

INTERVIEW NUMBER FOUR: Peter Nicholson

Interview With: Peter Nicholson, former manager, Pure Spirits Department, Gooderham & Worts; now retired

Conducted By: Christopher Andreae, Historica Research Limited

Location: Former Hiram Walker Offices, Gooderham and Worts Property, 55 Mill Street, Toronto

Date of Interview: July 27, 1994, Interview Started at 6:15 P.M; finished at 8:30 p.m

Start of Interview

Chris: Thank you very much for coming Peter.

Peter: My pleasure.

Chris: As you can see, I have a list of questions but we don't have to follow them at all. The only one I would like to start off with is identifying who you are, your name, when you started?

Peter: I am Peter Nicholson. I worked for the company for over 36 years, almost 37. I started here in the summer coming from school, a part time job and decided I wasn't going to back to school at age 16 and I stayed here until Christmas and I got laid off. Then they called me back and I was there right up until the last day.

Chris: You started when?

Peter: 1954.

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Chris: 1954?

Peter: Yes, the summer of '54.

Chris: You worked in a lot of areas?

Peter: Yes, I was fortunate. I liked my job. This was an awfully good place to work. I started out like everybody else, in the cannery. They used to can antifreeze here for Dow. I worked in there for a while. They kind of moved me all over the place. I worked in the pure spirits [department]. I worked in the denaturing department, the paint shop and, as a matter of fact, I was in the pure spirits when I got laid off that Christmas. When they rehired me, brought me back, I believe it was sometime around March. After that March, I stayed in the pure spirits until they weren't as busy. I more or less travelled in every department, wherever they were busy, that's where they sent me.

Chris: If we just go back to the antifreeze canning, when did that start? It was going strong when you arrived?

Peter: Oh, yes. I don't know what year it started. That was one of the reasons that they took on a lot of summer help. The company was hiring students.

Chris: So that's how you got your job?

Peter: Yes. A few of my friends that I played ball with during the summer, worked here. They were long time employees. They knew I was looking for a job. Their brothers, the older ones, they put a good word in for me and I came down and filled an application and you know...

Chris: The rest is history.

Peter: Yes, it helps.

Chris: Were you on the top floor of the canning line of Building 58?

Peter: I am not sure of the building numbers. I just know the buildings and where they are. It is right on the corner. The top floors were where the tanks are that hold the antifreeze. It would be, I think, the third floor or maybe the fourth.

Chris: What was it like?

Peter: It was, well, at that time nobody wanted to work in the cannery because it was very tedious and you were always moving. You have to keep up with a machine and the older buildings being what they were, weren't sort of set up for the entire operation. When you got the cans in, the cans came in on a tractor trailer and everything had to be "hand bombed" off the truck. Everybody was the same there.

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Chris: Was it noisy or smelly?

Peter: No, it was smelly. It was noisy because, you know how the cans are rolling around on the machine and you usually had two lines going at once and being young guys, horsing around, whistling and playing jokes on everybody. There was a fellow who used to put the empty cans on the machine, then you went from empty can to packing, then from packing to gluing and if you weren't working on the line, you were downstairs taking them off and piling them on the floor, moving them a couple of days later. Guys would be there with the glue brush and they would glue you up a bit, rather than the cases. One year we got a bad bunch of fellows -this is later on -not bad but full of beans these guys. They didn't particularly care for their Shift Foreman, so one of them somehow got a hold of his keys and dropped it in one of the cans and the can was sealed. They found the keys eventually.

Chris: But they had to open up a whole bunch of cans?

Peter: Yes.

Chris: Or shake them, I suppose?

Peter: Well, they usually come in either gallon or quarts. In the quarts, I believe there were 16 to a case and 4 gallons to a case.

Chris: What about the floor? It has a waterproof on the canning line, sort of an asphalt surface?

Peter: That's right. I believe what it was, was like a tin floor with an asphalt thing on there so it would cut down on the noise a bit and it wouldn't be as harsh standing on there and if anything split. That was the main thing because antifreeze is very slippery. Believe me.

Chris: Ok, I will take your word for it.

Peter: They used to can, for argument's sake, Tamblyn Drug Stores, Shell, Esso ...there was a Bull Dog antifreeze -I believe that was run for Eatons. All these outfits were into antifreeze.

Chris: Didn't Gooderham have its own?

Peter: Yes, they had Hot Shot. That was their line. That was on another machine. That was their own formula. But basically - the cannery operation - you did the different companies' brands with their specific formula. There might be a little different dye in it or maybe a little more of something else.

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Chris: And that is where the mixing tanks came in?

Peter: That's right. It was mixed up at the end of this building, away down here [pointing] where the big tanks are. There is a big tank by Parliament Street. That holds about one million gallons, I believe. There is a little mixing room just beside it [Note: room still in Building #9 in 1994]. It would be pumped into a scale and your inhibitor oil, or whatever they put into the formula would all mix there and then pumped up [to the top of Building 58/59]. A lot of the tanks ... the dye was put in upstairs [on the top floor of Buildings 58/59].

Chris: Is that why the tanks have the propeller...

Peter: Yes, that's right an propeller. Some of them [tanks] had air as well. You have to blend it.

Chris: So, even if they put the chemicals or additives in over here [in Building 9], they still weren't mixed properly?

Peter: They were mixed but it is just to ensure that it was a good mixture. I don't know if you have ever been up there or not [top floor of Buildings 58/59]. I can't particularly remember - the tanks were a fair size but they weren't huge. For argument's sake, if Esso wanted you to run 20,000 gallons or 40,000 gallons or an 80,000 gallon mix, you had ensure that it was of the dye, the colour was right and by mixing... As you know, when you mix things, especially with the colouring, if you are adding a powder to it, you have to make sure you get it up. It is just like if you were going to mix yourself a chocolate milk out of a Hershey powder, if you just put it in like that and don't stir it. They seem to get caught on the inside - you have to break it up.

Chris: Okay. I was impressed because the propellers there look like they are off a motor boat or something like that.

Peter: Yes. You have to get the good agitation.

Chris: And then was it gravity feed? They weren't pumped to the fillers?

Peter: It was pumped up into the tanks [at the top of Buildings 58/59] but from the tanks it was gravity fed. On the top of the canning machine there was a large, sort of holding tank. They could adjust it. There were also valves there. The valve upstairs would be wide open and you could just cut back on the valve here and there was a float in there that would also cut the flow off.

Chris: There is nothing there now. [See pages 94-98 of Gooderham & Worts Heritage Plan Report #6: Industrial Heritage Assessment]

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Peter: Right. I can always remember a float ... and you know.

Chris: When did this close?

Peter: I don't know what year they lost the contract from Dow and then it turned out that they sort of lost There was a bunch of 'fly-by-night' outfits that moved in and what they would do is can for Dow a lot cheaper because what they did - they would have some little warehouse somewhere with machines and what-not and if they had a two day run, they would run it for two days and then let everybody go and then maybe three days later start again, work for two days. That was one of the ways it was cheaper. Then they [the car companies] started into the bulk. They used to come down here with tank trucks and take it right to General Motors and Ford or whoever purchased it. They would put it right in the cars as they came off the line.

Chris: You were, for the bulk of it then, sending it right off to the assembly plant, is that it?

Peter: It is like everything else. The antifreeze, as far as I was concerned, at one time it was quite expensive to buy. It was a speciality thing. Like Shell had their own brand. Chrysler had their own brand. Esso had what they called Esso Rad. I believe Eaton's was Bull Dog brand. I don't know how many different brands.

Chris: You just think today that there is - just sort of - Canadian Tire...

Peter: I tell you, I worked on the trucks too and we used to load them up right in that laneway there [pointing]. A roller would come right out into the truck and then two of us, the driver and the helper, would start loading in these cans. You couldn't load just one side of the truck because it would start to ... [gesturing to show a lean in the truck] And we used to just run them up here to Princess Street. Esso had a plant here, like a warehouse. And then like I said - Tamblyn Drugstores - boy, some of them you had to carry them into the drug stores, down these little wee steps into the basement. The drug stores weren't equipped to handle 50-60 cases or whatever. Boy, some of those places, you would be trying to carry those cases down.

Chris: It also struck me as odd that antifreeze has nothing really to do with the Gooderham and Worts distillery.

Peter: No, I guess it was just what you would probably call in the early days, of diversification. They had the storage tank here. I don't know just whether Dow and Gooderham's kind of had an agreement, maybe half each. We used to do a lot of antifreeze as well in drums, like to different customers: International Harvester or whatever. They would take it in bulk. I believe it was also through Dow but we were like the people that would Dow would get the orders and we would fill them.

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Chris: So, in effect, it was really just a packaging operation for Gooderham and Worts?

Peter: I believe so. Nobody even questioned it. It was a job and you just went and did it. Everybody would come down here to work. To a lot of us, it didn't really seem like a job. You knew everybody and the way the company was operating. Boy, it was nothing to have a guy [work here for] 35 years. I think when they closed it down, I think the fellow with the least amount of seniority on my staff had 25 years. At that time, when we closed, I believe I had about seven of the fellows working for me. There was even a couple of them that had more years than me, like 38, 37, 37. I was down here last week [July 22, 1994] for Jim White. He was the last person hired by this company. He is just now making ten years. But that was the way the company was. You pretty near had to shot somebody to lose your job.

Chris: It was also well run. It was a good place to work because you felt...

Peter: It was. I think a lot had to do with who worked here as well as how the company was run. Like anything else, you are going to meet people that you don't agree with or whatever, but generally, I can speak for myself, the 37 years I was here, I only had a few years where I wasn't very comfortable here.

Chris: Because of a boss or something like that?

Peter: Yes.

Chris: That seems quite remarkable. I guess, what you are saying is that most people found it that way too.

Peter: Yes. It is hard to explain to somebody unless ... Most of the time it was people who really liked their job and if you think about, and I guess the proof is on the old honour role type of thing. Long time employees. One of my first bosses - I ended up being his son's boss and he retired here with 51 years service and his boss left with 52. Now if I would have been around to go to age 65 - I left here four years ago and I was 52 - so I would have just made 50.

Chris: If the plant had stayed open, there was no reason why you wouldn't have?

Peter: Well, no, actually, myself, I had set myself a goal. I would have liked to have been gone at about age 56, 57 where I am now. I went four years earlier. At first I was a little bitter.

Chris: You sure don't look like you are complaining now.

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Peter: I have been fortunate. Everything that I have done has gone well for me since I left.

Chris: Now when you say you were a little bitter, was it really a surprise that it was going close?

Peter: I don't know. Maybe it was in the presentation, I don't know. I can't speak for anybody else. For myself, I guess the old saying, "I wanted to be the one to say, 'that's it.'" I wasn't quite ready. I had a plan that I wanted to implement to kind of make my retirement the way I wanted it. I got a very nice settlement from the company. The only thing, with my years of service, my age was against me for my pension. As you know for pensions, that's for the rest of your life for however long you live. With a few more years, it could have been substantially more.

Chris: So it was more bad timing?

Peter: That's right.

Chris: But you sort of knew the plant was going to close? At least talking to Jim and others, it wasn't a total surprise.

Peter: I will tell you something. They had a huge, huge layoff here in 1957, big layoff. They shut the distillery right down and from then on they were only running it for a few weeks a year just to retain their license. There was a large layoff in 1957 and when you were laid off and come back again, from that day forward the joke here was, "we're closing." It got so much that everybody was talking about closing. It was closing since '57. There were things being done to try and stop it from closing, however...

Chris: '57 seems to me that was when they closed grain mashing down.

Peter: That's right. That's why I say, the distillery itself.

Chris: It was just molasses mashing after that?

Peter: Well, no. They did wine lees which are dregs from the wine companies. The Canadian grapes aren't strong enough so they would run them through the still and get the alcohol. It would be classified as wine spirit because it had derived from the grape and with that alcohol they would fortify the Canadian wine.

Chris: So our famous sherries and things like that?

Peter: Any wine, yes. When you are in the distilling end of it, if you were making rum, the government says that it is derived from molasses and therefore it is rum. If it derived from corn, therefore its corn whiskey. If its derived from - etc. etc. That is how it picks

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up its gender or whatever you want to call it. The still as it is now was a neutral spirit still at the end. There was very little odor to it at all but the classification came from what it was made from.

Chris: So, you mean in '57 you were making beverage alcohols with a real flavour or taste.

Peter: No, No, No. It was just a little different still operation. There would be, it is very difficult to tell a layman, but there would be a little different scent to the alcohol. You couldn't say that is definitely corn or that definitely what it is. One of the biggest things we were told was that it is the same as the aging process. It is very easy it to darken it but it is too hard to lighten it. Therefore the neutral spirit was just a better spirit. They upgraded the still and it produced what they classed as a neutral spirit, no odor.

Chris: All this happened in '57?

Peter: No, in '57 they closed the operation down of the grain operation because of economic reasons. They had a bigger still in Windsor and they could produce enough alcohol for everybody, like for the Corby's which was tied in and different places and their still was working to capacity. This one was so small, it was producing 5,000 gallons a day. They could do that in almost two shifts. They would double that easy.

Chris: So why didn't it close in '57?

Peter: From what I understood, you had to - there are many reasons - but, you had to keep your license as a distillery, you must run the still. So it was deemed at that time that they would run so many weeks of the year. Well, then the wineries got involved, the stripping of the lees to give them wine spirit. It got to be another paying thing and then they decided that all the rum for the organization would be made here. It was strictly a rum operation. If Walker's were running grain and when they switched over to molasses or rum, they would have to clean all the plates of the still and they would down for several days while they were cleaning. Then when they switched back from the molasses, they would have to take everything all off the plates of the still. So it just worked out that all the rum was done here eventually.

Chris: So it gave it almost a second life then?

Peter: Exactly. When I started here, the only thing I had to do with the distillery. I used to go in and load the grain bags in the railway cars after they cooked their mashes and got the alcohol out of it. They would dry it and bag it and sell it to the farmers for feed. Well I was one of the peons that carried the bags coming down the chute and pile it up, 540 or 550 bags to a car. They had a few stills down there. They used to make absolute alcohol at the time and also Consolidated Alcohols was part of this operation here which was a subsidiary of Gooderham's. They were all tied in. We had beverage alcohol plus industrial alcohol. Then we also handled finished products through the Company's

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trucks, we were delivery our own product to the various LCBO outlets in the area. We delivered to, something like, 81 stores we handled from here. Just Hiram Walker's, Gooderham's brands.

Chris: That's why there is those case goods warehouses?

Peter: Yes.

Chris: Coming back to this layoff. I hadn't really heard that it was such a massive one. Do you remember what the numbers were?

Peter: It was for here because during the war, apparently, this was at peak as far as manpower operations were, from what I understand. Through the war time, they needed alcohol in the manufacturing of munitions and various other things. From what I am told from the old timers that I had worked with, you couldn't fire anybody here during the war.

Chris: So a layoff of any sort?

Peter: In '57 different things went on and maybe down in Walkers, they got that new still and maybe in Peoria [Illinois - site of another Walker distillery] or wherever, they decided, as I mentioned earlier - about the still operation.

Chris: Did it go from suddenly 200 people to 80 people?

Peter: No, no, no a lot of them from the distillery were placed What they did was offer some employees Some of the employees came forward and they left of their own accord, others stayed. A lot of them came over into the plant so to speak - three or four of them were spotted in one of the department's I was in. It was done well. Everybody seemed to be happy with the way it went. They got a package deal - "x" amount of cash for so many years, or so many weeks pay for so many The formula from what I talked to different

[problem with equipment and changed tape recorders]

Generally, I can't recall anybody that was bitter about it.

Chris: But it was a cultural shock, was that it?

Peter: Yes, it all stems back again to long time employees. It was like a big family down here. Everybody knew everybody. If I can tell you just how good it was, just one little incident. I don't know if you want this on tape or not. There was one fellow here, Johnny Bagley, he was quite a nice fellow. He was a great New York Yankee fan and most of us didn't like the Yankees because they were always winning. Another fellow by

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the name of Kitch Jefferson said the Yankees aren't going to win and John, he never swore. His harshest words were Son of a Sea Cook. So any, he says to him, "I'll tell you what Kitch, if the Yankees lose the world series, I'll kiss your behind right on the City Hall steps at high noon." Well, lo and behold, the Yankees lost. So one morning - Monday morning - everybody gathers in the pipe shop and I mean everybody. Kitch is going to get paid off on his bet. We bring him down to the machine shop in a wheel barrow. Kitch walks in. There had to 50 people there. John Bagley said "I know what I said and I'll honour my bet." So Kitch got right up on the work bench there. They took a face cloth and washed off his behind. One of the boys took a powder puff and puffed his rear end with baby powder. John walked over and kissed it. It was that type of an atmosphere. There was a lot of kibitzing. It didn't seem like a job to a lot of people.

Chris: I mean, even after that, the fact that people didn't start job hunting and looking somewhere else even though everybody thought it was going to close...

Peter: Yes, I was laid off for a brief period of time and then when things got better, I was brought back again. No, a lot of the fellow that did move on -who left - as I said to you earlier left of their own accord. They had contacts. It was a case of "Alight Chris, your a friend of mine. Well look it, even though I have five more years in this company than you do, I can get a job so I'll take the settlement and get the job if you can't. There were things that did happen like that. Some fellows were older. When this came about - the big layoff in '57 - it was after that that they didn't hire anybody. When a person retired, that was it. They didn't hire anybody to take his place. Outside of, maybe - that I can recall - about a half a dozen fellows. That would be it.

Chris: And so you mean that

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[Chris's question not repeated]

Peter: Yes, for argument's sake, if there were eight fellows in the department and one of them left and retired, then there would seven regulars in that department. Then they also worked on the fact that if you needed more men, you got them from the departments that weren't busy. So everybody ended up, towards the end, they worked everywhere which was good because you were never stuck for an operation. You had some experience all the time.

Chris: Did you feel it was more seasonal then? You would be moving into different parts of the...

Peter: Yes, wherever you were needed. If they happened to get a big job or a big order and they needed drum fillers or they needed somebody in the paint department to paint the drums or whatever. Whoever wasn't busy was going. At that time the foreman, they

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used a little discretion, too. They didn't send a long time employee on the job where he was going to be busting his can. There is no modern things down here. Everything was push, pull and lift.

Chris: But it still must have made money for the company to still...

Peter: I believe so. You can't get into the specifics when the company is that big or what they are doing. You never know. We always heard that we were losing money but what else can your boss tell you. The old saying, if your getting a raise, but when you see the little figures in the paper of what they showed for their quarterly profit that would be the whole organization. We should be so lucky.

Chris: When did it go into rum production? If you said that the place closed for a while was it a year do you think?

Peter: No, maybe a little longer than that. I can't honest say. They ran the distillery just enough to keep their license. Maybe some wine lees. I would have to think it would have had to have been in around '64 that we got rolling pretty good on it.

Chris: On the rum?

Peter: Yes, like on the rum and more wine lees. That also got bigger. I believe they used to have it done by one of the, a few small distilleries in the Niagara region, like Ryder but they were having problems with what was left in the tubs. There would be burlap bags in the wine lees. What it was, if they had the wine and then it would sit in the tank and they would decant it off. In other words, all the undesirables went to the bottom and they took it off the top. The sediment and everything would settle down in the bottom. When they shipped the wine lees to us, you would get grape stocks, burlap bags, where they have thrown sugar bags and everything in it. There would be all kinds of things. If you had an area where there was going to be some ... anything flying around, it just gets attracted to it and it would be in there. I'm not saying ...

Chris: Like seagulls?

Peter: Well, maybe, that just an example.

Chris: That would be trucked in here?

Peter: It would be brought in by tank truck. It would be right here at this side door [of Building 5]. The pipe is still probably there sitting outside the wall. There was large steam pump in there - piston steam pump. You would pump it up, it would go up right through the pipe and right into one of the tanks. Right into one or two tanks, depending on the amount there was. There would be different wineries that would send lees. It started off, Brights was our best customer. But Brights was also in the Hiram Walker

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chain. There was Barnes Wines. There was Chateau Gai Wines. They would send various amounts. The smaller places would be in touch with Brights and Brights would say they were going to send up 100,000 gallons. Well, we could do a good run for them and it was more economical. Whereas Barnes would go in with them. They would send their own trucks in and we would keep their spirit different, away from theirs. If you were doing 100,00 and Barnes sent 10,000, it would be a costly operation for them. They were right in with the same sort of run.

Chris: You mean, in effect, you ran it as a continuous [operation] or you would actually separate out?

Peter: You would judge the amount of alcohol there would be in the yield. There would be an analysis done in the lab and as long as you were in a ball park figure and then, I would say, as a still operator, if I put all of what was in the beer well, I sent it to the still. I knew it would take 3 1/2 hours or 3 hours 45 minutes by the amount of feed to finish that product. That is the way we judged it.

Chris: Then you would say at that point that you were moving on to Barnes contract?

Peter: Yes, possibly it would ... When you did that analysis of the wine that they sent it, it wouldn't show you what the alcoholic content was in there and you would say that they sent us 5,000 gallons at such and such a figure, we will probably reclaim 2,700 gallons - in around there. When you were operating the still and you were feeding 40 gallons a minute...blah, blah, blah. See we would mix those wine lees with water when they would come in because we would have to send it through the still at approximately a 7% alcohol solution.

Chris: You mean it wouldn't work if it was

Peter: Not if it was too strong because what it was was a continuous flow still. If you put 40 gallons of alcohol in, you take 40 gallons of alcohol out. You couldn't take 33 or the next thing you know, your still isn't working properly. You dealt with various temperatures.

Chris: Just backing up for a moment, you said that there was a problem with the lees coming in with all these bags and that. Did that sort of gum up the still?

Peter: Well, what we would do is we would have to shut off the pumps. They all had screens and filters in them. We would have to shut it off, take everything apart, clean it all out and start again. I have seen us start sometimes start to pump through the beer well before it has been fed through the still. I would see us start to pump and be pumping and you wouldn't see the level going up in the tank and you would have to shut it off and go down and clean the screen and start it back up again. I have seen it clog up in minutes.

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Chris: What a pain.

Peter: Yes, but it was part of the job. But you normally wouldn't get that until we got down to the end of the tank. What would happen is they would pump it. As I told you before, there were two 50,000 gallon tanks, three 25,000, and all the rest were 12, 500 gallon tanks. If, for argument's sake, Bright's sent 100,000 gallons, you could do it in the two 50's [50,000 gallon tanks]. When you filled those two 50's up, then you would have to level them out with more tanks so that you would get that down to a 7% alcohol. They may have sent in 100,000 gallons of lees but by the time you get it ready to go to the still it might be 175,000 gallons.

Chris: Because it might come in at a 12% or 13%, is that it?

Peter: Yes, whatever the figure was. That was determined, like I said, they would take it to the lab and take an alcohol content on it.

Chris: When did that end because when the plant closed you were only making rum spirits, weren't you?

Peter: Yes, I can't tell the exact time.

Chris: But it went on for 10-15 years?

Peter: When it was turned around and the still was refurbished. I think it was kind of like a mutual thing. The company didn't want to handle the lees anymore because of the bothersome thing of... nowadays they are a little more conscious of what you do with the refuse. You just can't dump it or this and that. It would have created a lot of wear and tear on the still, itself because there was a lot in there. They didn't even wash the grapes. There would be, maybe, two feet of sand in the bottom of the tank. Sand on copper is very gritty.

Chris: You said the stills were refurbished.

Peter: Yes. They fixed them up and they made a few adjustments on it - that I spoke to you earlier about neutral spirit. It was a better distilling process. With other stills that we had ... we had three stills in there, two of which were operational. We took the two operational ones and through different columns that we used, we made it into one still. But we also made it independent. We could operate just the beer well to get the beer out of it and not have to run the other part until we got everything ... I guess to the layman, when it was a continuous flow still, you fed into the beer column first and then from there it went to the different columns. When they changed it around, you could feed into the beer column and run the beer column separately. Once you got that alcohol from there, it went into another holding tank and then it was fed to the other part of the still. So, you could shut one down. We had a problem: if the beer column - which at that time was

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where all the feed was going - it would clog up quite often. So, we would have to shut it down. But, when it was a continuous flow still, we had the whole shooting match down. So, by changing it around when we got into the molasses quite heavy, those plates had to be cleaned, but we had enough alcohol ahead to run - to purify - while this was being shut down and cleaned. Two men would be working on it and it would sometimes take you three days.

Chris: Jim [White - see Interview #2] made reference to that, where he'd be going in with, like, a little ice pick to chip

Peter: You would have a little scraper and you'd have a punch because the plates on the still were what they called a sieve plate and that's all it was. It just looked like one of your floor drains with all these holes in it because the product runs over the top and works its way down to the base of the column; the steam comes up through and the temperatures pick the alcohol up out of the product. When you start on the fourth floor, by the time it got to the bottom floor and with the temperature at the base of the column being the boiling point of water, alcohol - I believe -boils at 160 degrees and water is 212 degrees [Fahrenheit]. You don't have any alcohol coming out of the bottom. That's the idea.

Chris: How often would the still have to be...when you went on to molasses, it was worse then?

Peter: Yes, it got kind of a syrupy coating. The easiest way to explain, when you were a kid and went to a carnival, you used to get those candy apples. That's what would happen. You would get kind of a glaze over it.

Chris: How long would that take of running, to get that glaze?

Peter: Well, it would depend on the type of molasses. There is different types of molasses that they used. Some molasses is a little heavier than others. Depends on many, many things.

Chris: It would it be a week, or six weeks?

Peter: I don't know. The last of the operations, when I got out of there, I believe you could go for 3 1/2 weeks. You would go by your gauges, your temperature, how much yield, and how much you feed.

Chris: You would sense the clogging up?

Peter: Oh, yes, for sure.

Chris: You would see everything run slower?

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Peter: Yes, that's right.

Chris: When it got to a certain point, you would realize that you would have to send Jim in to chisel it out.

Peter: It wasn't only Jim. Jim was [unclear]. He did it once. What used to happen was the poor fellow that was working in the cellar used to get the bulk of the job. What they called the "cellar man." There was a cellar man and a still operator. And when the still operator wasn't watching the still, he was also helping. But normally, they kind of left the still operator to run his still. You can't be doing two things at once because the other part was going off. But, when you had to shut the entire thing down, everybody was in there.

Chris: Sounds like a particularly ... Well, you wouldn't want to be claustrophobic.

Peter: You wouldn't want to be claustrophobic and boy, if you can't stand wet. Because you had to take a hose in there with you and there was a manhole on the side. Once you got your shoulders in there ... Not a nice pleasant odor either. It wasn't harsh or anything but you would pick up enough.

Chris: So, he would have to do that every two-three-four weeks?

Peter: Yes, that would be the average.

Chris: But again, just trying to get a time on this, when you said they tweaked up the stills for the neutral spirits, was that in the mid 70's?

Peter: [figuring out time] Say around the 70's.

Chris: The early 70's?

Peter: Yes, I would think early 70's, late 60's. In that range somewhere.

Chris: You were saying that it was the mid 60's when the wine lees really took off but it was only a short time that

Peter: They did the wine lees and when it was finally decided that we would do the rum for the organization, then the wine got less and less. I believe Ryder distilleries started to do a little more wine lees for them. Instead of sending from St. Catharines to here, they would go from St. Catharines to Grimsby.

Chris: If I can just ask you about the stills, it seems to me that there was an anhydrous still, the Badger one from the 30's.

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Peter: Yes, the Badger one from the 30's, part of that column when into the Vulcan still. That was the change. The anhydrous still was ... I have never seen it operate.

Chris: When you were first there, it was just plain abandoned, is that it? In the 50's?

Peter: Yes, after '57, I believe, it was only run two or three weeks of the year.

Chris: The old Badger - the anhydrous still - wasn't even used then?

Peter: No, the anhydrous still never was. The Badger was. You see, there was what they called the anhydrous still, the Badger still and the Vulcan still.

Chris: The Badger was tucked away in the corner? [unclear, both talking at once] There is basically just the beer column there...

Peter: There is an oil column.

Chris: And an oil column.

Peter: Yes, that's one of the columns that they used. It was the oil column. It did a little better stripping job. They put it in in conjunction with the Vulcan. They tied them all together.

Chris: Before it was all tied together, the Vulcan had the most number of columns. It had a beer column of its own, doesn't it?

Peter: That's right.

Chris: So, it was self-contained?

Peter: Yes

Chris: But the Badger one was never...

Peter: No, the Badger had a beer column.

Chris: It had a beer column but did it have the other stripping columns on it?

Peter: I tell you...I haven't seen it in so long... It had the beer column, the fusel oil column. I don't know if it had the aldehyde column or not. There might have been a partial one. I believe it was three columns where the Vulcan had four [columns]. And it was a much larger still, by the way.

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Chris: You get that sense just looking at the control panel. It is a much bigger control panel for the Vulcan and it is quite small for the Badger.

Peter: Yes, they would tie in. They would use the same condensers, just that the charts were on that side for the Badger.

Chris: Alight. But then, was the Badger never meant to be run to produce...?

Peter: I don't know.

Chris: It was always sitting there?

Peter: Obviously, at one time, it was used quite extensively. I believe it was the first one that went in there. If I am not mistaken, that and the anhydrous.

Chris: There is talk now, in the new development, that it would be the Badger column area that is going to be kept to show what it was like.

Peter: Oh yes, because it is out of the way.

Chris: And the Vulcan side would be removed.

Peter: For my own part, I was very familiar with the Vulcan - with the newer type operation. I don't ever recall running the Badger myself. At that time, I was a cellar man and I worked myself into a still operator and I only operated the Vulcan.

Chris: Does that mean somebody else was working the Badger or...?

Peter: Well, no. As I told you before, there was two fellows on a shift; one still operator, one cellar man. You worked three shifts a day. It went 24 hours. For a while, we were also working only two shifts of 12 hours. 12 hour shifts: seven in the morning to seven at night then seven at night to seven in the morning. A fellow used to come in and start up Sunday night at 11:00 p.m. and you used to shut down at 7:00 a.m. the following Saturday morning. And I know because I was almost a year on 7:00 p.m.-7:00 a.m.

Chris: It must have been kind of lonely, wasn't it?

Peter: I tell you, you had a lot of things to occupy yourself if you were handy. I know I ended up drawing the entire still.

Chris: Drawing it?

Peter: Yes, making a plan of the still.

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Chris: Oh, I see, a schematic?

Peter: Yes, you had your duties to do. Most of the problem was washing out tubs and preparing them for the next day's mashing or whatever or running warm water. It was like anything else, when you got yourself into a routine, you were doing OK.

Chris: So, as a still operator, you were also responsible for the beer well?

Peter: No, that was the cellar man. The still operator, what he was in retrospect, was the shift foreman.

Chris: Oversaw the cellar man as well?

Peter: Yes. See, most of the times when the still operator had been operating the still for so long that the younger fellows, who were the cellar man, picked up our knowledge...there were a few fellows here that, older still operators, they took on the, how do I put it to you..."I'm not going to show you anything because if I do, you're going to take my job" or "I had to learn the hard way so you are". But, that was one of the things you lived with.

Chris: How long were you a cellar man before you became a still operator?

Peter: Four or five years. You would come over here and do a two month run and then go back and work on the other side. At that time, I was in the pure spirits department. They would come to me and say I was going to start up April 1. You are going to run April, May and part of June and that will be the end of that run and then you will be back here. They tried to run it in the colder weather because it was more economical. Their cooling water that they drew from the Bay was ice cold. Of course, Lake Ontario was always cold anyway but that's the way they worked things.

You weren't as busy in the winter over there as you were in the summer. They kind of tied in hand and hand.

Chris: When you said you were working four years or so as a cellar man, that was like four years but for a couple of months each year?

Peter: Yes. That would be the early part and probably the last two years I was a cellar man, it was almost 10 months a year. It got that we were quite busy. We were doing molasses and a lot of wine in those days.

Chris: So this was back in the 60's?

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Peter: Yes, it was before they changed the still over from the continuous flow. They updated it.

Chris: When you say from a continuous flow, it became more of a batch operation?

Peter: No, you could work the batch separately and it ended up making a better product because the alcohol was of a better quality.

Chris: You could control it better?

Peter: You could control it better but the columns were there and the stripping columns were doing a better job with an increase with the one off the Badger and a few minor adjustments through the engineering department. They changed several things on it but we would be here for two days talking about technical things.

Chris: That would be interesting but ... And what about the panels, themselves? They look like they date from the 1950's?

Peter: They were there ever since I came here.

Chris: They are older than that.

Peter: Some of those controls would probably be older than me and you.

Chris: The other thing I noticed is ... Isn't that where all those banana stickers on one of the weigh scales?

Peter: Yes, one of the operators...

Chris: He must of loved bananas.

Peter: Yes, he ate a lot of bananas. John Nichols used to stick them on.

Chris: And there must have been hundreds ... there are layers ...

Peter: Yes, but other guys would add on it.

Chris: It has been interesting to hear about those stills because it kind of confirmed what we were thinking that there were these three units. What about over in the pure spirits [department], you know, those tall buildings, Buildings 54, 56? There was a still in there?

Peter: Yes, in the front of the building. That wasn't in operation when I came down here. That's is, what is known as Barclay's; Jacs. Barclay. That used to be their still and I think it was the same type of thing, what I told you about. You had to operate for so

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long to keep your license and it was just ... I don't know why it was named that. I think Barclay had something to do with this distillery at one time. It was before my time.

Chris: So that was always empty or vacant space? It was never used?

Peter: Well, they used it later on. They used a few of the tanks over there, later on - the front building [Buildings 54,55] for antifreeze. They were doing some antifreeze drumming in there for a while. They had done various things in there but nothing really ... It was an empty space but it wasn't a space that you could really make good use of.

Chris: It was a tiny room, wasn't it?

Peter: Yes.

Chris: Would you ever cut parts off the old still there?

Peter: I believe some of the maintenance here might have taken some lines, like old copper lines and flanged them and used them in various parts because at one time, all the lines in here were all copper. Everything was copper. I would imagine they would have had their hands full changing everything over. Maintaining it - costly.

Chris: Just talking about the copper, it always struck me as such a shame that they've taken all of those tanks out now in the pure spirits area [Buildings 61,62].

Peter: Oh, are they gone now?

Chris: Yes.

Peter: Oh... I don't know how many times I walked across the top of them tanks and somebody would say something and I would turn around and BANG, I would hit my head on a beam. You see I was a scale man up there too, at one time. That was how we used to get the alcohol. It would go into the tanks and you would pump it out. In the first early years, we had a steam pump and then we got a centrifugal pump and I was a scale man. They would say that we have a tank truck coming in and we need 6,000 gallons. You would do it by weight. The strength of the alcohol would give you the specific gravity, so 5,000 gallons would weigh "x" amount of pounds. You would get it all weighed out. You'd call an excise [officer] over. You would take a test out of it, so that he could see the test and verify that it was at a certain strength and punch a ticket that was the correct amount that you were sending them. The boss would make out all the paperwork for it, so that the Government would get their duty and blah, blah, blah all the way along. Any alcohol that came into the plant had to come either by tank truck or tank car and it was pumped off and weighed upstairs, in the pure spirits [department], and tested and when they found the weight with the specific gravity then they would record how many gallons they received. Not how much was shipped, how much they

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received. Everything was verified by the customs and excise people. [See pages 98-100 of Gooderham & Worts Heritage Plan Report #6: Industrial Heritage Assessment for description of Building 61]

Chris: It sounds like a lot of paperwork?

Peter: Yes, but it is like your job, once you have done it for a few weeks. I used to say to my one scale man, when we left there, that 7UP wants a load. He would know the weight, exactly. I wouldn't even have to tell him the weight. We did it so many times. Pat LaChapelle, who was my scale man, at the time ...

End of Tape One, Side B
Start Tape Two, Side A

Peter: As I was say, Pat had been the scale man for so long, he made your job that much easier. He would even be a step ahead of you. He would say, "Pete, they phoned from the office while you were down over there and we have a tank truck going out this afternoon at such and such a time". I would just go ahead and do the paperwork and he would have the tickets punched and everything because after a while - as you know - the excise left here and kind of put you on your own. While they were at the other end receiving it, they would check you through. He knew his job and he did it. It made my job easier. All I had to do was whip up the paperwork and he would give me the tickets. I would take them over to the office and they would be recorded. The permits would be made up by the excise clerk and away it goes.

Chris: So you worked in the scaling loft area?

Peter: Yes, I worked in the scaling loft. What happened was, you used to have steam pumps. There used to be two fellows who worked upstairs. One guy was the scale man and the other guy was the pumper. He would be down at the steam pump and when the guy got close, when the pump would be shut off, there would be 30 pounds drainage coming out of the line. So, 30 pounds before his weight, he would ring a bell and you would shut it off and then disconnect all the hoses and everything and clear everything up in case you wanted a different type of alcohol the next time. How I ended up there was I had a pretty serious operation and when I came back, they gave me a light duty job. That was the light duty job, the helper. Through attrition and people retiring, it got to be a one man operation up there. When they changed to a different pump...

Chris: To a different electric pump?

Peter: Electric pump, centrifugal pump and they had the switches upstairs, right on the scale. You operated it yourself. All you did was walk down and hook up the You

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had a pipe that went into the tank, a movable, portable pipe which we used to call the sucker and then with camlock fittings, you hooked the hose into it. Went upstairs and made sure the bottom of your scale was closed, the line open going into it, pushed the button, set the weights on the beam and put a little lever with some keys underneath the bar. When the bar lifted, the lever would fall. You would walk up, put it to the weight you wanted. As soon as the beam started to rise, you would shut the button off and it would drain in and you would call the excise to check the weight.

Chris: So, the warning that you were getting close was just a... it didn't turn off the pump or anything like that?

Peter: No, it just dropped. There were three scales there and then there was an area there where the fellow had his papers or could sit down.

Chris: Where those manifolds are, leading out over the roof?

Peter: Yes, right there, exactly. There used to be two chairs there. It used to be for the pump man and his helper. You would set it up. Rather than standing at the scale for 35 minutes, you would go and sit in the chair. You would be sitting there and it may be in the far scale and you would be talking to the man or whatever, discussing last night's ball game or whatever. All of a sudden you would hear the thing drop to the floor, up you would get, walk over there and it would be ... Soon as he saw that, he would go downstairs. You would set it for, say 1,000 pounds, so you knew when that dropped you were within 1,000 pounds or 500 or whatever you set it at and you could judge by just how much time he had to get down to the pump so that when you rang the bell, he would shut it off.

Chris: Was that something that was fixed up just on the scale... Fairbanks...

Peter: No, I don't who set that up but it might have been the original scale man. It was just something that you do. It was just part of your job. Rather than just standing there, you could leave it. As a matter of fact, what you could do sometimes, we have had up to three different operations going on at one time, one in each scale. You could do them with that when you got close, if you were finishing this off, this was later on with the electric, you could shut that off and then concentrate on this one. Finish that off and then go back and finish this and then go back and finish that.

Chris: I have noticed, in a way, that is the only way modern thing in the scaling loft is the electrical control box on each scale. So that was quite recent then?

Peter: I couldn't ... It would have to tie in with when they were doing the renovations. I couldn't tell you what year the pumps went in. It would probably be in the 70's. Before that, everything here was a steam pump.

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Chris: Oh, of course and then they put the gas boilers in.

Peter: Well, they went from coal boilers [in Building 2] and then they come to the back part here, there was one right here, Bunker C [in Building 4]. Then they went to the gas.

Chris: It was at that time that they cut back on steam production?

Peter: They cut back on steam production a little bit when they went to this one here, to Bunker C. They kind of replaced one pump and they took their time and replaced another one. So I don't know the dates. They didn't all of a sudden convert everything over. They just did one area then area. They would say that they were budgeted now for \$10,000 so let's put that pump in.

Chris: And, then they just left the old pumps?

Peter: They left some of the old pumps right where they were because, well you have seen them, there were encased in concrete, bolts up into the concrete. When they built some of the things here, they were meant to stay. You need dynamite to move them.

Chris: It wasn't for any other reason? It was just easier to leave them?

Peter: Yes, and when they left some of them, from time to time they did take some parts off of them to repair other ones.

Chris: Were there any steam pumps used right at the end or had they, by then, they were all electric weren't they?

Peter: Yes. They were all electric. When I started down here, there was down in the little pump house [Building 60], there were four steam pumps, three or four in the pure spirits [department], there was one in the pure spirits in the far room [Building 62A] where the denaturing [department] used to pump off their tank cars with the line that used to come right up through the pure spirits. When I first came here the only electric pumps they had were in the tank houses. Everything else was steam.

Chris: In some ways, it was probably because they were so far away. Probably getting steam down to it would have been a problem.

Peter: Yes, that probably would have been the main one but the pumps that were down there were like a portable. They used to get 2-3 guys and push them from one tank house to the other.

Chris: No, they are not there but maybe I remember seeing them.

Peter: They probably were there.

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Chris: The other thing I always thought was neat about the scaling loft was that it was in such good condition. Whereas everything else had been painted and that...

Peter: Well, you know what we used to do.... There again, it was the guys that were working. They would come into the store room and get a bottle of Brasso and take a couple of them and when things weren't too busy you would be... You would get to, at least once a week, you got to polish the beams up. You used to keep everything nice. We had, what they called test cups there, and we kept them polished.

Chris: Why those ones and not like ... There are some really nice scales over in the...

Peter: Well, that's what I'm saying. What would happen here [in the distillery] is you would be in here for two months and then gone for five months.

Chris: So then you aren't looking after the...

Peter: There was nobody here to look after it.

Chris: The scaling loft was always...

Peter: Every day. That was an every day operation. Nothing moved in and out of this plant, in alcohol, that didn't go through there first.

Chris: So, you think maybe when the stills were in use continuously, then there might have been people looking after the scale tanks?

Peter: Sure, they used to have guys that would be on a shift and mop floors, mop wooden floors. They were almost white, at one time.

Chris: That is interesting. So it just gradually got less and less use?

Peter: Let's put it this way. Let's say you had a cottage and you went up there 2 weeks of the year and didn't do anything. What would happen when you got there? It looks seedier than it really is.

Chris: That is interesting, as well because it like it really hasn't been looked after for a long time. Before it even closed, it must have had that look. It couldn't get it that quickly, could it?

Peter: No, I know what you are saying but you have to remember, too, the buildings are really, really old. You could sweep the floor and 20 minutes later, it would be dusty. It is just the nature of the... when it was in operation, when we were operating seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, they had made some changes to the flooring and everything else.

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One of the jobs was the cellar man, once a week, on whatever shift was designated, had to mop all those floor. They were kept up pretty nice.

Chris: You remember that when you first started there?

Peter: No, not when I first started. This was later on.

Chris: Even later on?

Peter: Oh, yes. When they made the changes and the renovations, the cellar man that was part of his job. He would mop the floor.

Chris: There are also those slats in all the floor. The floor boards....

Peter: Oh no, you couldn't mop them. I'm talking about going up the stairs and the floor around the front of the still.

Chris: Where the linoleum is on?

Peter: Yes.

Chris: By the way, why the gaps in the floor. Was that to let steam through?

Peter: I really don't know. I don't know what it was for.

Chris: Was it steamy?

Peter: Yes. Steam would seep up through the floor. If you walked down there you were in a dungeon. As a matter of fact, they filmed one of the Jekyll and Hyde, Jack Grants did a series here and they used smudge pots and they used bottom floor, that green door on the bottom floor was the infirmary, so to speak. When we used to walk in there, going to work, the concrete floor was in pretty rough shape, there were holes in the floor and the steam would come up through the holes.

Chris: You said you also worked in the racking warehouses?

Peter: The rack warehouse, yes.

Chris: The one building that intrigued me was the lunch room in the biggest of the rack houses.

Peter: Rack house M [Building 75].

Chris: It has the big bracing through the lunch room there.

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Peter: The one with the sign on it, you mean?

Chris: The one with the sign on it.

Peter: Rack House M. I think that held 40,000 barrels capacity, I believe. I used to know all the capacities because that was part of the my job, in the later years. The pure spirits foreman took care of the pure spirits [department] and the rack warehouse. One time there used to be separate crews for each but through attrition and everything else, it got to be that if you weren't working here, you were working there.

Chris: It has been about a year since I was in that lunch room but it looked like a really nice....

Peter: No, that was a change room.

Chris: A change room not a lunch room.

Peter: They had a sink in there, a water fountain and lockers. Man, oh, man, when I worked in there, if you put your clothes in that locker, when you went home on the street car everybody just looked at you. You didn't think anything of it because you are in that odor all day long.

Chris: They would have thought you had been into the juice for a long time.

Peter: For sure. Without a word of a lie, you used to go in there on a Tuesday morning of a long weekend and you would open the door, flick the light on, you would swear to God there would be a blue haze around the lights. Especially, like say this long weekend coming up, if it was warm weather. You have eight floors of barrels. They are just sitting in there.

Chris: You are sure glad there was explosion proof lighting in there.

Peter: Yes. They were about as safe as they could get it, I would imagine. We have had people come in there and without even thinking, I had seen a guy light a match in there. I nearly croaked. He lit a match and a cigarette in there. I said, "Put that out".

Chris: But nothing happened?

Peter: No.

Chris: Was that just luck of the draw?

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Peter: I don't know what the person was thinking. I guess he wanted a cigarette. He wasn't one of the workers. It was a visitor. A lot of them were told that there was no smoking here. It was a reflex thing. I'm sure you have done things like that. I know I have, without realizing you are even doing it.

Chris: You would only do that once...

Peter: Yes.

Chris: It never happened... There were never any fires or explosions that you remember?

Peter: No, the closest thing that came to a fire was one of the tank houses. A fellow was down there with a torch and some sparks went on and there was a little bit of a smoldering. The fellow ran across the top of the tanks and with the top of the tanks, whacked the sprinkler heads with his hammer.

Chris: So it broke it off?

Peter: Yes. As he was running out. We used to curse those sprinklers because where they were placed, whoever put them in, you didn't have a lot of headroom and you would pulling hose along the top of the tank to fill them and your back would be a little bit on the stiff side so you would go up there to ease your back and BANG, man-oh-man, you would hit your head. Who was the son-of-a-bitch who put those there.

Chris: In the tank houses, in particular?

Peter: The worst was the pure spirits department because the office, and you had to work on the top of those tanks and their would be the wooden beams. I swear to God, in the early years they must have thought everybody was going to be 4'9". There used to be a little fellow down here. His name was Alf Taylor. He ran the store room which would be in approximately the area where we are now [Building 25]. They had a large store room here. You could get your supplies like paper towels, soap, brushes - anything that you needed was in the store room. I had only been upstairs a short time in the scale room and this gentleman liked to imbibe a bit. When I first came down here, there were a lot of people like that. Towards the end of the years, when we left, I don't think there was anybody. But he would always come in in the morning. He knew when the boss left for his coffee and you could always hear [making a footstep noise]. "What was that - it sounded like somebody running." Well, it took me a while but I finally saw who it was one day and sat at the top of the stairs, leaning down and he was the only guy I knew that could run under those beams and be erect. He would check the test cups to see if there was a little "something" there for him to wet his whistle and then he would run back.

Chris: With all this open alcohol around, there could have been plenty of opportunity to get at it.

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Peter: There was. It was the same as if you worked in a chocolate bar factory. It was there. There were a few fellows that it got a hold off. Generally, there was a lot of excise around too. There used to be four custom and excise guys in the pure spirits [department] alone. There would be one in the case good warehouse, one in the denaturing room. There was always an excise around and he was sort of... he would be the government watch dog and make sure everything was on the up and up.

Chris: Mind you if you lost a pint of alcohol, he would never notice it.

Peter: No.

Chris: But, you would never want to take a drink in front of an excise guy.

Peter: You wouldn't take a drink in front of him just out of respect for him. It is the same thing, I know for a fact, that if somebody wanted to drink and they sensed that he wanted a drink they kind of turned their back for 30 seconds. "I didn't see anything," type of thing. They did their job but they weren't a warden.

Chris: Also, the alcohol that must have been around here would have been pretty rough stuff. You would really have to want a drink, isn't it?

Peter: Without going into specifics, there was a fellow here that would have to have three drinks in the morning before the first one stayed down. He would pass it over the water. Just turn the water on, put it in the glass and run the glass through and then up it would come. Third one would stay down and he would go "Ahhhh!"

Chris: It must have been 80% or 60% alcohol.

Peter: British Sykes hydrometer goes 0 - 100%, American goes 0 - 200. It would probably be what we classify as 50 over proof which would be 1/50. It would be ... A shot of liquor is 30 under proof, so judge from there. If you had one ounce of that, you would have to put an ounce and a half of water to get it down to 30 under proof.

Chris: Which would then be like drinking it straight out of a bottle?

Peter: You got it.

Chris: If nothing else, doesn't that dry your skin out?

Peter: Well, as I said to you, a lot of the old timers when I started here -there was a lot of people that drank. I can honestly say over the last 25 years, we may have had a problem with two or three.

Chris: If nothing else, wouldn't that be dangerous?

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Peter: Well, you watched them. You knew who was doing what. You would go up and say "hey watch yourself. You are having a little too much. I don't know if you realize it or not". Most of times...

Chris: So you looked after...

Peter: It is the same old saying, if you know the guy's been imbibing you certainly don't send him out on the street to walk around. You say "Go over there and sit down." And he appreciated that.

Chris: But what about just falling into one of the tanks....

Peter: Oh, yes. I will tell you, I was in the paint shop one day when one fellow had had a bit too much to drink and he had a 45 gallon drum with black paint in it. What you used to do was take your paint can and dip it in to get your paint to paint the drums. He was about 5'2" and he leaned in and it was pretty low on the bottom and the next thing you know, he went head first into the paint.

Chris: Looking for a drink in the paint?

Peter: No,no,no. He had so much to drink. He was looking for paint to paint his drums but he lost his balance when he went in and he went head first in. There happened to be about 8" or 9" of black paint in there and he went right up almost into his mouth.

Chris: That would have been dangerous if nobody had been around.

Peter: Oh, yes. A lot of things happened. We used to line up at night to punch out and this guy would be walking down the lane right by where that new office is [Building 52] across the road, on the north side. He would be walking down that wall with his hand propped against the wall and somebody would say, 'How are you doing?'. Instead of waving with this hand, he would take this one off and wave and the next thing you know, he started nosediving right out the gate.

Chris: It is interesting because today, a company would not tolerate that, would they? They would send you off to dry out.

Peter: Basically, the company, they didn't look the other way. They didn't know everything that went on here. This wasn't really, really a job type of thing. You did your work. Early years, you were never overworked unless you were really young and you worked in the cannery - because every other department had enough fellows ... There was always enough fellows to do the job. We had no modern equipment here.

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

Chris: Where did the bosses come from? If you were promoted up through the ranks and you knew what was going on. You would be wise to it.

Peter: If you are a boss and you have your guys to do their day's work and do their jobs, you don't want to create problems either. Same thing as you said that there was a lot of excise people around while just because you were in excise, I wouldn't walk up to you and pour myself a drink. I would have too much respect for your position. The excise would say that if they caught us with a bottle they would take it off us. But, they could also turn their head the other way. What you don't see. You could discreetly take the fellow aside and say, "Look, whether you realize it or not, it is creating a problem with your work. What you are doing. You had better ease back because some people are watching." In my time, that I was here, there were only a few. You could count them all on your hand.

Chris: But when you started, there were a lot?

Peter: Yes, all the old boys. They were one year out of retirement, or whatever.

Chris: I wonder why that would change. Did the tradition change?

Peter: Ok, let's put it this way, why are people drinking less and smoking less now than they were 30 years ago. It is just a change in times.

Chris: So it wasn't that they were alcoholics in the way that we think of people that need help...

Peter: There were a couple.

Chris: But, you think the other ones...way back when you were saying that at the beginning it was just the nature of the job. There was alcohol around and it wasn't unhealthy to drink so you might as well have a drink.

Peter: I would say that would be pretty close. Right there - just the way you said it.

Chris: They might have turned into alcoholics but they didn't....

Peter: Over the years there were a few. I worked with one of the fellows for a while and it just got the better of him and finally another mutual agreement type of thing. He left. They did alright for him and it wasn't too long after that he had a pretty serious operation and it stemmed from his drinking.

Chris: I guess that is the difference. If you work in a chocolate factory all you do is get fat, but if you work in a distillery you get drunk.

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

Peter: At one time in the breweries, they used to go after their shift and they could have their four-five drafts or whatever it was. Being the nature of things, a lot of guys felt that they were probably entitled to a drink.

Chris: Just about the change room in the Rack House M, I don't know what was interesting about it but maybe it is because the other change rooms that I have seen looked like they had been closed down longer but this one looked like it had been used right until the end.

Peter: It was a very small area and it was painted up...

Chris: Really bright and the rest of the building is dark.

Peter: That's right. I haven't seen it since before I left, but I know that when they did paint it in there it was with a real good battleship green enamel that kind of stood up. You didn't spend much time in there. You went in there in the morning. Now when I worked in there, I didn't even keep my clothes in the locker.

Chris: Just because it was too fragrant?

Peter: Right. I used to change. I would be down there at 7:55 a.m. ready to go to work, already changed. You were already in your work clothes. You would pick up that smell. It was just something that I didn't change there. I had my locker in one department and it was OK by them so I used to change in the pure spirits [department] and then go down to the warehouse.

Chris: Where was the change room in the pure spirits?

Peter: You know where the demineralizer is now?

Chris: Yes. [Along the south wall of Building 62]

Peter: It was just east of there. Right in that corner. There was a cooper's bench there. That was the change room. Upstairs there was also a locker upstairs on the top of the tank. That was where the Assistant Foreman used to change.

Chris: That's right, but it is all gone now but you can see the paint on the walls where the lockers were.

Peter: We had a wooden locker plus all these metal lockers. We used to change the change room around from time to time. We even put a carpet in there once. One of the guys had new carpeting put in his place or his next door neighbour's and he brought in this carpet and we laid it on the floor. You walk on it with your socks.

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

Chris: There was another change room in the case good warehouse [Building 74].

Peter: Yes, down in the corner, right by the washroom.

Chris: You stepped on a big, high concrete...

Peter: Well, that was the washroom.

Chris: Oh, that was the washroom. Ok.

Peter: But the lockers were right there at the back of that wall. There was a table there where we used to eat our lunch. There was a window here, a table, some lockers sat along that wall there and then there was a couple over to the side. I think there was maybe a half dozen lockers against that wall. That raised part - that was the washroom. You used to have to step up to go in there.

Chris: I wonder, was it raised to get the plumbing underneath it because it was put in later?

Peter: I really don't know. Ever since I have been here, that's the way it was. That could very well be the reason. They had a toilet and a urinal, plus a sink in there. That's where you used to go a night to wash up before you went home.

Chris: Then there was another one in the still Building #5 with a big, huge sink?

Peter: That was the locker room when the distillery was going full bloom, pre-'57. There was maybe 50-60 lockers in there.

Chris: Because it is huge. It is the biggest one of all of them.

Peter: Oh, yes. All the distillery personnel kept their clothes and changed in there before they went to work. There would be maybe, I don't know how many there would have been to a shift. I would have to probably say there were 60 to a shift.

Chris: Was that the biggest of the department's then?

Peter: When it was in operation, yes because there were guys that operated the cooking, guys that were in the bagging room, guys that were drying it, there were cellar men, there were yeast men, there were still operators and guys that help on

End of Tape Two, Side A

Peter: Every department had their own change room - change areas.

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

Chris: When you moved about, you would change your change room?

Peter: Most guys, as I said to you guys would go to where it was busy, but if you were in the pure spirits [department] you were still my man. They would come and say that they needed a couple of extra men today, could you spare anybody or you may be there for two or three days but you would still change ... Because I was your foreman or your department manager, I accounted for your time and I had to say that he came in at 8:00 a.m. and wasn't late. That's the way that was. Guys were reluctant to take their lockers...

Chris: The other thing you reminded me of is the yeast area. What did you call that little penthouse?

Peter: That was the donor room. [See page 83 of Gooderham & Worts Heritage Plan Report #6: Industrial Heritage Assessment] They had a small stainless tub. They would start off with the yeast culture in the lab and then take it there. It just keeps building and building and that would be dropped into the yeast tub, split up between the three yeast tubs. Then they would feed down below. They had a little better control on it. When you start off with the yeast, the germ and everything, it all starts off pretty small. As with any fermentation, it builds but you don't want to put a little wee bit in a 5,000 gallon tank. It may never work. That was like a jacket and it was the heat around it and they could cool it, many things. You can control fermentation by temperature control.

Chris: But why up in that little room?

Peter: Gravity. Well, that's the way it has always been. They designed it that way. You walked up the steps into that room and you started everything right there. From the lab to there. Once that got going to a certain stage where they wanted it and then they would feed it to the other three tubs.

Chris: And then from there..?

Peter: So much would make so much makes so much.

Chris: Ok, alright.

Peter: To answer your question, I don't know why it was set up that way. Maybe that's the way the original guy, back in 1832, decided that's the way it is going to be.

Chris: It is such a neat little room with the windows up there.

Peter: Too bad you didn't see this cellar [in Building 6] beforehand. You know how you go down there now and you have the railings, you can see ... It was a one floor right across and at the tops of those tanks they used to have pipes come up and there were

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

traps there with water in them. They would save the CO2 gas. And - what's the name of the outfit - Liquid Carbonic was here and they would send the CO2 gas over to them. They would use it for dry ice and what not.

Chris: So that was on when you came here?

Peter: That was finishing up then.

Chris: That must have also closed in '57, or something?

Peter: I don't know what year it closed but it wasn't too long afterwards if it was. I think they were pretty close to '70 before they moved.

Chris: They were taking the CO2...?

Peter: No, they weren't taking the CO2 gas when I came here.

Chris: Oh, I see, but they were still here?

Peter: They were still here. Another thing you might be interested in. When they were doing the molasses, or the rum, they would get it fermenting in the tubs ... You'd have a very tough time to even light a lighter there with that gas coming off the tops of the tanks. You could take a lighter, light it and go there, and it would put it out immediately.

Chris: CO2 is heavier isn't it?

Peter: Right. Well it would come out and go right down to the bottom. When you went downstairs to open the bottom of the tank to send it to the beer well, sometimes you catch your breath. It would take your breath away.

Chris: Because there were no exits down there?

Peter: No, there weren't. In later time, they got a few fans, exhaust fans, pulling it out of there. You just didn't keep your head bent over. But you could walk along there and the further in you got, you could feel yourself...

Chris: Suffocating?

Peter: That's right. It was harder to breathe.

Chris: While we are down on that floor, there is an odd iron set of pipes that are just sticking in the concrete, way over in the far wall just before....

Peter: Oh, there was a heater there.

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

Chris: Is that what it was?

Peter: Yes, a big long heater. Against that wall, you mean, underneath the stairs.

Chris: Under where the scale tank is, right on the ground.

Peter: There was a long heater against that wall. You used to turn that on and you could almost get live steam out of the water hose. It was a chamber of some kind. It didn't really work all the time.

Chris: The only reason why I have been continually been curious about is that one photograph from the days of the British Acetone, when they were making ... In the First World War, there is a picture and it looks an awful lot like one of those....

Peter: I will tell you, what I can remember about it, it was probably about three feet wide and about 15-18 feet long and I don't know if it was fed from the boiler room or where it was fed. I don't know why it had to go through there.

Chris: And it wasn't really used very much?

Peter: No.

Chris: I just wonder if it was something left over from that British Acetone and they just figured...

Peter: It might have been and then they might have made some kind of an adjustment to it. There were lots of things around here. That's the way they did things.

Chris: It is getting late, but I would still like to talk about the denaturing. You worked in the denaturing as well?

Peter: Denaturing, yes. And the paint shop. I also, for a few days, worked on the coal truck. I used to go down to the docks and get coal and then bring it up for the boilers here and he would dump it and you would kind of shovel it down into the pit.

Chris: Then there was a bunker up above the boiler. Would it go down a hopper and then you would hoist it up?

Peter: Yes.

Chris: With the weigh scales just outside the building as well....

Peter: I can of vaguely remember them.

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

Chris: You can see the outline in the concrete. But that was long gone.

Peter: I believe it was. I think, if I recall right, it was a weigh scale and that's the way they used to weigh the trucks when they would come in with the coal full and then empty.

Chris: Off your own coal dock or when you bought it from the City?

Peter: If you bought it from the City, maybe both. Maybe they just ... Like I say, things change. You would go down there and BOOM, they would fill your truck up and away you would go. Maybe they would used to take their word for what they got.

Chris: You never drove across the weigh scales? They were gone by then?

Peter: No, I believe they were gone. I was on it for a few days, just giving the guy a hand. Rather than sit around, they always got you something to do.

Chris: Talk about the denaturing building [Building 47 - see page 122 of Gooderham & Worts Heritage Plan Report #6: Industrial Heritage Assessment]. Again, it was all closed by the time I ever saw it. It sort of looked a little poisonous in there...

Peter: Well, what they would do is make up different grades of denatured alcohol. The main think for denaturing is so you don't drink it. It is poison. Some of the things they used it for would be... I think it was 2D that they used to clean printing presses with.

Chris: 2D? That the brand?

Peter: That was the brand. There were so many number 1's, so many number 2's.

Chris: Oh, Ok, I have seen a chart with that on it.

Peter: There would be formulations as to how much denaturants you would add to it and whether you would add wood alcohol or whether you would add tobacco, different things. The main thing in there was when they made a mix, they found out how much alcohol they needed. They would phone the pure spirits [department]. The man would weigh it. Send the alcohol over there. When the alcohol was all over, the mixer would then mix up the denatured alcohol. That would be so it would be drummed off for a customer. That's all that went on in there: the drumming of denatured alcohol and then they would ship it out of there.

Chris: So, it was for mixing and drumming?

Peter: Yes. Mixing and drumming, that was the operation.

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

Chris: Because of the chemicals that were in there, would you have to be more careful? Was there special training or something like that?

Peter: You were trained by the previous mixer. You had a book with the formulas there. As a mixer, you also kept a book as you made your mixes. You used to keep it in your back pocket and you would look back. You would say, "Oh there is my 2A and I put 'x' amount of qusin [###spelling?] in it, some of this, some of that and a lot of times the excise [officer] would be there and watch and work with you while you were making the mixes to make sure you put the proper amounts of denaturant in it.

Chris: Although, once it was denatured, it would be of interest to excise because then it was...

Peter: No, but they had to determine that that was indeed what you made, 2C or 2B or 1B. Whatever the formula was. You can just say that you made a 1A when in fact, you made a number 2 mix.

Chris: But I thought the whole idea behind excise was to get their tax off of it but industrial alcohol wouldn't be taxed or was there a tax?

Peter: Various things. Hospitals all paid tax on it but then they would get a 99% rebate. Everybody pays the tax, whether you get a rebate or not. That's like the GST, if you pay somebody GST and you are in business for yourself, you can claim it. I know, that's what happens to me. It is a pain in the ...

Chris: Yes. It is like what you were saying earlier, you just get to live with it. A couple of years ago, I really thought it was terrible but now ... Well anyway the accountants look after it.

Peter: It was just verifying that that is the mix that he made. Once it is in that tank - at one time - when the customs or excise were always here, they would lock the bottom of the tanks so you couldn't get any out. If you wanted to take some of it out they would come and unlock it and when you finished you had to go and tell them and they would lock it up again. A customer would order say 30 drums of product and you knew by your bin cards that you had 27 drums in there. You either had to make up a mix of 3 or add a 30 mix to it. They just kept it in stock and if it wasn't in the tank, it was in drums.

Chris: So, in a way, although it was another department, it wasn't much different in the type of work? There is a big mezzanine...

Peter: Yes, you used to walk...there was a scale upstairs first. It would go into the scale and then from the scale, you would hook up the hose to which tank you wanted to go to.

Chris: Was it Jim [White] or somebody that was saying that it was impossible for that alcohol to get back into the system again because there was only gravity feed in that...

Interview #4: Peter Nicholson

Peter: That's right. Gravity feed into the tank and then gravity feed when you were putting it into the drum.

Chris: It was virtually impossible for it to get back into the plant again through the pipes.

Peter: That's right. Unless you pumped it out.

Chris: Unless you were really trying to screw up the system.

Peter: Right. Well, you had to watch too. If you had a alcohol that was really, really, strong odor to it and you were making up another one which had a distinct odor to it, what you would probably do is he would say... well, one of the worst ones was what they called 2D. It stunk. So what you would do is flush the lines with alcohol. Now I want a 2D mix and then they would mix it and once that would go through there they would say now give me a small 2A. So, you would pump up the alcohol for the 2A. It would go through to flush that line out a bit to sweeten it up. Then we would give him the number 1 mix. The alcohol for the 1 mix.

Chris: And there wouldn't be an residual in the pipe of the

Peter: No, very little. What it would pick up, if it would pick up any of the 2D into the 2C would be negligible but that could stand the odor whereas the last one couldn't. You didn't want... you wanted a different odor to it.

Chris: You would almost know what you were going to do that day and try and put the worst ones...

Peter: He might get three mixes at once and he would look at his cards or the boss over there would say we're getting low on this or low on that or he would know that this company was going to order 30 drums of this so he would yell down to the guy and tell him to drum off 15 drums from there and I am going to order a mix for 30 and once you do, let me know. I will get them to pump it over and we'll fix it and then we will flush it with this stuff and then we will go to that. It is knowing what...you have to be aware of what your stock is at all times. Certain customers used to want their drums on certain days.

Chris: It was stuff you would never get out of a textbook, it was just what you learned. The order to do it in?

Peter: You got it. It just like the cannery, you can never get through to one guy's head. He used to like to run Esso Rad and you used to say to him, they take their order on Tuesday, why don't we run it on Tuesday. Instead of piling it on the floor, it goes right out the door to the truck. But, he would say, " Cause I said so". Finally, a little later on

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down the road, it was his idea then, so then you would start to run it on Tuesday morning. It is like your kids, if you have young kids they say your not very bright Dad and all of a sudden from 18-21, did we ever get smart.

Chris: Well, its getting late. I really appreciate your [time].

Peter: Like I said to you, my time is going to be really busy now for the next...

End of Tape