

Oral History Number: 415-001
Interviewee: Robert Henry “Ty” Robinson
Interviewer: Greg Gordon
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Greg Gordon: There we go. Okay, so [Richard A.] Eddy, was he more of a businessman, or did he pretty much run the day-to-day operations?

Ty Robinson: That’s right. That’s the way the McLeod’s described him. Although he was very definitely a part of the opinion making group, with whom you’re familiar with: [Edward L.] Bonner, [Frank] Higgins, Eddy, [Andrew B.] Hammond. They had a Worden. Those five originally were the only (unintelligible) Missoula started with. As time went on, Hammond became the leader of the group. Hammond was the “doer.” Hammond was the man who built the saw mills over in northern Idaho and eastern Washington.

He went down in Salmon, Idaho country. It was Hammond who built the Spur Railroad, you know, both the Philipsburg and the Hamilton that came back to bite him when he had his difficulties with Marcus Daly. Marcus told him, while over their problems, he told finally Hammond that—and you have this I’m sure—the grass is going to grow on the streets of Missoula. Then my understanding was that Hammond, like all times, wanted to run (unintelligible) back. He didn’t pay much attention to that until such time as two days, twice, a train came from Butte over this line that Hammond had originally built and was sold to the railroad because the railroad, by federal law, couldn’t build those.

So as a consequence, he built them but never realized that they were going to come back to work against him. Here’s Marcus Daly moving everything out of Butte and building the town Hamilton, which was going to supersede Missoula, which was Hammond’s town. Of course, I have some recorded matters thereafter that because of that dispute, and finally Hammond recognized that this man Daly, who had been his partner in many of these operations, probably was going to outdo him. He made a deal with him and gave him a one-third interest in the Missoula Mercantile Company.

GG: And you think that was more of bringing him and keeping him—

TR: Yes, keeping him from developing Hamilton even to a greater degree. It was following that that Daly said, “What I’ll do is that I’ll go in the horse business down there and make it a horse breeding operation.” He did set up the bank, the Ravalli County Bank. He set that up really in 1895, which was the year after Hammond had left and gone to Oregon.

GG: Yes.

TR: Ninety-four. At the time I liquidated the Missoula Mercantile Company, this octopus, which was—a lot of people don’t understand that it was that kind of an operation—liquidated really

the retail operation first and then the wholesale. I got all done and by 1967 there about, I had finally done everything. I had sold the mills, the grain elevators across the state that they owned.

GG: They owned grain elevators around Montana?

TR: Yes. They had grain elevators in Hamilton, St. Ignatius, Polson, and the big operation in Kalispell, which was all under what they call Misko Meads, M-I-S-K-O. Misko Meads. Then they had a big one in Bozeman. They had a part ownership of one in Harlowton. They were mixed up in partial, very, very small amount ownership in Conrad and Choteau.

GG: The grain elevators were primarily to supply flour for the Merc or were they grain dealers?

TR: They were grain dealers.

GG: So it's just to ship on the railroads?

TR: First I hadn't been in my job at the—you understood that I graduated from law school and the first job I got was right at the Missoula Merc as in-house council.

GG: Really?

TR: Oh yes. I went work—

GG: What year was that?

TR: 1948. April the first, 1948.

GG: The Hammond family still owns stock in the Merc at that time?

TR: Yes, they owned stock in the Merc until the day it was completely liquidated. Back to Marcus Daly, what I wanted to portray there, that one-third interest was a lot of money when we liquidated and paid off. Of course Marcus Daly had no direct heirs. He had a Marcus Daly III that married a girl in Las Vegas who originally had been listed as a stripper. Juanita was her name. She's alive.

She has Dream Isle up here in Flathead Lake. Are you familiar with the Melita Island in the lake up there? As you go out of Polson and you go about 12 miles and make the turn, you'll see the whole foray of the lake. There's a little island down there. There's one right here in front of it, Melita. This over here is Melita Island. That's one that was owned by a broker originally here in Missoula. Juanita owns that now. She's been on the board of the University Foundation out there for several years. It was something and she was not a blood relative of any of the Dalys.

That's off the track for you. But it goes back to the fact that (unintelligible) made the deal and they were in cahoots as you probably know all the way through—Marcus and Hammond.

GG: They seemed to get in fights and get together and the same thing with Higgins and Hammond.

TR: They do for two reasons. I've concluded that Marcus was a good Irishman. He was a Catholic. Hammond's English Episcopalian. Those days, I suspect that was something that counted.

GG: I was wondering about that because [Charles H.] McLeod, the Keiths, all those guys from New Brunswick were all good Protestant and Republicans. They had the Irish Catholic. I can understand how it would split apart. What kept bringing them back together again?

TR: Greed. It had to be. I don't know what else. Marcus got mad over something. Then he resigned as President at the First National Bank, which was owned by this octopus. That was all right. Hammond—so he put John Keith in there as President. At that point, Marcus did not come back from that fight until Hammond said, "Well, I'll cut you in for a third of what the interest is here at the Merc."

GG: Do you know what date that they made that deal generally?

TR: That was before I—I often thought it was sometime between 1990 and 1994.

GG: Eighteen—oh, okay.

TR: Because '94 Hammond left. Hammond had a family and that family moved with him to California. During the years that I was at the Missoula Merc, Hammond people would come back each year for an annual meeting of the Merc since they were still stock owners until the end. Hammond had a son that would come but he had a brother. The brother ended up, as I understand, running that ship line that he built out of San Francisco. Which today, as I understand, is called President's Ship Line. I don't know whether that's true. I think somebody told me one time about that. Hammond saw to it—and you're familiar with Hammond and his appropriation of the federal timber?

GG: That's one of the things I'm working on right now.

TR: And you're aware of the fact that in 1894, the federal government said, "You owe us some money." I've found two different places; one was less than a million dollars. They said the other was more than a million. They didn't give an exact figure. More than a million in 1894; that's an awful lot of money. Of course he had been running those saw mills. He had a saw mill up at Troy. Nobody seemed to—I've been there to try to find information. Nobody seems to know today where it was even located. He had them in eastern Washington. I don't know what he

was doing over there with the saw mills. Then, anyway, according to the federal government's records in 1917, they settled that for \$17,000. According to Walter McLeod, Hammond never worried about that one bit.

GG: He never worried about obviously (unintelligible) \$17,000 at that time. He never worried about the suits? That the feds had been after him for 30 years—

TR: That's right. He was never worried about it. I don't know if that was true, or what was on his mind.

GG: He may not have.

TR: You have a lot more information than I'd have. Mine is sketchy and most of it was what I was told by the McLeod's. Putting all things together, and what other people have written, and what other people have heard them speak of Hammond back years ago when they first set up the Hammond Chair. There was a lecture that was given by some professor from out of state that I had attended. That's when I first really started to get interested in the whole history of the Missoula Merc.

I had a lot of it but it seemed to me that Hammond was the "doer." You have the information relative to the fight for the capitol, where Daly wanted Anaconda, and Hammond had bought the newspaper and owned the *Missoulian* at the time, and he pushed hard for Helena and lost the battle right in Missoula County. The people in Missoula County voted against Helena. In the meantime, under the table, I take it that Hammond had made some deals with the people in Helena that if it got it, then we'd get the University here.

Years ago a man, who was warden of the prison in Deer Lodge by the name of Middleton—Austin Middleton—was telling me about the fact that of course he knew a history. He had been living during the days born back to Daly. He said that Missoula, if they hadn't got the University, they'd have gotten the prison. So that was the choice and Hammond wanted the University. Hammond owned South Missoula Land Company. You're familiar with that?

GG: Yes.

TR: You're looking at the last surviving witness of the Missoula Land Company's hierarchy. We had a five member board in south Missoula when I came aboard in the Merc, and they put me on the board. Then I eventually became the President, liquidating South Missoula Land Company, and all we had left were some lots out in the University area; University edition. Everything from the river to South Avenue was South Missoula. They did not own the land where the University golf course is located. Lots of people think that they did. I'm not able to find that. I haven't looked at a recent title opinion, but I'm quite certain that was Higgins land to course as was the South Missoula land that they acquired from Higgins where the University is located.

GG: Oh, they bought it from Higgins?

TR: They bought it from Higgins. Remember I call this group a cabal, these five fellows. We don't know what Andrew did with Higgins in dealing—

GG: Yes, they seemed to get in fights all of the time too.

TR: They did. Again, what did you have? Roman Catholic Higgins. This fellow, I think Hammond, was the strongest of the group.

GG: Well, he certainly had a fairly aggressive personality.

TR: Apparently so.

GG: Did the McLeod's ever talk about that? There are people who really liked and remained extremely loyal to him when there were a lot of people in Missoula that really—

TR: They talked about this, that after Hammond went here, he went down to Oregon and set up down there, you're familiar with that?

GG: I'm getting into it but I know he went to Oregon and California—San Francisco.

TR: He hadn't been in Oregon for very long before he was running two saw mills and stealing, or appropriating timber there.

GG: Yes, he had bribed the senator from Oregon.

TR: Boy, I know. Then he goes to California. Hammond left and he told C.H., "Okay. It's your baby now. You run it." One thing that he wanted, Daly wants to buy that mill out there in Bonner. Originally [William] Clark put together, but Higgins—or Andrew—ended up with it somehow. I've never understood that.

GG: Hammond built the mill and then Clark built the dam.

TR: Yes. That's right. That's where it got over into Montana Power. You know the Merc sold a Missoula street railway to Clark. They were in that as well as a power and light company. They sold that to Clark. Anyway, Hammond goes on to California. He says, "Okay, you deal with Marcus." No. Marcus wouldn't deal with him. So Hammond said, "Every day that you call me, this thing is going to go up \$50,000 a day in price—the mill."

Now what the original offering price was to Daly, I don't know. I haven't been able to figure that out. Anyway, he eventually—Marcus had to finally deal with McLeod. He bought the mill.

According to Walter McLeod, he said, "I'm not sure what it was finally, but I think my dad told me he got a little over a million dollars for the mill." That indicated that while Hammond had left Missoula, he was still a controller, and he's had his hand in the operation enough here. He was pushing this nephew to take care of everything. As soon as you get it done, the next thing to do is sell that newspaper, which McLeod did.

GG: It seems that—it always struck me as sort of odd that out of all the founders of Missoula, that everybody knows who Higgins and Worden and all these other guys are. We have McLeod Peak and everything. Hammond sort of got...

TR: I know where you're going.

GG: Do you think that was deliberate?

TR: Yes. Very deliberate. Walter said that Hammond himself, while he was rough at times with, like C.H. [Charles H. McLeod]—not rough, he just pushed him, and made him what he was, a very great manager—and C.H ruled this town with a single hand after Hammond left. You didn't do anything in this town without checking first with C.H. They called him. Anyway, Walter said that Hammond wanted to keep a low profile. To do that, when they bought the *Missoulian*, it wasn't bought in the name of the Merc. It wasn't bought in the name of Hammond or anybody. It was bought in the name of some of the people in the Merc; the clerks. Are you familiar with the Missoula Improvement Company?

GG: Yes, they were the ones that were set up for the timber.

TR: Yes. Now that's another one. He had that in the names of—other than himself. He wasn't showing in that.

GG: Why do you suppose that is? From business or a legal perspective?

TR: If you're going to be a magnate and you're going to be an entrepreneur in a lot of things, I'm sure, I'm just guessing—Donald Trump would be an exception to it—you want to stay back. Howard Hughes was an example of it. Of course he was very reclusive. I have the feeling that he had his hands in so many pots that he probably didn't want the publicity. There's one incidence and I can't remember what this is, he set up a subsidiary organization somewhere. It made C.H. the president of it I think. C.H. had to go to the bank to borrow money for it in his own name, not in the name of the corporate group. That seemed funny to me. Hammond didn't show anywhere. I think this was purposeful.

GG: On Hammond's part?

TR: Yes.

GG: Do you think there was any purpose on the part of Higgins, or those who were still in Missoula, to sort of make you forget about him because—having lived in Missoula for a long time, it's one of those big small Montana towns where, "Oh, well that guy left and we don't want to have anything to do with him anymore since he forgot about us." That kind of attitude of, "He didn't die here so we don't want to remember him."

TR: There is this story that they told, that I was told. Without a sheriff here, and he was a territorial sheriff of type, and not much of a sheriff, they built a little shanty for a jail. It existed for several years. It wasn't much of a jail because they weren't putting anybody in jail. They were shooting and killing them or hanging them as the vigilantes were doing. Some time, Hammond figured they needed a jail. So he called the sheriff over one day and asked him about that. Hammond built a jail.

GG: Oh, I didn't know that.

TR: No one must ever know that he was mixed up in the jail. I said to McLeod, "Was that because he was worried about criminality that would fill over if he was part of that?" I said, "They didn't name the jail for him." Walter said, "That's the last thing that he'd want."

GG: Is something named after him?

TR: The only thing that got named after him was an addition in town here; Hammond Addition. That was done by McLeod when we—

GG: When they renamed Hammond Street. I always wondered why.

TR: I don't think anybody can. I've been asked that question many times. I don't know.

GG: Was the same antagonism between sort of the McLeod's and the Frank Higgins and the rest of the—did the Irish Catholic Protestant divide continue?

TR: Not with C.H. McLeod, no. He had a lot better—or differently than, anyway—no. There's a reason for that. He was in the marketing business. He was going to get along with everybody I think, in that extent. Gradually he phased those people out. Selling the mill or getting rid of that, and getting rid of the street railway and those other things. He pushed those things around where he's nothing but an entrepreneur and he's running a mercantile establishment. He does have these outlying interests. They had land in a place called Grantsdale, south of Hamilton. That was not South Missoula land. That was a part of the M.I.C.; Missoula Improvement—whatever it was.

GG: Montana Improvement Company.

TR: Missoula Improvement Company; formed by Hammond, Eddy, Bonner, M.J. Connell from Deer Lodge, and Daly. That had property in Montana, Idaho, and Washington. That was formed, of course, to be able to do business with the railroad that came in. Hammond sent Eddy first to deal with the railroad people and then subsequently Bonner went and talked to them about getting this deal. The next thing you know, Hammond's running these tent stores along right away and doing so very well helping the railroads coming along. They moved these tent stores after the railroad comes through.

Hammond says, "Gosh, we better set up some stores in these towns." So he did. That's how Thompson Falls got in; Arlee, Drummond. When I went to work for the Missoula Merc, I think every little grocery store from Hamilton to Troy was deep in debt to the Missoula Merc. They kept them that way pretty much because they ran the wholesale grocery business. The day finally came that my boss, who was the Vice President of the Merc said, "You're going to have a big deal for you. You're going to go out and tell all of these people we supply. We'll give them 30 days to change from credit to cash." This means that they're going to have to quit giving credit to everybody—all their customers. I never saw so many people so mad in my whole life.

GG: This was after the Merc was sold?

TR: No this was in 1950. I had been at the Merc two years when that happened. They had stores in Charlo. The Wamsig (?) family owned that. The Beckwith's owned a store in St. Ignatius. They had a store in—the Eltons (?) owned a store in Polson. Ronan—here's the other thing, they owned the banks. I liquidated the banks. I didn't know very much about how to do that. So I called a former banking examiner from over in Helena to help me work that out. They owned a big bank in Kalispell. They did not own the bank in Columbia Falls. That was owned by the Anaconda Company. They owned the bank in Whitefish, Ronan, Kalispell. They had an interest in the bank in Stevensville. They didn't own that wholly. I'm trying to think of the people that owned it. They had their hand in it. Of course they had the banks here in Missoula. One time they had two banks.

GG: Both Missoula?

TR: For a short time.

GG: The First National?

TR: And the Western Montana. This is off the record in a way, but in 1950s, the Federal Reserve is not delivering money at early days. They hadn't started that yet. The Missoula Merc had 10 million dollars sitting in the safe in the Missoula Mercantile Company office here, which is now Macy's. On Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings, the banks were still open on Saturday. You'd have the president or somebody at one of those banks coming to the Merc getting money. We'd put them in paper sacks. You'd see maybe the president, Ted Jacobs, walk across the street to the First National with a couple of sacks. You'd see Bill Worden from the Western

Montana waltzing back down the streets with a couple three sacks of money. Plain day, I'd go down the street to get them enough money to run for the day.

GG: Oh, because the Merc owned the bank?

TR: Well, no.

GG: Was it because—

TR: The Merc had the money. At that time, the Merc was out of the banking business. I don't know when they got out of the bank—that banking, out of the two major banks. They were not in that when I went to work there in 1948. They owned all these other little banks; Thompson Falls, Plains. We sold those to the people who were running all the way through.

GG: I'm under the impression that, I don't know how much of it is true, but it seemed that the Merc in many ways was sort of Hammond's cash cow, that he was able to draw upon that for all the California enterprises as well long after he left; that it made him so much money and it kept—

TR: That is correct.

GG: They were able to produce a lot of liquid capital.

TR: That goes back to my point a little while ago, even after he had left. He still had his hand on the Missoula Merc. Yes. Money was going all the time, even when I was there.

GG: It was flowing out?

TR: Money out of the operation of the retail wholesale here went down, yes, to the Hammond's operation.

GG: Yes, I wonder how important it was. It must have been—there's probably no way of—

TR: I think it was a still a hand in the glove operation.

GG: They sold off everything else but the Merc.

TR: They sold off everything except the retail. They kept the implement business. They kept the—well, it was the Misko Meads. Misko was last. I sold Misko Mills about a year before—that would be 1955, so Misko Mills. Then in 1956 I sold the wholesale grocery to the Mormon Church. It was called Udall's (?) Grocery, but it was owned by the Mormon Church. Then we sold, I can't remember the year we sold the wholesale hardware. That would be close to '60 I think—1960—to the International Telephone and Telegraph.

Interestingly enough, those people were real entrepreneurs. We had about five million dollars in the Western Montana Building and Loan that we had placed there in order to build a future retirement system; the Missoula Merc didn't have a retirement system. What they did was when you retired, they'd ask you how much you were going to get from Social Security, and in order to bring that up to a figure of maybe \$300 a month, they would give you the balance. We were working on a retirement system and doing with a real system in place. Then we sold, the day after we sold IT&T as the owner moved that money immediately out of Missoula. So there was never an opportunity to complete the system even under IT&T's ownership here.

GG: Walter McLeod ran the Hammond operation out of Oregon for a long time. Did he ever talk about what it was like to work for Hammond?

TR: Walter?

GG: Yes.

TR: Walter ran this operation here.

GG: No, he ran the Merc.

TR: The Merc here, he didn't have anything to do with the Hammond Company in California. I think he felt that pressure by almost all of the Hammond people.

GG: And by the Hammond people, do you mean—

TR: The Hammond family in California.

GG: Is Andrews—

TR: Aside from Marcus Daly, the Hammonds owned another one third of the Merc. Then the McLeods—there were 32 stockholders when we liquidated.

GG: So it had no—it was not a public—

TR: No.

GG: But the Hammond family and Dalys both had it until the very end?

TR: Had what?

GG: The Hammond and Daly families both had it until the very end; had their stocks?

TR: Until the very end, yes. I don't know anything about the modern day Hammond family, what's left, if any.

GG: Well, there's George's descendants here in town.

TR: That part of it, yes.

GG: I just talked to the guy who runs the foundation out there and he said there's three of Andrew's great grandsons.

TR: Oh, are there?

GG: And they're scattered all over the place. They sold the Hammond Lumber Company. His daughters sold the Hammond Lumber Company in the fifties. So ever since then, there hasn't been—

TR: Probably sold the shipping lines, too.

GG: They sold everything, yes.

TR: They did?

GG: Yes, for quite substantial money.

TR: They had a beautiful big home in San Francisco up on the hill there.

GG: Have you been there?

TR: I haven't been in the home, but I've been past it.

GG: I imagine.

TR: I remember the address. When I was down there at a Bar meeting one time, I had a little time. We drove past it to see what it was like. It was a mansion. Hammond himself was an icon in San Francisco, an entrepreneur of the type, I'm sure. I don't know whether he ever surfaced enough to—he certainly didn't want to surface here.

GG: Yes. It almost seems a little strange for somebody who is doing so many different things and wants to have some sort of legacy there, or pride or something.

TR: I'd like to have met him. I'd like to have known him.

GG: What do you think he was like?

TR: What?

GG: Based on your conversations with the McLeods and—

TR: Well I think he was a pretty shrewd businessman. He probably played pretty close to the vest when he visited with you or me. He wouldn't be very open. I rather gather that from Walter. He used to put the pressure on Walter, I know. Walter's secretary said to me, "Mr. McLeod has to go to California tomorrow." I said, "He does?" She said, "Yes. I've got to make reservations on the train right now to get him down there. The Hammonds are demanding that he come down."

GG: To...? The Merc must have been important enough that—

TR: It was the cash cow. This cash cow business, I think, was lingered on. I don't know how long it went, but it was—he had to go down to report to them. I think in Walter's mind, the Hammond interest in the Missoula Merc was the major interest. He never paid any attention to the Daly people other than the Daly's daughter married a Count. You're familiar with that?

GG: Yes.

TR: A Romanian Count. She had the place down at Hamilton. She entertained the McLeods. The McLeods' secretary was a very good, close friend of this gal. What's her name? Margaret. No. Dear—

GG: That was his wife?

TR: Anyway, she would come from New York City in the summer and spend her time there at the mansion. McLeods would go down and visit with her. They'd go down to dinners and so forth. She was a very nice lady. I knew her quite well. She would come into the store and visit with my secretary, who was Mr. McLeod's secretary, who tragically had Alzheimer's and we put her in a rest home down by the river across from the University. Some fellow murdered her and threw her body in the river. That was 17 years ago. We haven't yet solved that one. I always had the feeling that the Hammonds, that were all working for the Hammonds. I don't know.

I wondered what the stature of Andrew Hammond was. I haven't—other than the picture of his face, which we have—I haven't seen any picture of a full body.

GG: There is a couple over at the University, but he's sitting down. So it's hard to say.

TR: I haven't seen a picture of it. Walter McLeod himself and C.H were big men.

GG: Oh really?

TR: Yes. They stood a full six foot, six foot-one, broad shoulders, big heads. So I would assume that Hammond and the McLeod families were related because after all, C.H was a nephew.

GG: He married Hammond's sister, is that right?

TR: Yes. He married somebody in that family, I can't remember if it was his sister. It's a senior moment here; I know very well who he married because I knew her. Walter's mother. I can't even think of her name...when will it come?

GG: Was it Clara Beckwith?

TR: Clara Beckwith was a sister to Walter.

GG: That was his sister? Okay.

TR: Sister to Walter. That railroad contract was interesting to me.

GG: What was the railroad contract?

TR: In '81.

GG: Oh yes, have you ever found that?

TR: No I haven't.

GG: That started the—they got to build the railroad.

TR: Yes, but there were lots of slips that the company had installed among the documents they had down in the basement. They were thrown away when we sold to IT&T. They just threw everything out except the files. By accident got a hold of these, at least the information.

GG: Do you have any idea how—because there were so many other saw mills that were already up and operating, why did the Mercantile Company get a contract to build?

TR: I think that's the uncanniness of Hammond. That's what I always figured. He was just a savvy, smart trader of some kind. They had these slips showing what had gone to Tarkio (?), what went to such-and-such a place on the road, what was going to Superior, what was going down.

GG: The other thing that I'm coming across is quite a bit of debate about who actually held the—owned the Montana Improvement Company. The papers say that Hammond, Bonner, Eddy, Daly had half and the railroads had 51 percent. Then Hammond always maintained

everything in the railroads; that the railroads did not own any stock in the Improvement Company.

TR: I never heard of the railroad getting involved at all. They had records that the Merc of the MIC, we should have gone into those. Looking back on it, I really should have just taken a lot of time and written all of that stuff up. It would have made it complete.

GG: Were there any records from the Merc that survived?

TR: No. They were all thrown out unbeknownst to me. Unbeknownst to anybody at the time. They just took them out and threw them in the dump. I went to the dump and tried to get into them. By that time, you couldn't get anything. They were pretty well mashed up and all covered over. No. One thing I was interested in, I'd built a pretty good little law library that my boss L.E. Bunge got. I wanted a library here. I thought I was going to be there for a long time.

GG: At the Merc?

TR: So that library was all thrown out. West Publishing Company sold us a lot of books.

GG: At one point, the Human Cross Reference that Hammond had, started up a reading room in the Merc for the employees. A library for employees to come—nothing left of that when you arrived?

TR: No. All I know is that they had an eating place in the Merc for the employees to eat lunch. A reading room...well, when I arrived at the Merc, you still—if you came into a department and wanted to purchase—a clerk would give you a slip and you'd give him the money and he'd put it in the basket and send it upstairs to the cashier. They had to send the merchandise up there with it. The bagger would come, okay, and you paid for it.

GG: Was that standard, or was that only at the Merc?

TR: No, that was only the Merc.

GG: Why was that?

TR: I don't know.

GG: Just to keep really close tabs.

TR: I had a situation where we had a cashier, a very long cashier, had been there for 25 or 26 years. She never took a vacation. She became ill and during the time she was ill, we located the fact that we were short considerable funding. So we kind of attributed it to her and when she came back to work, it was my job to investigate. So I called her. I called her down and closed

the door and told her that we'd discovered the shortage. She turned just as white as a sheep and cried. Yes, she admitted it. I said, "It looks to us as though we're short of about \$28,000."

She said, "That's pretty close. I have a daughter in California who has been in drugs for years and I've had to pay for those drugs." Her husband left her when the daughter was born. She raised the daughter and had problems with her originally and sent her off to live with an aunt down in California. She got into drugs. Okay, so I take a confession from her, write it out, and I have Mr. McLeod's secretary sit with me during this confession. So I have a witness to it and show that it was purely voluntary, et cetera.

So I got it all done and went in to see my boss. I said, "I'm going over now to get the county attorney and talk to him and we'll follow up on that." He closed the door and said, "You're not going anywhere Ty. Give me that confession." He said, "What I want you to do is make out a claim to our insurance company, which is Lloyd's of London. You've been dealing with those people, you know who they are. Go ahead and get a letter off to them." Within a week's time we got a check back for \$28,000 no questions asked. We of course terminated her employment.

A year later, I heard she had been hired in Seattle by the Boeing Company in their accounting department. My friend who was the Vice President of the Milwaukee Railroad—since we were the Milwaukee attorneys in this law firm—was here visiting and he was telling me, he said, "You know, we have a neighbor lady who moved next door to us here about a year ago. She used to work for a company here in Missoula." "Oh?" I said.

"Yes. She's working for the Boeing people and has a job out there. She's a very nice lady. We see quite little of her. Neighbors have a cooperative garden group of neighbors and she's very active in it."

I said, "Do you know her name?"

He said, "Oh yes." He gave it to me.

I said, "Going to work for Boeing?"

"Yes."

GG: Who was running the Merc at that time?

TR: Walter.

GG: And was he the one that said "tear it up"?

TR: No Walter wasn't involved in that. It was my boss; L.E. Bunge and I were the only two. So after that, one day I asked Mr. McLeod's secretary, I said, "Do you know that Lorraine is working for the Boeing Company?"

"Yes I know," she said. "We have a nice letter here from her thanking us for the fine reference we made for her."

I'm only a (unintelligible). I don't run the show. So you know a lot of things about Mr. Hammond and (unintelligible). I told you when we started out, I'm really not much of a historian for you. I know that those five fellows together wheeled and dealt. There's no doubt about it. As they phased out and C.H, the man who moved over on his shoulders.

GG: And was there no longer a cabal? Was it pretty much C.H running—

TR: There was no other. Marcus was dead. Hammond was dead. Higgins was dead. There were some Higgins. Of course the Higgins boys were still around. They were dying early because of their problems. They were all matched up—the story goes, and this comes to me from somebody in the Merc that knew them all; they all got mixed up with the gals and picked up syphilis in those days. I think three of the boys, two or three of the boys had it. That may be more myth than rumor, but that's what the perception is.

GG: Do you ever hear anything about Florence, his wife, or what she was like?

TR: The McLeods liked her very much. She was a lovely lady apparently. He was very devoted to her. Of course he named the hotel for her. The town, yes. He's not the one supposed to be responsible for that according to the story—it was one of the other members of the cabal told him that this is what should be done. Apparently the MIC was going to buy land down there. They were mixed up with the MaClays (?) who have ranch land in the area at the time. Interesting, another thing, if you were a rancher for the Missoula Mercantile Company, you paid your bill only once a year.

When you did, you'd come in and see C.H, and they'd visit with you. These were ranchers from the Blackfoot area, the Bitterroot, the Clark Fork area, up in St. Ignatius on the reservation. It was recognized that these people only would pay once a year. The Merc carried them for the full year.

The story that Walter told me about his father was during the Depression; he said there were a lot of people who starved to death. If it hadn't been for C.H.—I had been at the Merc only a couple of months and the union people were trying to unionize the Merc, which was never done. It was a cold winter. We're in January and they're walking outside the building there up and down, women in dresses, and they're freezing to death. Walter comes past them one day and of course they all jeered him and everybody. So he came in and got a hold of the men's clothing lady and went up and got Mrs. McCollum in the women's department and said, "Go

out there and see how many of those women and men out there need some clothes and take them out and put them on them.”

The Merc was a family; very generous, low wages. If you got sick right now, you’ve got the best medical care available. You were put in St. Patrick’s Hospital. Western Montana Clinic doctors, they were all paid for by the Merc. The wages weren’t very good. Paid weekly at the Merc and paid in cash. The eagle flew every Friday afternoon between four and six.

GG: What flew between four and six?

TR: The eagle. That’s an old saying that comes from Europe when you get paid. In this country we are on the dollar, we had the eagle. So the eagle flies. That was the saying. A clerk would leave you standing if he was waiting and if it was time to go get his money, he’d go upstairs and leave you there. You’d have to wait.

GG: It seems that people worked there a long time.

TR: They did.

GG: Twenty or thirty years.

TR: It was a loyal family.

GG: What do you attribute that loyalty to? If it’s low wages, what’s the point of sticking around?

TR: You wanted to build a house; you couldn’t get a bank loan. You went in and sat down and talked to either Bunge or C.H. You talked to C.H.; he’d probably kick you in his next office to the Vice President Bunge. He’d make you a loan. I got ready to build a house in 1948 or ’49.

GG: They didn’t charge interest? Did they operate as a bank?

TR: They had their own federal credit union within the store too, later. That was the one that made the loans rather than the Merc outright. That federal credit union was set up in about 1955. I bought some property. Bunge is talking to me about this. I said, “I’m going to build a house. I’ve got to go over to the Building and Loans to see if I can get a mortgage and get the loan.”

He said, “Where are you going to get your lumber?”

I said, “I haven’t thought of that yet.”

He said, "The reason I ask is logger (unintelligible) Hamilton owes us a lot of money. Incidentally I'm going to give you that to go collect. Why don't you go down and get your lumber down there? Buy it there and we'll give him credit for it against his bill here?"

I said, "I wouldn't know how to do that."

"Sure. Take a truck. Take one of our trucks and go down there on weekends or whenever you want to."

Many nights after work I'd wheel down logger list and bring it—enough for a couple of days—for my contracting people; the people who were building my house. I would go back and get another load of lumber.

My house today is built from Missoula Merc Company lumber. That's the way they did things. Then he asked me about my loan. He said, "Did you get a loan?"

"Yes."

"What's your interest rate?" I said I was a veteran so I got it at five percent. "Okay," he said, "That's not bad. I don't think I could do any better for you."

One day he came to me and he said, "You know, here it is May. We're going to start harvesting at the end of June across Montana and we'll be buying grain. Get a hold of our bank, Morgan Bank in New York City, and go ahead and borrow three million. We got 10 million in the bank laying back here. We're going to borrow three million."

Well, I go get the controller, the Vice President of Finance. He said, "I'll take care of it." So we borrow it. At around about the middle of August, my boss comes to me and said, "Have you paid off that loan yet to Morgan?"

"No, we're still buying grain."

He said, "We better be about through here pretty quick. That interest is eating us up." We were paying one percent interest. We were outstanding credit with Morgan.

GG: Is that Morgan Drexel...?

TR: The Morgan people that come twice a year, take everybody, all the executive crew out to dinner and fake them and take them up to Flathead Lake and have a boat overnight and put them up in the hotel up there. The Lloyd's of London did the same thing. Their men came twice, or maybe three times a year. He sent me presents all the time, fancy presents at Christmas time. We got a big box of California fruit, big enough for two families. They were nice people to work with.

The Merc had an excellent reputation. It was the best quality store between Dayton's in Minneapolis and Marshall Fields in Seattle. We had people who came here from all over. They came from Spokane to buy clothes. Their hardware business ran from Sheridan, Wyoming to Wenatchee, Washington; the wholesale hardware. Stop and think that they had a hardware operation in Spokane. The Anaconda had a hardware operation in Butte. There was nothing in Billings. That's why they had all of eastern Montana. If you want to shut that thing off, I'll tell you a story about myself.

[End of Interview]