Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Lloyd Menveg Oral History
Date of Interview: Unknown
Location: Los Angeles, California
Length of Interview: 00:56:01
Interviewer: MS – Unknown
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: Okay. Let me give you the hard question first. Please say your name and spell it.

Lloyd Menveg: Lloyd Menveg. M-E-N-V-E-G.

MS: Lloyd, what year were you born, and where were you born?

LM: I was born in Wilmington, in 1923 – January 5th, 1923.

MS: So, tell me about your early memories of Wilmington. In fact, maybe take that badge, and we put that badge over here. Yeah, so we may see that in a large angle. . Tell me about your early memories growing up as a boy in Wilmington. What was Wilmington like, and what are the kinds of things you remember you doing there?

LM: Well, I remember that I was going to the Grammar School. My father had been in business and my grandfather in business in that area. Just to show you a difference in time, you could walk up and down the street and call all the merchants by their first name. That was quite a thing, that you knew them personally. They were all part of a community. It was a very small bedroom community.

MS: Your father and your grandfather go way back in the harbor area. Who were they and what were they doing?

LM: Well, my grandfather was in the real estate business and was a close associate with Phineas Banning. As I said, my grandfather was on the annexation committee that when Los Angeles was trying to obtain the port for Wilmington and San Pedro, they had to sign this annexation agreement to become part of Los Angeles. From there on –

MS: Well still you can expand a bit on that. First of all, who was Phineas Banning? People don't know who he is.

LM: Well, he was actually the founder of the port. Phineas Banning was known as the developer of the Port of Los Angeles. The Banning family owned a lot of properties within the boundaries of a lot of Wilmington and San Pedro.

MS: Tell me, what was your grandfather's relationship to him?

LM: Being a big landowner, my grandfather was in the real estate business and owned a lot of property in the area.

MS: When did your grandfather come to Los Angeles? It must be some time ago.

LM: My grandfather, Charles Menveg Sr., came to San Pedro in the early 1850s and had a business here on in San Pedro. Then moved to Wilmington where the family resided up until –

MS: What were the circumstances? Why did he come here and where did he come from?

LM: My grandfather came with a captain off of a ship in order to get here from Alsace-Lorraine. He booked passage on the ship and had to work his way over. Then Mr. Pasky, who was my father's uncle, he started the Wilmington Cemetery, which became the Civil War Cemetery for Wilmington.

MS: So, tell me more about your grandfather. He's an interesting man. He came here, he had to work for his passage, yet he became a real estate investor. How did all that happen?

LM: Hard work, I guess. Things were very poor in those days. Everybody would just be eking out a living. He could see the future and started obtaining property by business means. He was a broker. Then my father followed in his footsteps.

MS: In the 1850s and [18]60s, when he came here, what was San Pedro and Wilmington like?

LM: Wilmington was known as goose town. That was the reason why the ducks and geese of the people that live there would up and going up and down the street, of which is now Avalon Boulevard, but was known as Canal Street.

MS: There was actually a canal there.

LM: Yeah.

MS: Tell me about that.

LM: Well, up until about where Anaheim Street is now, it was all on stilts. The port was down below until they went and dredged the harbor and use that dredge to actually make the lower part of Wilmington.

MS: Canal Street was a canal that –

LM: Yes.

MS: – Banning had built then. Tell me about that.

LM: Well, in the early days, the ships that came in, a lot of it was put on barges and brought in when the ships couldn't get into the port. My father was born right down where the tugboat company is right next to the Ferry Building and that was the family home. I remember as a commissioner, we were condemning out some of those properties for poor expansion. My grandmother was still alive and she would not sell her property. That was her homestead. So, we had to use eminent domain to probably we can get the family property away from her.

MS: That puts you in a pretty difficult situation.

LM: Yeah.

MS: So, again, people don't know the history. So, what was San Pedro like before the harbor? What did it look like, and the land, and it was pretty much not much of a port, right?

LM: No, there was very little here. My father had a complete picture album of all, and some of those are in the files here at the port. But it was mainly where these ships would come in and unload. San Pedro along Beacon Street here was just a wild seafaring port at that time. There was very little commerce other than the harbor itself.

MS: So, tell me more about your father. He followed in your grandfather's footsteps in real estate. What did he do?

LM: My father was in the real estate business. He also served as commissioner for the Port of Los Angeles. I believe it was in [19]41 or [19]42. I can't really pinpoint that. Then we've always been active in the port and surrounding businesses.

MS: To go back again to your grandfather signing the agreement annex, again, people don't know about that. Tell me, what is the story of the relationship between the port of Los Angeles and how did that come about?

LM: Well, Wilmington and San Pedro were separate entities at that time. There was a big to do-over where the port was going to be located. It was a lot of interest to make Santa Monica Bay the port. But because of Phineas Banning's input, and his presence and the money that he had following his own fortune, plus the fact that, I believe, he owned the railroad from San Pedro, too. So, it was in his best interest that the port be located here, rather than in Santa Monica.

MS: So, talking about the annexation agreement and your grandfather's signing it.

LM: Well, we had to get both San Pedro had certain interests, and Wilmington had certain interests. Each community set up a committee. I think it was either four or five from each city to work out the annexation agreement so they could have it. In order to do that, they had to have a continuous strip of land. That was where the Lomita Harbor City and the strip that went up there to make it part of Los Angeles, bisecting Torrance and Hawthorne and different cities in between.

MS: So, tell me more about what was known as the shoestring annex.

LM: Shoestring strip, yeah.

MS: Yeah, or whatever. Explain what that is. Why did you have to make that line?

LM: Because the city had to have a continuous line. You couldn't have a part of the city down here and then have different cities or municipalities in between. So, that's why they had to have that strip of land to hook onto Los Angeles.

MS: Was that a controversial thing?

LM: Very controversial at that time. Well, a lot of people said we should have the port ourselves – people in San Pedro. It was quite a fishing port here. There was a lot of pride in San Pedro, a lot of pride in Wilmington at that time. They didn't want to be tied into Los Angeles. But there were very few utilities available, we're talking about water. So, that was really to the best interest of the area to join Los Angeles and have the strength of that community behind us.

MS: Sort of interesting, and sort of looked like a long straw going to pull up the money from the port. It's not a very subtle thing.

LM: Well, it was the same as when they started to annex the valley. There was a lot of opposition to that. They didn't want to become, but that was practically desert land out there. So, they went through the same procedure. They had one unified city. I don't think that they had the bonding capacity. There were too many things in those port. There were no sewer systems. It was a very primitive area between here and the city of downtown Los Angeles.

MS: So, what was your grandfather's opinion? He obviously signed it, he was for it.

LM: Yes.

MS: What was his attitude about all this?

LM: I have to be honest. I don't know what those issues were at the time but his best interest was in Wilmington, because that's where he was a landowner. I think they had to vote on those people at that time, as to who was going to be on that committee. So, they picked up – I forget the name now, but it was Mr. Robin, my grandfather, I think two others that were on there. They did likewise in San Pedro.

MS: Talk about your days growing up as a young boy in Wilmington and in the harbor area. Do you have any memories, any particular stories about your growing up period?

LM: Well, we were growing up in most of the depths of the depression. It was really tough for a young kid to get out of grammar school and go to high school. We were fortunate in those days that you had friends you think you could go down. I think we got a couple of dollars a day to help them unload bananas. The unions were looking for extra help during those seasons when they were unloading, which was a hard job when you're unloading those big stocks of bananas and putting them on a conveyor belt.

MS: How would you describe the port? What was it like? Did you just spend, as a kid, much time down there?

LM: Yes. I can remember before the West Basin was dredged out, we used to go swimming in there. In low tide, you could walk across the West Basin. I tell a story that when we started the development of the West Basin and dredging it out, and the head trestle over the West Basin where the red car would come in from Los Angeles to Wilmington. Then for another 10 cents or something, you could come all the way to San Pedro. So, one of the first things we had to do because during the war, that drawbridge, for security reasons, had to be secured. It was soldiers

manning it during World War II. So, after the war, we had to negotiate with the railroad to get rid of the drawbridge. They were going to have to reroute the railroad tracks around the West Basin. There was a Mr. Sanderson, who was a friend of my grandfather's. I was telling him that we thought that when they do away with that drawbridge so the big ships could go in there and use that part of the after we had it dredged, it really helped Wilmington. I thought he was going to be very happy about it. He says, if you knew how hard we worked to get that trestle and that PE, specifically electric to get their train to go on across there. He says that used to save us twelve minutes. Twelve minutes run around there that we could be over there in no time at all by taking the train instead of driving around the West Basin. It was just one of the funny things that come up about progress, I guess you'd call it.

MS: People forget what it was like. Did you, as a kid, ride the red cars into downtown around this?

LM: Oh, yes.

MS: Tell me about that.

LM: Well, we could get on and be onboard the Pike in Long Beach, you know. It was I think ten cents to go over there. We wanted to go out and go on to the outer harbor to go fishing. We think we could get off in San Pedro and there would be a bus to take us on out there. That was about the only transportation. There was not too many cars in those early days.

MS: So, where did you go to high school?

LM: To Banning High School. Yeah. I went to Banning High School and graduated there in 1941.

MS: Now, there's a long rivalry between Banning and San Pedro. Talk about that and how those two towns have their rivalry.

LM: Well, there was a rivalry but we were very friendly. It was a friendly rivalry. I think it was more a rivalry between San Pedro and Banning and Torrance High School. They were the outsiders. But we used to come over to the Friday night dances at the (Slab Hall?). We used to recite the sports rivalry. But it was a lot of good feeling between the two communities because they were tied pretty close tied together. People like Peppy?) who had Peppy's?) Restaurant here, they were all friends of mine. Even though we were four or five miles away from each other, we were still closer than we were to Los Angeles.

MS: Well, tell me about Peppy and Peppy's restaurant.

LM: Well, Peppy was a cheerleader for San Pedro High School – that's where I'm in. I used to run the sound system for the high school sports. Peppy was a cheerleader so I knew him back in [19]39 and [19]40. That's how I happened to get to know him and a lot of the fellows that were in business. I was president of the (Harbor Shrank Club?), and I got to know quite a few of the ball. Most of the businessmen that were in San Pedro and I belong to the 20-30 Club, which was

a young men's organization. So, they had Tony de Rocco, and the group that were from San Pedro, and we were very close. Then when the war came along, I joined the Coast Guard. I was stationed for a time here in San Pedro and then I went back east at Fort McHenry.

MS: Well, tell me about Peppy's Restaurant. What was Peppy's Restaurant? What was that like in –

LM: The original Peppy's Restaurant? Well, Peppy started on 9th Street or was it 8th Street, I can't remember. But he was just a local fellow that knew everybody in town. He was a very popular person and decided that he was going to open a restaurant. When he opened it up, it was probably one of the finest restaurants in San Pedro for many, many years.

MS: Peppy, I guess his nickname came from he was full of pep?

LM: He was a pep leader. He was a cheerleader and they call them pep leaders in those days.

MS: What were the other gathering places, restaurants and gathering places, in San Pedro?

LM: The Majestic.

MS: Tell me about The Majestic.

LM: Well as I recall, it was back in the time that – I can't remember the family name now.

MS: The Tranis?

LM: The Tranis. Right up from the city hall, the old man Trani had a pool hall, just a small place. A lot of the longshoreman at that time had a schedule of working, four on and four off, or two on and two off on. On their off time they would come on up to the pool hall and shoot pool. Old man Trani would stop in the morning and get a loaf of French bread at the San Pedro importers and salami and he fixed himself a sandwich while his kids were going to school. One of the longshoremen one day said, "Well, fix me a sandwich," and gave him a quarter. As a result of that, that started the dynasty. They then started selling sandwiches there, and then pretty soon beer. That was the original Majestic Café. He then went on to setting up the Trani Square, and that's how they got into the restaurant business.

MS: What about Ante's?

LM: Ante's came in later. A lot of the people from the city hall and from the port of Los Angeles would go over there for their lunches and things. That's how he got his start, shifting from the city employees.

MS: We've heard of another place a little bit less, well, maybe I don't know – Shanghai Reds.

LM: Shanghai Reds was a place that if you were a seaman, you had to say you were at Shanghai Reds. They would say a half a dozen of these places along Beacon Street that were well known.

You could go to a foreign port and say you were from San Pedro and say, "You ever been in Shanghai Reds?" It was known worldwide throughout a lot of during World War II. People would always identify with Shanghai Reds, with San Pedro.

MS: Who was Shanghai Reds?

LM: His name was Red – I really can't remember his name.

MS: Eisenberg.

LM: Eisenberg, yes. Shanghai Red was Red Eisenberg. He had been a sailor at one time and came and decided he wanted to come ashore and have a watering hole for the crews of the ship.

MS: Why was it so famous? Why do people know about it?

LM: Well, it was a little bit different than anything else in town. I think you probably got by with a little bit more. As the ships came into the harbor, and they needed an extra crewman, they would go on up and recruit their recruits off out of the guys who have had too much to drink and half asleep. They take them down. They find out they were a seaman the next day after the ship sailed.

MS: So, you were in the Coast Guard. After the war, you came back to San Pedro?

LM: Wilmington, yes

MS: Wilmington, okay. How had Wilmington changed when you came back from the war?

LM: Well, when oil was discovered over in Wilmington, that made the biggest change. Then my father got in the oil business and started his own oil company and drilling wells. Because he had been in the real estate business that he knew most of the landowners. So, he'd get the leases together and then they start drilling wells over there.

MS: So, tell me how did oil get discovered and how did it change the city?

LM: While there were two or three different theories on there. But in [19]39, I think it was 1939, there was a family call to Salcedo family. The old man was digging either a cesspool or water well, and he got ethyl gasoline out of it. It was quite a boom. People hadn't even thought about oil up until that time. Then they discovered it was a broken pipeline, or somebody had tapped into it. But then when they finally knew that it was an extension of the Long Beach field and the Signal Hill field, that really set that thing and really started booming in Wilmington.

MS: What impact did it have on the town that suddenly was filled with oil dregs?

LM: Oh, yeah, Phil. In fact, as we were kids, they drilled an oil right in our backyard. There were very few local laws that control it so there were wells and pumping units all over town. I remember with my father and his oil company, if you didn't have a connection, there was so

much oil that they were getting 30 cents a barrel for their oil. You had to have a connection to get rid of your oil because there was a lot of wells. After they drilled them, they had to shut them down because there was too much production.

MS: What impact did that have in the town of Wilmington? What happened to them?

LM: Well, you think about it, it really saved the town. There was a lot of people that had big mortgages on their houses and the influx of the oil production – along with a port coming along, and the oil refinery Shell and Union and Texaco opened up a lot of avenues and jobs for the people there.

MS: So, I guess it was a good business for your father to be in?

LM: Yes.

MS: What impact did it have on him as a businessman?

LM: I can remember my father at one time had a group they called (The Tunnel Company?). The Tunnel Company was a group of about four or five realtors, and they were primarily selling their land to people from New York. They got together in saying we shouldn't do this. We should buy these this land ourselves if we can. So, they ended up having more property than they could really afford to own. They would tell the story there, maybe an investor from New York would come in to buy a lot. In order to get the property off the tax, out of their name and off the tax rolls – and they didn't have the legal descriptions and those [inaudible], they would add an extra parcel into there. Just enough to get the excess property off the tax rolls so they weren't burdened by the taxes.

MS: I bet you're regretting some of those changes. So, when you came back from the war, what business did you get involved with?

LM: I went in with my father.

MS: So, he was still in the oil business?

LM: Yeah. In the oil business, and the real estate and insurance business.

MS: What kind of effect did the war have on Wilmington and San Pedro?

LM: Well, during the war, because of the barrage balloons they had stationed all over, but being more or less a port of embarkation, there was a lot of troops movements and naval facilities here that just bloomed – added to the payrolls into the business, and really, with a boom to the economy here.

MS: After the war, a lot of the soldiers who had embarked here came back to live.

LM: Yes.

MS: Talk about the impact of the real estate boom after the war, and what happened then.

LM: Well, after the war, I think there was a lot of the servicemen that were stationed here either married some of the young girls or decided this looked like an opportunity. I can remember two or three fellas that became friends of mine. One opened a paint store, another took whatever knowledge he had from being in the service and sharing it with the big demand for help on the docks and the refinery. (Jordahl?) doing big business, and just everyone seemed to be fine. There was good employment for anybody that was here and wanted to work.

MS: What did that do to the real estate market? It was a huge rush of –

LM: Real estate market never jumped as fast here as it did in the East Coast. We had a lot of people from the East Coast come by and say, "Well, gee whiz. You're just a few blocks." They were looking at Wall Street and thinking how far and what prices of property were in New York, and what bargains are were here. That was a lot of out-of-state people that invested in. Then I think they became disillusioned and the property come back. It didn't really get to the boom until for maybe 10 years after – probably in the early [19]60s, late [19]50s and early [19]60s.

MS: Well, that's about the time Lakewood takes off, right.

LM: Yes.

MS: All of that in the [19]50s –

LM: Well, that was a whole new concept of communities.

MS: – same as Lakewood was –

LM: Yeah. Lakewood was a whole new concept when building mass homes – forget the fella's name that started that. There were never any shopping centers as such. It was the individual businessman. They always stayed pretty close together because the transportation was very limited.

MS: So, what impact did that have, this new shopping centers in Torrance and elsewhere? What effect did it have on Wilmington and San Pedro?

LM: To me it didn't have a big effect because this has clearly been a closely knitted community. If you did business close to home, with people you knew. There was no idea of going out. It was kind of a novelty when Lakewood first opened up their shopping centers out there. Even to the point when the Del Amo Mall opened up, it was a whole new concept of living and doing business.

MS: Did it help or may have effect on all the businesses left?

LM: I think that if you look, they moved around. Now I was discussing with someone today

that when San Pedro first – Pacific Avenue was the business area. But I supposed it was a little bit too far out of town. Everybody that was in business along Pacific Avenue all the way out to 22nd Street.

MS: But when the suburban shopping malls came, 6th Street was lined with stores, then suddenly those stores went out of business.

LM: They all went out of business.

MS: Explain that. What happened to that?

LM: Well, I think as the community started moving up the hill – because there was nothing in Palos Verdes. We used to go on up there and shoot rabbits and things like that. It was just too far. You go in from Wilmington to Palos Verdes – that was a half a day's [inaudible] and all Wall Street were all little rock and gravel practically in the early days. It was just too far to go. So, everybody stayed in the area that they had. I remember when Peppy opened his first restaurant, the Tasman Sea, everybody says he'll never make it. He had one restaurant, the one on 6th Street or 9th Street, I forget what it was. Going that far was almost without a whirl. I can remember then when they moved the Elks Club off way from the location, they had next to the City Hall, everyone said nobody will join that club. It's way up in Palos Verdes practically. It was unheard of at that time, and it is. They suffered a big loss because that was a kind of a local watering hole. All the businessmen and everybody would go to to have lunch and good to hang out and go to the bar.

MS: Talk about that. Many people mentioned the Elks Club. What was the Elks club? What's its importance in San Pedro?

LM: Well, the Elks Club was a place where all of business – in particular, the port people, people who were doing business surveyors, or insurance people, whatever had to be done and would be easy to. They didn't have a lot of restaurants in those days. So, it was right across in the business section. The attorneys would be in, that the courts were in the city hall. So, that was kind of the center of the attraction of people getting together for business purposes. Then also the Elks Club was a fraternal organization that moves the people who belong to. My grandfather was a charter member of the San Pedro Elks Club.

MS: Were you a member?

LM: Yes, I was. My father was a life member.

MS: Any stories about big deals that were concocted at the Elks club that –

LM: Well, there was always a big deal. That was the place where deals were made because there were no other clubs around that they had other fraternal organization. But that was really the hub of San Pedro, where the bankers and everybody met, and the fishing industry was right across the channel.

MS: Do you remember the specific deals that were put together at the Elks Club?

LM: Yes. I can remember one time when we were discussing we were losing a million dollars a day, or it's a million dollars a year or something. I think it was costing the city. I cannot remember the amount, but I know it was a staggering amount. That's when we started to push for the Vincent Thomas Bridge. Of course, a lot of people didn't have cars and the workers that were going over there were using the ferry to go across. So, we met with Vincent Thomas, who was the Assemblyman at that time. We had our special committee to get the bridge put across so we could eliminate the loss that we were having on the auto ferry. In order to compromise, they agreed to still run a passenger ferry so that the cannery workers would have access to get over to San Pedro.

MS: Well, tell me that whole story of the Vincent Thomas bridge. I mean, what were the reasons why it was thought of? How did it get thought of? How did it get done? It's an important part of the story.

LM: Well, we met with John Gibson, who was president of the city council. The mayor and I got together in saying that we wanted to throw our support because the state could not get funding. They didn't think they could sell the bonds. So, what we did, we said that we would give the land for the access to the bridge, both in Terminal Island. We made certain concessions. I can't remember the exact deal of how those bonds could be sold feasibly and make the bridge a priority. There was some compromise. To be honest with you, I can't remember what those compromises were, but it took a lot of time. Vince Thomas probably was the sole backer of that. He had bills in the legislature for ten or twelve years before we ever got the realization of it. It wasn't until I think Pat Brown was the governor that with his support. Because we felt that unless we got to mass transit, the island would never be acceptable for development.

MS: Take me back again. Why was there a need for the Vincent Thomas bridge? When did it start? So, you have to give me a complete sense.

LM: Well, I'm trying to say, it was back in [19]38, [19]39, that they knew that they were going to have to have some kind of transportation, a mass transportation that couldn't be provided by the ferries. I think when the Navy finally gave up Reeves Field and the naval base over there, they knew that that land was now the easiest. Before we ever talked about dredging the outer harbor, that that was land that was most feasible for development.

MS: So, tell me again, how did the bridge get developed? What purpose did it serve?

LM: Well, the main thing was to get fast transportation. So, with the cooperation of the City Council and the Harbor Commission and the state legislature that are working together and making certain compromises along the way to get the bonds so they could sell the bonds and get it built.

MS: Now, you were in the Harbor Commission –

LM: I was president of the Harbor Commission at that time.

MS: So, that was a big priority for you, I assume.

LM: Yes.

MS: What were the reasons that you were arguing why there's a needed of a bridge.

LM: Well, because we knew that we were limited if we were just coming into the containerization of cargo. Up to this time, everything was a breakbulk way of moving cargo. It was slow, and it was time consuming. The ships never made money sitting in the port. The only time the ship made any money was when it was underway. So, in other words, get the movement of cargo move faster. So, they need a lot of back land. You take in San Pedro along the main channel, there was very little back land. You take from the 22nd Street out, there was very little back land. Also, there wasn't too much back land in Wilmington. So, it was the development of the West Basin and the big land areas were in Terminal Island.

MS: So, again, we're talking to people who don't know anything about this bridge. So, what was this bridge? Where did it go? What transportation was on this bridge? I mean, give us a basic –

LM: Well, what eventually happened is when they got the freeway system in there, this made it much faster to get the cargo out of Los Angeles either across to Terminal Island, that had access to the Long Beach freeway, and the distribution points in the eastern part of the county.

MS: What is the Vincent Thomas bridge?

LM: The Vincent Thomas bridge was a structure that was to be built across the Cerritos Channel, out of the main channel brother, and to deliver cargo to Terminal Island, and this then to be transformed up into the freeways of Long Beach, and to distribute to the eastern part of the county.

MS: Who was Vincent Thomas?

LM: Vincent Thomas was a San Pedro attorney who went to Santa Clara University. It was in the early, I believe, [19]38 or 1940 he ran for the state legislature and became the assemblyman. Almost from the beginning, it was his idea of getting a bridge across Terminal Island. He had a lot of friends and a lot of relatives that were in the fishing business and most of them in Terminal Island, perhaps the Fishing Capital of Southern California.

MS: It was the United States and –

LM: Yes. I think it would but I –

MS: So, tell me about how you joined the Harbor Commission. What is the Harbor Commission?

LM: Now Harbor Commission is the governing board of five commissioners appointed by the

mayor and confirmed by the city council. They would govern the operations of the port.

MS: So, what were your powers and responsibilities as a commissioner?

LM: Well, the biggest part, at that time, was trying to secure, open up avenues of getting foreign shipments coming in to the port.

MS: So, what were the big issues? You started [19]53?

LM: Yes.

MS: What were the big issues when you were starting for the port that you were debating and trying to get done at the commission?

LM: After the war, it was important. I was just making the mention of the day that Israel was just becoming a country. I went to Haifa over in Israel and knowing that they were going to have a port, and they had their ZIM Israel Navigation come in and convince them at that time that we should have a facility in Los Angeles to take care of that part of the world. The big problems at that time were determining how they were going to move this cargo faster. At one time, Long Beach had a lot of oil money so they were in a position to grab off a lot of the top shippers of cargo. I always maintain that we had Pacific Far East line and American President Lines and they had the franchises, so to speak, to Japan, China. So, my intention was, at any cost, to keep those two shipping lines in Los Angeles. But Long Beach had moved a lot of pressure on these companies to come to Long Beach. It's a new port and they were just starting out. We were making every effort to try and hold them. They did everything, but now American President Lines made every point to say that they were moving to Long Beach. So, I went back to Washington and met with Congressman King who sat on the Ways and Means Committee. We used his support to get American President Lines to stay in Los Angeles. As such, we agreed to set up the new terminal down here in San Pedro, which would not only handle their passengers, but also their freight. I don't think anybody at the time realized what this containerization was going to do for traffic. In fact, they could not decide in the early [19]50s what size container it's going to be. Was it going to be four-foot square or going to be eight foot? So, looking back, Steamship Company that was doing strictly intercoastal trade between here and the East Coast – they wanted small, collapsible. It took a long time for him to decide to get the containers and return the containers in whole and make them as they are today. It turned out that instead of having transit sheds where we unloaded the cargo and put them in there that everybody come and picked up their cargo, that we shipped them in containers. So, therefore, we needed vast back land and storage areas. That really would serve the purpose by having that land that was sitting very vacant over in Terminal Island.

MS: What about the issues of dredging and dredging the harbor? Were those things that came up during your tenure?

LM: Yes. We had a program that we would send people back to Washington to Congressman King to get certain dredging with the department engineers and army engineers. Dredging was a big problem. In fact, we were talking today about that. When the super tankers coming in, it

couldn't come in because we had fifty-foot draft water. These big tankers would draw more. So, that is why we built the supertanker terminal out where the Sausalito blew up out in the outer harbor so that we could service this big super tankers, and not knowing that we were coming into an age where these ships down were carrying containers that would have berths that would handle these deep-draft vessels. It wasn't the depths in the main channel to have to handle all those ships, because of the limit of what the length of the piling along them and the main channel.

MS: Not just commissioned meetings during this time, lots of big changes going on in the harbor. Are there any particular dramatic moments in the history of the Commission in those days you could remember? We'll talk about those. So, tell me, what's been some dramatic moments in the commissioner during those years.

LM: There were very little. As President, I worked very closely with the mayor's office and with the city council. We did a lot of homework as far as inviting them down, seeing what the problems were. We had very good cooperation. John Gibson as president of the city council, people that were on the committees that were affected, we had good relationship. I would say that we had everything worked out ahead of time. I tried to solve with our commission our problems before we ever became controversial.

MS: But working with a commission where there's discussion, what were the debates going on within the commission before you did that? Or everyone agreed 100 percent?

LM: No. There were different interests. We had some of the commissioners from Los Angeles who had business interests that they were representing in one way or another. But we tried to keep politics out of it – outside politics as much as possible. We felt that we were going to try to do something for the good of the port. We had (Bernie Coughlin?) as the general manager – who had had experience – he had a lot of experience. We were very fortunate at the time that I became president that we almost had a complete rebuilding. All the people that had been here for twenty, twenty-five years that were either died or retired. So, we had a building of a whole new infrastructure for the port, chief engineer and traffic manager, and as such, we were able to start out with perhaps a whole what you'd call a new team in the administration.

MS: What was that team setting out to do? What was the goal for them?

LM: The main goal was to try and fight, within our commission and Long Beach, who had all the oil money. We were very limited. We floated a bond issue to for capital improvements with $50 million which was at that time a big thing. I can remember going back to New York and signing those bonds. We thought we had $50 or $100 million, I cannot remember the amount of what. But it was kind of a menace thing that we were going to start selling our own bonds, and not selling because we could get a better rate selling our own bonds, and then going through the city of Los Angeles.

MS: So, you were commissioned for ten years, or twelve years?

LM: Eight years.

MS: Eight years. Okay.

LM: [19]53 to [19]61.

MS: [19]61. So, by the time your term was over in [19]61, what had happened in the port when you –

LM: By 1961, the American President Lines, who had all the trade routes to the east, to Japan and China, they were pretty much in control and they became the big dominant factor in shipping. Then the other carriers came along. Actually, we couldn't handle all the traffic that we were generating. That's what helped Long Beach, really. They had the money and they built their facilities up. The competition was good for both ports.

MS: When you look back at it from your experience with the Harbor Commission and actually living in the harbor area, what are your feelings about San Pedro and Wilmington, the harbor? What is this place? What should people know about it and its importance not just in America but maybe in the world?

LM: Well, Wilmington and San Pedro were always a bedroom community for the poor. I think one disadvantage is that we didn't have large hotels. It was much more advantage for the passenger business to be in Long Beach because the hotels there had better facilities to handle the passengers. So, it really was better for us because passenger facilities never made any money. It was the cargo that we were trying to reach for and I think we attained.

MS: I guess I should go back, and I'm asking you again, you personally. Why is this place important to you personally – this harbor, this port, this town?

LM: Well, it's hard to say because, well, we were the Fishing Capital of the World. I'll never forget when Van Camp moved to Long Beach. The fish were caught here, but they moved their offices over there so they had Van Camp Seafood in Long Beach. So, we presented the one to – I forget what agency we went to saying, "Well, no, these fish were processed in Los Angeles, not Long Beach." Long Beach was very upset about that. They wanted the prestige of Van Camp Seafood, Long Beach, California. The [inaudible] were all here? It was that kind of a friendly situation we had. But I think the biggest problem we had was labor problems with the longshoremen union.

MS: Talk about what were the big issues there?

LM: Well, I think that the labor, trying to get the shipping companies and the unions to work something. I don't think that the longshoremen really wanted to see containerization coming in. They thought it was going to be a loss of jobs. So, there was a big fraction as far as that we were favoring the steamship companies over the unions. The unions were very powerful in those days. So, it was a continuous fight with trying to get them to understand that there had to be some kind of a workable deal between the unions and the shippers.

MS: So, what was the role of Harry Bridges in all that?

LM: Well, Harry Bridges controls the unions, not the locals. I mean, whatever he said, that was the policy they took. Until we start to get some of the local leaders in to realizing that it was to their advantage to – and that was a time that the hiring halts. How are they going to hire? How were they going to get the new help in there? There were a lot of issues that weren't really our concern, but it still it was in our interest to get cooperation between the unions and the shippers.

MS: So, what role did Bridges play in all this? Is he a compromiser? Do you agree –

LM: Well, yes. I think he realized that he was only trying to protect his men's interests – he wasn't looking ahead. They knew what they had in their contracts there. They didn't realize at that time that by moving these containers in and out faster, cutting down on pilferage, of all the things that were going to be to their benefit. So, the rules were changed that they were going to, so called, get a piece of the action.

MS: What are you most proud of in your years working for the harbor here?

LM: We started at an association called the International Associations of Ports and Harbors. I was president on the inauguration of that, while it was formulated out of Japan Ports and Harbors. We got all the countries together and had a commission meeting in Los Angeles where we formed the association. Then subsequently, I was elected president of the association. By getting all the ports throughout the world to not necessarily use the same standards but to agree on worth ethics. That we're going to not be subject to one sort of rules in Amsterdam and have a different set of rules here, more or less. I'd have to say that the Japanese did a very good job. They wanted us to have the association headquartered here. I thought that the Japanese at that time were more set up for that type of thing because they had had all the ports in Japan already in association. By folding them into our international, we got all the eastern port on the far east ports automatically. One by one we've got the European and the eastern ports in the United States into an association which is now probably one of the largest associations there are.

MS: Why are you particularly proud of that?

LM: I think because I was able to use some of the importance of our port to spearhead. The Japanese couldn't do it alone. Then we had a fellow that was with the port of Los Angeles – Arthur Nordstrom. He did the whole way to spade work, we all got the credit for it. But he and Bernie Coughlin did a lot of work to bring the Japanese into the fold. Then with our support, it became the kind of the leading association for ports throughout the world.

MS: Perfect. Anything else you wanted to talk about?

LM: No. I think that about covers it. I'll probably think about one thousand things after I get out of here.

MS: I need you to move your chair about two feet over to the left and I'm going to take a still photo of you.

[end of transcript]