their children were out of school and whatnot so they could work, and usually when school started, you saw quite a few of the women -- you know -- they started dropping out pretty fast 'cause they had children to get back in, in school. And then besides that, we had a big number -- a great number -- of college students, both girls and boys, working in the plant. There was quite a bit of seasonal help like that. And, of course, I was talking about picking these Blue Lake beans. Quite a few school children -- that's where a lot of those came from -- these busses, and I suppose you remember those too -- the busses -- they came by every morning about 6:00 o'clock and they went out and picked beans for Joe Doaks or somebody else -- you picked beans out there for maybe six weeks or so. Before that you were picking .. eh, strawberries or some of the other fruits. But ... that's another thing, in some of these berries even the mechanical harvesting coming in practically -- I would say 50% of the cane berries are now mechanically harvested, and the -- I don't think the time is too far off when 90% of it is going to be mechanically harvested. Again, that is going to eliminate small farmers and go for bigger farmers because the mechanical harvesters cost \$40,000, \$50,00 apiece -- well, you can't have a two acre field and grow berries on it. On the other hand, you can't very well compete if you use hand help. You pretty near have to get big so you have the big machinery to do the job more efficiently. It is a fact this year we will be experimenting out where I work -- we will have mechanically harvested strawberries. Two years ago we started on this program with one grower and a machinery manufacturer in the east -- there's a couple being tried
In the stages of development here in Oregon, and this year we will be running

quite a few mechanically harvested strawberries. And that there's lots of things that have to come about before that will really be a reality where big important volume will be mechanically harvested, and that will be developing new varieties for one thing. And then, eh ... improvements in the machinery. I think the basic machinery is pretty much as it's gonna be, but it's gonna be improved.

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L I think we have alluded to it ... or you have alluded to it several times, but, ah, ah, where were some of the original things canned? I think you mentioned a lot of them. Did we leave out any or ?

CL No, I think, just your fruits and vegetables, generally. All your fruits and vegetables. Of course, you have, you have much ... a lot more specialty items canned now like, oh, I'm thinking of ... oh, chili can carne -- there's a lot more things like that canned. Eh, spaghetti and meat balls, spaghetti dishes and ... ah, lots of juices, and also blended juices where water is added, and different things. I can't think ... pretty near everything is canned -- there are a lot more of those specialty items I have mentioned. Originally you had meat and fish and vegetables and fruits, and that was about it.

L This is a sort of chicken and egg question -- in that sense, which came first - the canning industry here in Washington county or the farmers growing crops, or did they just grow together?

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CL I think they had to grow together.

L Was there a market -- a ready made market for the canners before they arrived here ... in this area?

CL Well, most of the canned goods originally, you know, were shipped east -- lots of our fruits -- most of our fruits were shipped east. And even the vegetables. I remember out at Sherwood the biggest -- I would say 90% of our pack there went to the east coast. In the east ... the mid west ... they didn't have the fruit like we had here. We canned them up and shipped them back there. On plums -- I mentioned plums -- which have gone out of favor kind of with the public now, but out at Sherwood and that's one of the original products that Portland Canning Co. ran were canned plums or canned prunes as they called them in those days ... the old prune that they dried and as you know grew all over the hills here. We used to have tremendous markets for those in the midwest and ah, used to pack them in No.10 cans, gallon cans, and without syrup or without sugar -- just in water. We canned thousands and thousands of cases of them and they went in to places like Wichita and Oklahoma City, and St. Louis, all back through the midwest, and on the east coast we used to ship a little better grade in syrup packs in the 2-1/2 cans, and at that time it all went by .. by ship. We would haul them into Portland and they would load

them on to steamers .. steamships .. and took them down through the canal and to the east coast.

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L Wow!! This was before the advent of trucking then we're talking about?

CL Well, we were trucking them all into Portland then -- the trucks went into Portland to the dock. At that time shipping by water was so much cheaper than rail, that you could ship them ... they all had to go by boat, but then there was such a difference in the rate, and then due to various changes in labor conditions and costs on the docks and trucking costs from the plants into the docks, and things like that, it got ... the two rates became -- got closer and closer and then innovations in the rail rates where they would let you stop cars at several places to unload, and things like that -- well pretty soon it got up to where the steamship companies were just forced out of business, and everything went rail or truck. Now with frozen -- lots of the items go to the east coast by truck -- midwest by truck -- refrigerated trucks -- but you ship smaller quantities and ship faster - a little more flexible.

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L The canneries then and therefore also the farmers ... were really dependent on the eastern markets then.

CL That's right. I think we still are, to a great deal .. to a great degree, and that's one thing that has happened to ah ... with the coming of the bush beans. Oregon, the northwest, had kind of a monopoly on this pole Blue Lake bean. We were shipping them clear to the east coast -- we were selling lots of them in Philadelphia and New York, Boston, but when we came to the bush beans, and the mechanically harvested bean, they could grow them back there as good as we could grow them here. So now, actually, beans are being shipped from, maybe, Wisconsin and up in that area, are being shipped to California and taken some of the market that used to be exclusively northwest. So it has affected our market for beans out here -- the change from the pole bean to the bush bean.. And those bush beans -- they grow up in Wisconsin, we'll say, and New York state, Michigan -- they are so much closer to the big metropolitan areas back there -- Chicago, New York, Philadelphia -- that their freight rates are so much less that they can compete better, and that's taken some of the market that was originally for products out of this area here.

L That's ... that's interesting. During your time, in the canneries, you must have met a lot of the farmers, growers, coming into the canneries.

CL That's right.

L What was their .. in general, what was the relationship between the farmers and the canning ... or the canneries?

CL Well, I don't know. In my own experience we have always had pretty good relations with our growers, in any company I have worked for. Of course, ah, you ... you have a situation there, of course, when you are in one business you try to put out the best product the cheapest you can, and so you are trying to buy that .. that product ... at the most advantageous price you can, and, of course, the growers -- he's on the other side -- trying to get the most money for his product, which is natural in any business. But, ah, in spite of what's said, I think that canners never tried to, at least most of them, have never tried to beat a grower down because, after all, you gotta have growers, and you gotta have good growers. One good grower is worth a dozen of them that are just struggling along, and you have to finance, and he hasn't got adequate financing to have good machinery, and ah, good equipment that he needs all the way through, so with a good prosperous grower, you are gonna get better product and you're gonna prosper. I think when, ah, the ... when the grower is making money, the canner's usually making money, and vice versa.

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L Ah ... my understanding that .. the prices really fluctuate from season to season then. Why is that?

CL Ah, that's right. Usually they go in cycles. A good example, I think, is in our berry market here in the last few years. Ah ..what happens is you have a short crop, we'll say, so the price will be up .. it will go up. Well, it takes two to three years, maybe four years, to get in .. really get into production -- take something like -- blackberries -- you go out and you plant -- first you have to get the plant - you have to grow the plant. That takes one year. So then you plant the plant; that takes another year, and then in the first year's crop you get there is a very sparse crop -- it's a baby crop they call it - if you live in the area you more than likely heard that term. So you get that first crop, then it's the second year before ... second and third year before you really start getting a crop, so you are four years -- concern growing your plant -- you have four years to expand that crop. So if we get a really short year, we'll say, and the price goes up real high and everybody says -- "boy, blackberries are the things to grow. Look how much money Joe made off of an acre up . there!" So, they plant, well the next year they don't get any increased production to speak of. It may even go down. So the price is again good. So more people say "boy look at the price of those blackberries?" and they go up in (plan?) So about the third year you start getting these berries .. start coming in, and the fourth year you catch up with the demand, and the fifth year you are ahead of the demand, and once you get too much ahead of that demand, boy, then the price just goes skyrocketing .. I mean just falling down -- it goes right down to the bottom, because, after all, unless something new is developed to use them. you only eat three meals a day, and once you get beyond that, and the amount of blackberries you eat in three meals a day -- well, in other words the demand isn't too elastic - it won't increase as the price goes down. it's kind of an elastic demand - so your price goes down. Well, if the price goes down and so then people aren't making money. So they over correct -- they start digging them out. People can't live ... the farmer, he has to get into something else, so they start taking the blackberries out. Pretty soon they go too far the other way. And then, of course, you

always have another little thing -- like weather conditions thrown in here to help things along. You may have shortages because of weather conditions, or have ideal conditions and have big crops and have an over supply. But usually I think that is what happens. You get the plantings -- the supply lags behind the plantings and pretty soon you got too much and the price goes down, and when the price goes down, the acreage comes out -- pretty soon your over correct there. So then the demand is greater than the supply and the price goes up, and then your plantings come back in. If you look at them, they just kind ... the price goes like that -- up and down. Barring some ... something other that might enter into it, such as during the war when help was real scarce, so you couldn't grow more if you wanted to.

L Boy, it sounds like you almost near an economic forecaster there in the business to understand the market.

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CL That's right. You feel you have to watch things like that pretty close. Right now I think we are in a situation where certain berries -- looking down the road here two or three years -- berries will not be very cheap again. Right now they are very high, on two or three of the berries like evergreen blackberries are high priced, boysenberries are terrifically high priced. Ah, red raspberries are high priced. Now, you can talk to some growers and they will so, "Oh, no, they are not high priced -- they are not high priced!" Well, ... ah ... I think they are, I think that not because I am a packer, but just knowing what the tonnage is you get, and knowing a little bit about what you can grow and what ... what the ... what they get back. The people that have got the plantings now, are making money now. But starting out with a new planting, you are looking at selling them four years down the three years ahead, they may not be too high priced then, because it is very, very expensive to put in a new planting of berries now. Plants cost you say, 25 - 30 cents apiece -- it takes a thousand of them, say, to the acre, that is \$250.00 per plant. Then you have to put those up on trellises -- you have to put in posts and stakes. You have to put in wire. You have to grow them for two years to get them up there to get your first crop. So, most likely it will cost you, oh, I suppose it would cost you \$1,000.00 - \$1,200.00 an acre before you get your first crop off. So, and then, of course, sprays are expensive, your help is high priced now, wages are high, so it's pretty ... pretty high but when you think ... and get good yields when you are getting something like 50 - 60 cents a pound, getting five tons to the acre on some - some of these good growers are getting five tons and better to the acre, well, I think they are doing all right now.

L You charted the economic curve, so to speak, roughly charted it. Was there a time in the past 20, 30, 40 or 50 years where that curve really skyrocketed or pummeled one direction or the other? ... really a bad time?

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CL Well, I can remember a number of years ago when plums, for instance, sold for say \$20.00, \$25.00 per ton, and we had a real short crop and they went to \$120.00. So you say, boy, they sure made it that year, but the trouble is they didn't make it because very few of them had a crop, and the ones who had any crop at all had so darned few that they didn't make it anyway, because they only had a half a crop or a quarter of a crop. So the value they got per acre wasn't any greater than if they had their regular normal crop and \$20.00 a ton. So, it doesn't work out that because the price is high you make a lot of money sometimes. Now, on taking raspberries for instance here last year where the price was up in the neighborhood of 60 cents a pound, and the crop was good, the growers made money -- they had a good crop -- they had a good price., but I don't know, you have heard people say well, you only get it about three out of five years. Well, sometimes you have one that get it three out of five years maybe that's so strong. But you do ...you ... there's some growers that I know that have grown berries year after year after year, after year, so they haven't lost money every year. That's the same as the canning business. I've cried about it myself when I was in it, but after all we never stayed in it for 30 years out there and lost money every year. (Laughing) ... you just wouldn't. You couldn't and that's the same with some of these farming enterprises. Sure, sometimes you have been kind of rough, but the good growers I think, have generally made money.

L What is the Northwest Cannery Association? What was its purpose?

CL Well, the North .. it isn't the Northwest Cannery Association any more. Originally there was the Northwest Cannery Association, there was the Northwest Frozen Food Association, and they kind of ran along parallel. Well, you had so many problems with the two industries that were the same. In other words, you had growing problems ... growing strawberries for canning, or plums or beans for canning, and the same things for freezing, and usually these associations -- the purpose of them -- is to work collectively on some problems. Like, say you were having problems with varieties, or problems with hm. hm. ... diseases in certain products. Well you go down and you sponsor some research at Oregon State and different things like that, to try and correct some of these problems, so you try and work together for freight rates and getting advantageous freight rates. So you work together on research, better metals and better methods for canning, we'll say, and making cans or better methods of freezing, you finance research and things collectively into those areas. That's the purpose of it, but you had these two associations that were parallel in so many things, that finally they combined into Northwest Cannery & Freezers. Then as time went on you had other associations here that were very closely allied, like the Cherry Briners Association. Then you had the Pickle Packers, and things like that. So here about two or three years ago they changed the name of it to Northwest Food Processors Association. So now it takes in all kinds, especially items pickles, brine cherries, dried fruits, any processed food. So that's the name of it now -- it isn't Northwest Cannery any more, it is the Northwest Food Processors Association.

L When it first started ... when it got its start, did the canneries in the Washington county area belong to that?

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CL Pretty near every cannery in Oregon belonged to it, and there were a few that didn't, but for the most part, everyone belonged. Yeah.

L Where did it get its start?

CL Well, it was just an association. It got its start through a group of canners getting together and they found out they all had some of the same problems. So they said, well, let's get together here and form an association, hire a secretary or an executive vice president or call him what you want, to direct some effort and we'll put up some money to solve some of these mutual problems we have. That was then Then out of that you had other kinds of associations come together. You had things like the Blue Lake Bean Growers Association; you had the Purple Plum Association, and those associations were put together to do possibly cooperative advertising, things like that, on one particular problem, or to do right now -- the company I am working for now -- we just joined in on a research project to do some research on blackberries and marion berries, cane berries eh ... for the most part. Going into some of the problems we are having with septoria leaf spot -- things like that -- to give the -- to get -- we are donating money which will be given to Oregon State College to put people to work trying to solve some of these disease problems with cane berries and that's why the associations were formed. Some people think they are formed to get together and try and control things, and nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, that's against the law to do it, and people who belong to these associations are very careful that nothing like that gets into them, because you get into a real serious eh, trouble there with the government because of regulations, and that is one thing you don't want to do.

L All right. I think we have traced the inception and rise of the canning industry here in Oregon, particularly in Washington County. I think we have alluded to the gradual, and sometimes not gradual, demise of the canning industry here. Could you elaborate a little bit farther on that?

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CL Well, it's like, I think I said here briefly ... I think we're most likely canning or processing - I'd better say processing because frozen has become more of a factor than it was a number of years ago. I think we are processing tonnage-wise, most likely fruits and vegetables, as much as we ever were -- most likely more. But you have smaller -- fewer plants and bigger plants and you're trucking products greater distances -- your farms are bigger because they have to be to afford, and have all the necessary machinery now, to handle these things mechanically and in bulk, so I think ... I think we are about most likely bigger than we were, but we do have less (companies ??) and like I think also that the canneries had to get bigger because of the cost of all of this high speed machinery -- bigger machinery you have to have.

- L Do you see that as a growing trend in the future of the processing industry here?
- CL I think you are seeing that in the trend of everything in this country. Not only ... not only in having companies that are big in one item, but companies that spread out and grew into a lot of different directions. They get into conglomerates they are called now -- eh, the reason, I think, is for financing -- things like that -- that are bringing about as much as anything.
- L Do you think this growing trend toward conglomeration affects the quality of the product at all? Compared to in the past?
- CL No, I don't think so. I think the quality has been improved right along. I think all my life the quality has been improved. I think there is some things that have been added that cost -- increased the cost and still have not benefitted the consumer too much, and I think some of this nutritional labeling, and now they are talking about - what do they call it -- dating on your cans and dating cans, and things like -- I think on canned goods and some of those things, I think all you are doing is just adding to the cost, because no packer is knowingly going to put out a product that is getting so old that it would in any way affect the edibility or have any bad effect on the people that did use it, because you are not going to build any business that way, and that follows right through to the grocery store down here that's selling it. And as far as all this nutritional labeling, I don't know how many people sit there and study whether they are getting enough Vitamin A and B, and this, that, and the other thing, and the protein, and so forth, they are on those cans now. Did you ever sit down and analyze all that when you were eating your beans to see how many beans you had to eat to get the ... what percentage of your -- what do they call it? Daily -- I've forgotten what you call it now -- daily amount that you need of a vitamin or protein? I think that that's just ... hm, you eat for more than nutrition, too, you eat for enjoyment and you don't go down and buy things that are not enjoyable to eat just because -- well, what I mean to say -- that they have to be good or you wouldn't buy them.
- L All right. That's about -- I think we have pretty much covered the industry as a whole -- I think we have got a pretty good feel
- CL One final thing -- I think that processed foods, I think, by and large have been one of the best values the people have had in my life time. In other words, I think that for good food I have spent less of my earnings -- well, each year I think that statistics prove it. I have spent less of my earnings for food each year, and I don't know -- I have been in the food business all my life, and although some things maybe I could pick apart, but I think for the most part, the food we get is very good, very wholesome and reasonably priced.

L Ok, if you don't have anything else to add, I think that we have had a good discussion on that.

CL I don't know what value it will be to you in your work here, but I hope it has been helpful.

L. Oh, I think it is -- it gives a good historical background in the canning industry.

End of Interview.