

This interview is with Bill McDermid, Senior Project Manager for Fraser River Pile and Dredge. The major themes discussed in this interview are the marine construction industry, FRPD's operations, clients, working jurisdiction, and union labour.

Interview Date: October 21, 2014

Interviewers: Peter Hall and Kate Petrusa

Interview Date Range: 1960s – 2014

Sound Recording Length: 52:35

This interview with Bill McDermid, Senior Project Manager for Fraser River Pile and Dredge (FRPD) which is located in New Westminster. He saw a FRPD job posting at British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) for a construction management position, which was the closest position that he was looking for when he went to school. He said that marine construction was appealing to him because it is unique from general construction. Marine construction also offers more opportunity for travel up and down the coast of British Columbia, and working in places more interesting than concrete towers or residential building. The interview is largely about FRPD's operations.

Section 0:00 – 7:38

In this section of the interview McDermid describes how he got involved in FRPD. He grew up all over British Columbia, but has lived in Vancouver the most of his life. He discusses how marine construction is different than regular construction in its construction methodology and equipment, the currents and tides, and that marine traffic is loosely controlled. He discusses the changes he has witnessed over the thirteen years of his career, the two most significant being the change from wood construction to steel and concrete, and that the facilities that FRPD are building and maintain are much bigger than before.

Section 7:39 – 21:49

In this section of the interview McDermid describes what a bridgeman does and what they do for FRPD. FRPD gets all of their labour from Pile Drivers, Divers, Bridge, Dock and Wharf Builders Local 2404. He talks about the old wooden waterfront infrastructures around New Westminster, most notably, the dock around the Quay Esplanade and how FRPD has to do work there every couple of years to keep the infrastructure safe as it has wood structures from 60 years ago. He states that he likes to maintain old structures along the river because they have history and serve a purpose especially around New Westminster's waterfront. He mentions how BC Ferries was the biggest client that had only timber structures, but these have now have been replaced with concrete and steel structures, which require much less maintenance. He describes the logistics of how FRPD gets the materials and parts they need to fix structures.

Section 21:50 – 31:57

In this section of the interview McDermid discusses how in the marine construction industry businesses tend to have territories which they operate in. He explains why FRPD does not do work internationally and has decided to stick primarily to the Fraser River because they want to focus their resources on their "core business," and working in a new country is always risky due to different rules, laws, and regulations. He mentions about other marine construction businesses do work internationally because they think a certain job is profitable. He states the reason why

Canadian marine construction companies cannot work in the United States is because of the “punitive” trade laws, the Jones Act, that prevent them from taking floating equipment into the United States. He also states that how often FRPD dredges on the river depends where their clients on the Fraser River are located because some areas get more silt build up than others.

Section 31:58 – 43:57

In this section of the interview McDermid explains that FRPD has kept same person working on the same site year after year because they know the certain site so well. He describes the marine construction work that FRPD does as dangerous due to the large, destructive equipment and the constantly changing waterfront conditions. He talks about Vancouver Pile Driving who he describes as a “formidable competitor” to FRPD; however, both companies work in mostly their own territories -- Vancouver Pile in Vancouver Harbour and FRPD in the Fraser River. FRPD is twice as big as Van Pile, and thus has a competitive advantage. On land FRPD has done work driving piles for the Evergreen Line in Port Moody, he describes the construction work on land as having five times more competition than in the marine construction industry. He also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of trucking and barging logs.

Section 43:58 – 52:35

In this section of the interview McDermid describes how far FRPD does work upland. They have gone as far as the Northwest Territories and Fort McMurray, Alberta, but it takes a lot of human resources to do work in those faraway places, which leaves FRPD depleted to do their core work on the Fraser River and ensuring their customers of 20-40 years are happy. He further discusses the union relationship of FRPD’s labour He mentions that FRPD are very patient in training their workers which may take three to five years to complete. He discusses how it can be a struggle to maintain workers when marine construction business is slow and sometimes they lose workers despite that in a month or two of a slowdown FRPD’s business will pick up, which can be hard for FRPD because that is when they need the labour the most. FRPD has diversified their business and spreading their revenue in different markets.