

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWER: Aubrey Kerr (Summary of his interview with Stan Slipper)

DATE: June 6th, 1981

Side 1 only – 25:00

AK: This is side one of a tape, and I'm Aubrey Kerr and this records my interview with Mr. S.E. Slipper, retired geologist and engineer, in his apartment number 1907, 820 Burnham Thorpe Road in Greater Toronto, Saturday June the 6th, 1981.

I had previously talked to his son Bill who was looking after him in his apartment on several occasions, alerting him to the fact that I wished to see Stan as I knew him and interview him on tape to get his voice. He felt he wasn't ready to talk to me because he did not want to put anything on tape that would turn out to be later proven to be incorrect. I assured him that whatever we discussed would be merely informal and could always be corrected later period. However, he insisted that no taping be done and rather than upset him and alienate him, I acceded to his request.

Stan promised to tape his reminiscences and send me a copy and with that view, I left a blank cassette with him to encourage him in this respect. He said he was going to be traveling to visit a couple of his daughters (he has five children) and states that he goes from one to the other in a cyclical process.

First a few words about the apartment. One would normally not describe the furniture, but the room is crammed with elegant and valuable objet d'art. There is one display case full of magnificent Dresden pieces, statuettes, worth a small fortune. There is also a beautiful set of nesting tables, other porcelain vases and silverware, badly tarnished, but probably Sterling. Then a magnificent brass fireplace fan, the kind that folds out with the leaves beautifully scrolled, Then the late Mrs. Slipper's grand piano with the music sitting on it. The lack of housekeeping is no reflection on the son and his father, neither of them probably very interested, but the elegant furniture and other surroundings indicated that Slipper had amassed a fortune in his career and I believe most of this was treasury stock that he obtained from George Cloakey upon the formation of Britalta, back in the early 50s when the Many Islands gas field was part of their assets.

First some vital statistics. Stan is 91 years of age, he has five children. His wife died in March of 1980 and he stated his great loss and the fact that this has, he is still recovering from it. Stan himself has aged tremendously from my recollection. But even when I knew him in the 50s, he was what one might call an old person then. His hair has grown long, whereas he always used to have a brush cut. But his hair is white, it was white then and is still white. He walks with difficulty using a cane, but what impressed me was the sharpness of his mind and his keenness of observation. Based on his ability to survive his latest attack of the flu, although he is somewhat weakened, I would say that he would be around for maybe one or two more years. And as an aside, one would hope that he is still with us to help celebrate the Royalite Number 4 in 1984. This should be kept in mind.

He was born in Port Arthur, Ontario (now Thunder Bay) and he received his degree from Queen's University, making some snide comments about University of Toronto. He started off with the Geological Survey of Canada and apparently work the foothills prior to the drilling of the Dingman Well.

He was quite knowledgeable concerning the location of seeps and confirmed the fact that prior to Royalite Number 4, the field was known as the Dingman Field. He also spent one year with the survey in Ottawa working out of the old Victoria Museum. When I asked him about the early officers of the survey, he recalled R.D. McConnell who he said in his earlier years was vigorous and had lots of drive, this would help explain the pushing for those wells that the survey drilled in Alberta back in the 1890s.

Stan claimed to have the distinction of being the first petroleum engineer in Alberta, and when this happened is hard to say. I only interviewed him for an hour and there are many holes and pieces that have to be patched together, but he did work for the Department of Interior and the map that he made, a copy of which I have on my wall, has his name on it under the word Department of Interior as Petroleum Engineer. I reminded him of this map and it seemed to come back to him. I also reminded him of the words that he had printed in red about "natural gas will be found in many localities in the Foothills". In the Borings Division to which Vern Taylor made reference, Stan appeared to have had a fairly senior job. And when he left to go with the gas company, Charlie Ross took over. The other person that Stan was aware of and had probably personal contact with was Eugene Coste, who he said drilled wells in Bow Island and had the volcanic theory in mind, then went to Texas to further develop his theory but achieved no success there. Then return to Lake Erie where he drilled wells, presumably in the Haldeman part of the east end of the lake to obtain shallow gas for the utilities there.

The temperament and style of Slipper probably emerged when he left the Boring Division and I believe I mentioned that Charlie Ross took over and this was some time before Vern Taylor showed up. He made a kind of an odd remark to the effect that Vern didn't have very much exposure to the work and it sounded as if Stan was fairly arrogant about his positions and probably with some justification, the fact that he seemed to get a good grasp of the geology period when I asked him about the discovery at Viking, he admitted that Coste drilled a well at Viking but when I asked him if he, Stan Slipper, took the credit for finding the Viking field, he said, yes in a way I was. Because he was there when Dingman drilled his well, he knew Dingman and described him as the driving force behind the operation even though he had partners.

He called Royalite a monopoly in Turner Valley on the on the gas, and I asked him whether there was influence from Jersey?? and he said yes ([inaudible] directing and put anybody and everybody out of their way in the Valley. He did not recall Spooner too well, although he knew the name. He probably had pretty well left Turner Valley by the '30s and was well ensconced with the gas company, having been hired by... the name I haven't got here, but it was the name of a person who preceded Ray Milner, he was a very clever person but he committed suicide and Ray Milner took over, but the controlling force was the Butcher family in Philadelphia and Stan remembers having to report directly to the Butcher's all the time about the gas activities throughout the province. He did not remember the name Dominion Gas and Electric, but he knew that Ray was his boss and he characterized Ray as knowing that he, Ray, was good, but he was very good as an operator, in other words. So Ray was fairly, not that arrogant that he couldn't work with people. I did not get to ask him about Major Lowrey or the Angle Canadian group, but him going back to the Turner Valley area, he recalled that he played a dirty trick on Shell Oil by indicating the depth of the bed south of the highway where one ridge to the west was outcropping Dakota, which is Upper Cretaceous and the East Ridge was bare of outcrops. And he had misdirected Shell when he met them out in the field.

He was quite firm on who developed the concept of an over thrust fault block, that being Ted Link, and when I asked him about George Hume, he said he didn't have any structural background and had not worked in it as much. He dismissed George rather abruptly. Throughout the interview I could see that he

had high standards and was still very much the professional. Stan probably spent a fair amount of time up in Athabasca Tar Sands, although he said he did not take any leases out, but he did work and did come into contact with Count Von Hammerstein who I have mentioned in other articles. And the count had two men with a flat bottom boat and a Zenith gasoline engine, and Stan used to go up and down the river with them. Apparently the Count drilled a well but the oil was too thick and they couldn't do anything with it. This was not the well which found a salt bed.

There were several other things that I did not get into because I was tiring the gentleman out and left shortly after 3 p.m., after about one hour of talking of old times. Questions that still need to be answered are, how he obtained his first interest in geology, his boss in the Department of Interior, the kind of people that he worked with and on his different parties. In that respect perhaps by digging through the archives of the Geological Survey, I can perhaps find out when he was out in the field, and who his parties were, and he did mention that people in the old Boring Section over in the immigration building where he worked also, imported a lot of British ideas. He said some of them were good, but they weren't as imaginative as presumably he was. He recalls Jack Goodman and Jack could probably confirm some of the stuff that Vern Taylor and Stan have given me.

The other matter is details about his deal with George Cloakey in Britalta. He didn't want to talk too much about that. The hearing at Medicine Hat and the subsequent coup that Britalta pulled by becoming the first exporter of gas.

This is all that I think I have to say at this time, and I will sign off at this point. Thank you over and over.

End of Summary