Oral History Interview

with

Arthur Brown

September, 1973
St. Louis, Missouri

Interviewer: Greg Giebel

Introduction

Arthur Brown is a retired vice-president of the Amalgamated Lithographers Union, living in Toronto, Canada. In this interview he relates how he became an apprentice for Stone Ltd. at the age of sixteen and describes the apprenticeship training that he underwent. In 1919 he joined the Toronto Local and talks about the nature of that local, its jurisdiction, its membership, and how it became one of the finest in the International. He also describes the lithographic industry in the Toronto area at that time, the state of its technology, and the conditions under which the need for unions and collective bargaining developed.

In about 1925 Brown went to work at the Postergraph Company in Cleveland, Ohio, in order to learn about the new photographic processes that had developed in the industry. His experience in the States gave him new insight into the workings of other union locals and the influence exerted by the International over its member locals.

Brown traces his rise to a position of leadership in the Toronto local, where he assumed the presidency in 1941. In 1944 he became International vice-president and continued in that office until he retired in 1964.

Also in this interview Arthur Brown recalls how the lithographic industry in Canada fared during the Depression, how the skilled craftsmen in his union reacted to the growth of industrial unionism during the thirties, and how World War II affected the lithographic industry.

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INTERVIEWER: This is Greg Giebel in St. Louis, Missouri. This is an oral history interview for the Graphic Arts International Union. Would you just introduce yourself, give your age, place of residence?

BROWN: Arthur Brown speaking, age 74, born 1899; live at 21 Spring Grove Avenue, Toronto, Canada. Lived there all my married life with the exception of trips to other countries on business.

INTERVIEWER: Arthur, can you state the last title you held with the Graphic Arts Union before retirement?

BROWN: Yes. I was the international vice president for the Amalgamated Lithographers for twenty years before retirement. I have now been retired nine years.

INTERVIEWER: This morning I thought we could try to deal with one segment of your life. That's the early portion, starting with your first impressions of unionism in general, then how you came to acquire your trade, and then your introduction into the Lithographers Union. So I guess my first question would be: what was your general impression of unionism at the time when you were beginning to look for a job?

BROWN: Well, when I first started to look for a job, I was rather young--sixteen--and although I had a bit of art ability, the thing that led me toward the lithographic industry was a cousin of mine who was a lithographic artist at that time. So I applied for a position with the same firm, which was then Stone Limited, one of the largest lithographic firms in Canada. I obtained the

position and signed the five-year apprenticeship with my parents and the firm that they couldn't fire me or I couldn't quit. And the salary was $3.00 a week for the first year and $1.00 increase each year.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you at this time?

BROWN: Sixteen at this time. It wasn't enough to keep the family. (Laughter) I think I had about $2.00 spending money out of the $3.00. I paid $1.00 board, which the family didn't need, but I believe they felt it was a good idea that I should pay something, starting out in the business world.

INTERVIEWER: So the apprentice program that you were involved with was the typical apprentice program that new members in the trade participated in?

BROWN: Yes. At that time all apprentices. . . you worked for three months to see whether they thought you fitted into the industry and would make a go of it. After that three-month period, why, then you were approached with the indenture papers, which your parents had to sign, you had to sign, and the company had to sign, to say that unless something extraordinary happened, they couldn't fire you or you couldn't quit; you had to complete those five years.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work under a specific journeyman or were you trained by numerous people within the company that you. . .

BROWN: No. The system then of apprenticeship was that you had sort of a roving commission. You could walk over the entire plant and watch any operation in any department or sit down and help anyone, and for eighteen months I never actually did a job that was completed for the market. You actually did jobs that the other tradesmen were doing; but it was just done to completion, and then it was checked over by the supervisor and he would tell you where you were wrong or right; and then it would be destroyed, and you would then go on to another one. But you didn't do any actual work that the company gained anything by it for eighteen months of the five years.

INTERVIEWER: Were other friends of yours involved in apprentice programs either at that company or in other companies? Or were you exceptional to be able to get an apprenticeship at the age of sixteen?

BROWN: I think I was exceptional, although I found out that amongst my friends, the majority of them

took on jobs without apprenticeships where they got more money. I know on one occasion when I went out on a message for one of the craftsmen, why, somebody came out of woodworking plant and offered me a job at $10.00 a week when I was getting $3.00. It was quite a temptation, and a majority of my pals took jobs of that type. I didn't have any of my friends at that time in the industry, but naturally the apprentices all got together. We even discussed forming a union of our own, because if anything went wrong and you didn't do your job right (and you were under the direction and orders of all of the people) they'd give you a cuff on the ear or a boot. So we even discussed starting a union of our own. (Laughter) But you made friends with all the apprentices at that time within the plant, and that friendship usually lasted your entire lifetime.

INTERVIEWER: So you agreed to work at very low wages for a long period of apprenticeship when you had good opportunity to work at high wages elsewhere. Can you explain some of the reasons? You mentioned that you had art interests at that time. Could you mention some of the other reasons that perhaps encouraged you to undergo this rather strenuous apprenticeship program?

BROWN: Well, I think it was family influence that kept me rolling. And a lot of older people that I knew, they said that I was doing the right thing and that I would benefit many times over in the long run. I don't know whether I was easily influenced or whether I liked the work, which I might say I did; I enjoyed it very, very much. And at that time the men you worked for were highly skilled craftsmen, and they were certainly a nice bunch of fellows. You got to know them, their wives, their children, and that again became a lifetime friendship with the men who were teaching you the business.

INTERVIEWER: At that time, when you were sixteen years old, the Toronto local had really only been founded for a short period of time, so you probably had an opportunity to know most of the people who had ever been in the Toronto local. Could you talk a little bit about the founders of that local and what the conditions were like for that local--what was its jurisdiction, what was its membership like, etc.?

BROWN: Well, when I joined the organization in 1919, my international roll number was 541, so that would give you some indication of the size of the international organization. But as far as Toronto was concerned, I believe they had about 175 members when I joined, maybe less than that; and I suppose they were about 40 or 50 percent organized. It was more like a secret society because

the firm didn't look on unionism with any pleasure on their part. It was quite a job to try and talk the men into joining. So there was no organized system of getting wage increases or bettering the conditions in any shape or form. It usually had to be done individually and sort of behind the scenes. I don't know whether the firm knew at that point just who belonged to the union and who didn't, but it was a very tight organization in the city of Toronto.

While it was founded in, I believe 1902, previous to that the Canadian members belonged to some of the American locals--Buffalo was the nearest one. It was local #2, so it must have been the second local that was founded in America. So the Canadian members belonged to that local. We used to hold joint picnics, and I suppose about every three months they would have a joint meeting where the Canadian members would go over and meet with them and find out what was going on in the organization.

But the local itself didn't really get rolling until about another ten years after its founding, when they kept on getting a few more members here and there and they got a little better leadership. It became one of the finest locals in the International because they did develop real leadership programs. They used to elect the officers on a one-year basis so they could develop new leadership. There was no objection to it; the people were quite pleased to step out of office and let someone new come in; and they all helped to develop that leadership. And I think it brought that local to one of the foremost of the entire International all down through the years because of that program they had.

INTERVIEWER: Now, as an apprentice you probably were involved in problems dealing with full participation in the local at that time. Can you describe what it was like to be an apprentice and how you would relate to the local membership?

BROWN: Yes, as an apprentice you were either well-liked and brought along very carefully and taught properly, or you didn't fit into the picture at all. I don't know whether I had that sort of a personality or not, but I did get a few boots in the behind; but in general I got along very fine with the men. Although they didn't teach you or tell you anything about the organization in general, you knew there was a union; and as an apprentice you knew who belonged and who didn't belong. You knew that because the ones that did belong, if they were trying to talk someone into joining and they were obstinate type and didn't want anything to do with the union, well, they began to get the cold shoulder. So even as a boy you knew who was in and who was out. But you usually found out that the <u>best</u> craftsmen were

in the union. I don't know whether it was because they didn't have any fear of their jobs. Lithography was new then, and they were pretty well always in demand around the country. But the ones that didn't seem to have all the qualifications lived a little bit in fear. I think they felt they had to cater to the company. They didn't seem to want to get in the organization.

INTERVIEWER: As an apprentice were you allowed to attend meetings and discuss local situations with other members of the union at that time?

BROWN: No. The union rules at that time were that you couldn't join the organization as an apprentice. You had to serve your full apprenticeship of five years, and then there was a probationary period of about six months following that; and then if the union decided that you were good material to join the union, you were given an application and they considered it. In some cases apprentices had to serve another six months' probationary period. But the union at that time wanted to make darn sure that every member they had could hold his job at any time at any plant and the employer couldn't say, "We're firing you because of inefficiency," just using that as an excuse where the man might be trying to do a bit of organizing. So the union was a real tight organization, well-founded, and run with good ground rules that brought in the very best craftsmen in the country at that time.

INTERVIEWER: What other unions were present either in that company that you worked for or that you were aware of that also were in the printing trades?

BROWN: Well, the plant that I was employed in, served my apprenticeship in, was a very large firm, one of the largest in Canada, and they did just about every operation within the graphic arts field, from printing to photoengraving and all sorts of novelty work, lithography. And I don't think any of them were organized at that time as well as the lithographers were. I believe some of the branches of the graphic arts didn't have any members within the plant. Now, I think at that time there would be about 200 employees in the entire plant, somewhere around that from the designing and art department right down to the shipping. But the other unions, you never heard them discussed or you hadn't any idea whether they had a union or not. And I think union membership was few and far between in anything but the lithographic field. I think then as now, the lithographers were doing an organizing job in that day as good as some of the graphic arts unions do even today.

INTERVIEWER: What was the situation with employers in those days? Who owned the firms and how many were

there in the Toronto area? Was there competition? Can you describe the industry's situation a little bit?

BROWN: Yes. I would say in the city of Toronto there were approximately twelve lithographic firms. From the two largest--one was Rolph-Clark Limited, and the other was Stone Limited. The companies, as far as I knew, were all family-owned companies. Some, a few, employed maybe ten men, and then they ran right up to the largest. But they were all pretty well family-owned, and I think the employees were darn near like a family within the plant they were so familiar with each other. And it seems as though, with a membership as small as it was, that everybody knew everyone else in the city, knew their families, and were very friendly with them.

Even that far back the Lithographers used to have a yearly picnic, and they had stag picnics with barrels of beer and so forth, and we used to invite any members in London and Hamilton and Buffalo to these picnics in Toronto. In fact, I have a few pictures at home that were taken in the early 1900's of some of those picnics.

But the firms were few and far between. They each seemed to specialize in a certain type of reproduction. For many, many years, I think they were only either two or three firms in the whole of Canada that could do the big posters for the fences. Then some houses were classed as "label" houses. Some specialized in drug labels and whiskey labels and that sort of thing. The odd firm went in for book work. But they seemed to specialize in certain types of work. So there really wasn't--I could never figure--a lot of competition in the industry, because if a job of a certain type was up for quote, maybe out of a dozen firms, there were only two or three could actually quote on that type of a job that had the men and equipment to produce it. So I don't think there was much competition in the industry in that day.

INTERVIEWER: Did this make bargaining difficult? Who got the raises and who got the benefits? How was that affected in the 1910's and early '20's? Can you comment on that?

BROWN: Well, they never bargained as a union group at all. As far as I can recall, about the first time the union actually bargained as a whole for any wage increases or better fringe benefits would be about 1920, somewhere along there. And the contract was signed in 1921, I believe. I sent a copy of it to the international office, and it was signed with the employers in the city of Toronto and Hamilton and covered all of the litho-

graphic union men in those two cities. That was the first time it was ever spelled out on paper--the hours and the wages and the conditions of labor. So from then on it became a yearly matter of negotiating a better condition or a worse one. During the depression years the firms sent out letters varying in the conditions that they were going to lay down because of the depression, and some of them said they were going to cut the wages on a certain date twenty percent and some even up to fifty percent. Take it or leave it; if you didn't like it, you just walked out.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that the firms, previous to collective negotiations, tended to be rather paternalistic. Can you talk about what that meant in the way of wages and benefits for the individual members at that time? How did one person get ahead and get recognition and get the jobs?

BROWN: Like in every skilled trade or profession, the men varied in their qualifications, and the firm paid them whatever they thought they were worth as compared to the other chaps in the department. But I remember on one occasion, when the 1914 war broke out and they were going to have to raise the wages because of the dissatisfaction of the men, they called all the employees individually into the superintendent's office and told them that they'd been doing very good because of some war work and they were going to raise the wages. And in your case they would say, "We appreciate what you're doing, and we're going to give you a $2.00 a week increase." So that was fine. The chap would thank the superintendent and go out, and they would call in the next one. And he, maybe, would get the same bill of sale, and he would be given a $1.00 increase. In some instances they got $3.00. I think $3.00 on this occasion was the highest anyone got. So after it was all over and the fellows started to compare and found out that one had got $1.00 and one had got $2.00 and one had got $3.00, they were pretty mad about the whole set-up.

I think this sort of strengthened the union and brought them in together so that they felt they should have someone to really negotiate and bargain for them instead of having the firm call them in one at a time and hand out this sort of a dish. And I might say it was due to that--and although I wasn't in the union, I used to hang out on the fringe of these meetings and overhear things--that I decided what a rotten system it was for the workmen because I knew them all individually and I knew that some that had only got $1.00 increases were far better workmen than the ones that had got $2.00 and $3.00. I think the firm had based these handouts on the type of an individual they were dealing with. I know at that time everyone

was very proud of his craftsmanship and he really enjoyed his work. The ones that were the quiet type and worked very hard and did an outstanding job sometimes were the ones that didn't raise their voice so they got the lowest wage increase. And this really upset me as a young fellow, and I decided that I was going to do anything possible that I could to pull them together and help set up a new system where they would have a good representative to go in and not let them deal with the men individually. Because some people, even today, have all the qualifications in the world for their work, yet they haven't the ability to sell themselves in any shape or form.

So I, at that time, started to get interested in the union affairs. I don't know whether I had a little socialist leanings. I must have been born with it, I think, because my father was a very independent man, but it didn't seem to worry me whether they found out that I was leaning towards the union or not. I just carried on and learned all I could about the workings of the union and the system they worked on, even though I didn't belong to it.

INTERVIEWER: So you ended your apprentice program six years--did you say?

BROWN: Five years.

INTERVIEWER: You ended a year earlier than what was standard?

BROWN: No. It was a five-year apprenticeship. But I think because of the nosey type of young fellow I was and butting into union affairs and getting to know all about the union before I was out of my apprenticeship, in the city of Toronto, I'm sure I was the first apprentice ever to join the union before serving my time.

INTERVIEWER: What was the state of technology in those days? Were there new processes coming out or was there a rather fixed technology that, once you acquired the skills, you knew that you'd be in a stable position for years to come?

BROWN: Well, there was a general feeling that that was so; but by the time I joined the industry, photography and chemistry was coming into the industry, and there was a little resentment about its coming in because, as you point out, the fellows thought they had a process and the skills to carry on for the next hundred years without making any changes. But there were new developments coming in, and this worried the people. The chaps used to tell me as an apprentice I better learn something about these new processes, or by the time I served my apprenticeship, I wouldn't even be needed in this industry. So I think that thought sunk

in, and I decided that as soon as I served my apprenticeship I was going to find out something about the photographic process that was coming in. In the meantime I got everything I could possibly lay my hands on that was being published about these new processes. After I served my apprenticeship, I was ready then to step out and do something about it.

So within about one year I had written letters to different firms in the States who had this new photographic process, but with no results. So I saved up a bit of money--I was married by this time, had three children--paid a month's rent, and borrowed, I don't know, I forget, $50 or $100 off the union to leave with my wife and went to the States to look for a job. I went to Buffalo and Erie and Cleveland and Toledo and finally ended up in Detroit where I obtained a job with the Calvert Company. And they had the photographic process in there. They had paid thousands and thousands of dollars for it, but nobody in the place knew how to run it, so it was all covered up with a canvas. And this made me very mad because here was the very process I had come to learn; I didn't know much about it, not enough.

Anyway, I worked there for a few months and then received a telegram from a firm in Cleveland, The Postergraph Company, offering me a position. Now, this was a firm that had all the very latest up-to-date photographic processes that I had come over to learn about. So I left the position in Detroit on a Friday, and Monday morning I was in Cleveland ready to start the job. And I often think, at that time it was one of the foremost firms in many instances. It was unionized 100 percent, and they had a forty-hour week. That was approximately 1925, in and around there. And they gave me $60 a week, which was a lot of money at that time actually during the depression. So I worked there a few months and naturally, having gone over there to learn about this process, I learned as much in six months as the average person would learn in a couple of years.

Then I had to make the decision whether I was going to stay in the United States or go back to Canada. By this time some firms in Canada were putting in this process, so I went back. I might say that due to that trip it meant anywhere. . . well, it meant dollars and dollars more to me for the rest of my life, because of that short experience and grasping the knowledge in the new technology that was rolling into the industry. So I was able to operate what they called the step-and-repeat machine; instead of doing it the old-fashioned way by hand, it was all by photography and chemistry, using micrometers instead of the hand method of moving the positions of the impressions.

INTERVIEWER: So you're really a classic case of a craftsman and a journeyman. You move around from city to city until you find the ability to participate in the craft at the level that you want to. Let me

just go back for a second and ask you: when you go to Buffalo and when you go to Cleveland, how do you go into those cities in those days? Do you go into the firms and say that you're here, or do you go into the union and announce that you're here and find out what's available? How does a journeyman travel in those days?

BROWN: Well, we used to have trouble with some even union men. If they heard there was a vacancy somewhere, they'd go and interview the firm. Now, this was against union regulations. And in every instance, in every city I went to, the first thing I did was look up the local president of the union and tell him I was in town, I was seeking a position, could he offer any suggestions or would it be okay if I went to this firm or the other to have an interview? And in every instance they either told me there were no vacancies in the city or gave me advice on where to go and how to go about it. But I think, in every instance they told me it was fine to go ahead and interview the firm. But they did give me a little indication of what sort of wages to ask for, the conditions, and so forth, so that, I suppose, I or anyone else wouldn't go in and undercut the men that were already in the plant. But that was the general rule that you were supposed. . . in fact, there was a fine in a great many locals on anyone who came into the city and contacted any firm without permission of the local president.

I know in latter years in the city of Toronto, when I was president, we had the odd person who came in from other centers and just contacted firms, and we brought them up before the union and fined them as much as $200 or $300 just for doing that and breaking that rule, which they paid. But even if it was a non-union shop. . . I recall one case where a chap came in from Winnepeg, and he took a job in a non-union shop without contacting the president. We called him up before the board--he was a union man--we put a fine of $300 on him; and then when he told me the conditions within the plant, and so forth, I asked him if he would help me organize the plant, which he did. We even held meetings in his own home. He was the only union man in the place, and I went and addressed them. Due to that, we organized the shop and so we cut his fine in half. (Laughter) But the rules were very strict, even way back.

INTERVIEWER: As you went from city to city on y our little trip, did you find a degree of standardization between the various locals or were there differences that you can remember that you might want to comment on?

BROWN: Well, the standards set up were actually laid down by the International, so they were similar, whatever city you went into. It all depended on the type of leadership you had in that city. In some

cities I attended the meeting, and I would find out that there was as much difference as summer and winter in the leadership ability of the local itself. It did you good sometimes to go into a local where they had a real good, bang-up leadership man, and you found out that this was reflected in the shops. And then you'd go into another place where they had a weak type of leadership. . . mind you, the man would be doing the best job he possibly could, and nobody else would want the job. It wasn't any reflection on him, but they had no leadership program to develop people.

And in general, the rules were the same. There wasn't a big difference in the wages, as far as the minimum wages were concerned. But in those days, and as long as I ever worked for the industry, a man with any extra qualifications could always earn more than the general wage laid down, by receiving a premium wage. That still applies in the industry today. partly based on a man's ability to sell himself as well as the skill that he has.

INTERVIEWER: During this period the locals are very strong, very autonomous, and yet the International's presence is felt, commenting on it about the standardization of rules. In what other ways were you aware of the International in those days?

BROWN: I was very aware when I joined the union of the International's affect on the locals. Approximately twice a year, I suppose, in the city of Toronto, the International president would come to that city and address them. And they always seemed to me to have very good leadership. I have talked to other people who did belong to other unions, and they were always downgrading their International leadership. I found in the litho industry, during my time (and that covered quite a few International presidents), they were a fine bunch of fellows and real leaders. I can't think of one--I think we had one, but he didn't stay in very long; he resigned and took a job as a manager of a plant, I think--but with that exception, they had real good leadership. And I think they did a lot to influence the individual members, even in those early days, and make them realize that they had an organization behind them far larger and beyond just the local city itself.

INTERVIEWER: In those days were you aware of what other locals were doing in the way of strikes or other relationships they were having with employers? Was there much interlocal awareness and brotherhood, or were you primarily just relating to the International?

BROWN: No. We had a very good close relationship due to the International. If we had trouble in San

Francisco or Providence, Rhode Island, or in Winnipeg, all the locals knew immediately by telegram, and usually they put an assessment on to help the fellows out in that city. So there was terrific coordination between the International and the locals, no matter what it was--trouble of any kind. If there was any trouble in a plant in any city, telegram went out to say that no one was to apply for a position or take one with this firm. So the system of the International, I think, considering the day and age, was just out of this world.

(END OF SIDE I)

INTERVIEWER: In those days, during the 20's, what were you aware of in the political developments within the International. You mentioned a strong presidency. Were you aware of what was going on at the conventions and what was happening on the International level in terms of policy decisions, issues that confronted the International generally?

BROWN: Yes, very much aware. I think even the International at that time had a terrific way of communicating with all of their locals. Anything and everything of any importance that took place throughout America or Canada, we had a communication on it immediately. And when I look back, I'm amazed that the communications were so thorough and how they impressed me. It seemed to me that outside of the union there was no communication like that in any shape or form in connection with organizations or even things that were happening within the government. We seemed to get the news fast, no matter what it was. So I have a very fond remembrance of the efficiency of our International way back before I ever thought of becoming an International man. In fact, I never had a thought of it; I was sort of influenced and pushed and kicked into it in one sense.

INTERVIEWER: Now, in those days were you aware of different candidates and different issues confronting the International? How were they discussed at the local level in Toronto?

BROWN: Well, they were brought up on the floor of the meeting. We had some very fine meetings, a good meeting place. Problems were discussed very intelligently. And I might say--I'm not sure about other locals--but the Toronto local would have an average of 90 percent attendance at every union meeting throughout the year. In fact, if you didn't turn up at a union meeting, the next day everybody was after you wanting to know why and so

forth; and unless there was sickness or some good reason, everybody turned out. So there was no reason for you not to know what was going on. In fact, if somebody didn't turn up for the meeting and didn't have a very good excuse, the fellows would refuse to tell him what went on. This used to aggravate them very, very much. But the system of communication in those days actually amazes me; because even being young at the time, a lot of the stuff just sunk in. So I know the system must have been very good, because I wasn't the brightest student by any means.

INTERVIEWER: Now, let's turn just a bit from our interest in the International and try to pick up your relationship with the Toronto local and your gradual assumption of more responsibility in that local. When did you start to receive indications that you wanted to participate more in the leadership capacity of that local?

BROWN: Well, I think right from the start, from the time I joined the organization, I took a very thorough interest in the union and the union affairs. Now, I really don't know why it was. I suppose had I joined the Knights of Columbus or the Masonic or something, I would have pretty well done the same thing there. But as it was the union and the only association I belonged to, I really took an interest right from the start. I suppose I had an inquiring mind and wanted to know what was going on everywhere. So I usually was on my feet like a perky young fellow.

In fact, previous to that, I sat beside an artist who was quite a speaker. And when we were in debate on something, I used to drop my thinking to him; and first thing I know, he'd be on his feet just repeating what I had said, you know. And suddenly after a long time, it struck me, well, why should I let him get the credit for it? Why shouldn't I do it myself? So then I began to get on the floor. Naturally, I was very nervous at that time, but I gradually developed, and I became known through the organization.

Naturally, then young people didn't hold office. You had to have about 25 years' experience at the trade and be 40 or 50 years of age before they'd think of making you even the keeper of the keys at the door. So it took quite a while, but I think I overcame that over a period of time by, I think, my sincerity on the matters that I did discuss. So that I was then nominated for minor office, and I think I went through just about every office the local had--from editor of the journal (that was later), from sentinel to the chairman of the entertainment committee, recording secretary, financial secretary, and finally, the ultimate, president of the local.

INTERVIEWER: Could you give us some time reference for this? This was during the 30's or the 40's?

BROWN: Well, that started. . . I was an officer for at least twelve years or more in the local, of one type or another, holding one office or another. In fact, the president of the local ahead of me was in the job for eleven years, and I held the vice-presidency for three or four under him; he was a very good friend of mine. Mind you, this was earlier. I talked about changing offices every year; but later on, after the local got bigger and we got better leadership, why, then they were revoted in. And this chap, he really liked the job. He wanted to stay in. But after I was vice-president for three years, four years, I went to him and I told him I was going to run against him for the presidency. And he said, "That's fine." He was well established by this time and older than me. Well, I ran, and I was defeated, I think by 27 votes. The comments I got were that I was too young. . . I was too progressive, I think, for the times. . .

INTERVIEWER: Was 27 votes a large. . .

BROWN: Well, at this time they would have about 400 members, so it was getting close. So then I'd be out of office for the coming years, but they always created some kind of an office to keep me in there for that year. And then I would go back in as vice-president again for a year to establish myself, and then I would go to him again and tell him I was going to run again. And I ran three times before I finally defeated him. I think the second time I only lost out by. . . I don't know. . . five or six votes. But anyway, we were the very best of friends, and we enjoyed the campaign, you know. It was a very pleasant campaign; we all had backers who believed in what our policy was. So I went along until I became president of the local in 1941, I believe it was, and spent a little over three years as president of the Toronto local.

INTERVIEWER: Can you talk to us a little bit about these years in which you served in different positions up through the local? What was the situation like between the leaders and the rank and file in those days? And let's not forget that this would have been a very difficult period of the depression that you were in these offices, so maybe you could comment on some of the effects of the depression on the local.

BROWN: During the depression, naturally it was a worrisome time for not only the union, the officers of the union, and the members. We had quite a bit of unemployment, but we were always able to put an assessment on the ones that were working and pay these men a certain amount of money to keep them going, not enough to

keep them actually. Some would get other jobs outside of the trade or part-time jobs if they could. But we had a system to make sure, if they weren't working, to pay them this unemployment pay; we would meet on a street corner downtown, and everybody had to go there and get it. And they seemed to be very happy with the thought that the union was taking care of them and paying their dues and all their obligations keeping them up to date.

Naturally the employers got a little more arrogant during those days because they felt they had a pool to pick from if they wanted a man. But I think the system we had of stopping any member from going and applying for a job in any plant without permission was a very good one because, even if there were a dozen people out of work in a certain branch of the trade and the employer wanted a man of that type, he couldn't call in the whole dozen and talk it over and use one against the other. He was made to contact the union, make known his wishes--the type of man, how much he wanted to pay--and then either one or two would be sent to interview the employer, and then he could take his pick from those two. Whereas it would have created chaos if there were a dozen men and they were all sent down. It would be like the early days of unskilled people.

It was tough. It was hard on the leadership. It was hard on the men; but we pulled through it very, very well with 300-400 members during that period, and we had 25 unemployed. That would be, I would say, the average through the depression, sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less. But I think it was due to the type of industry that we were employed at that brought that condition about because all this time, through this period, lithography actually was expanding and eating into the old printing-type of business. So they were creating new work, and this helped us actually through the depression.

Offhand, I just can't recall how long it lasted, but I know we came out of the depression, especially in the lithographic industry, ahead of what they did in the United States. We found out that the firms, not the lithographic firms, but any of the firms that did a lot of advertising, when they felt their business was getting <u>real</u> bad, they started to do more advertising to sort of pull themselves out of the depression; and naturally that helped the lithographic firms. I think we actually came out of the depression between one and two years ahead of the people within the United States, partly because of the expansion of the lithographic industry even at that time. It was going; the industry was changing. Previous to that they were doing a lot of lithography from the old lithographic stones. And now the photographic process was coming in; chemistry was coming in; and the metal plates were coming into

the industry, which speeded up the production and gave us a better competitive position against the printer. All of these factors helped us to climb out of that depression a lot earlier than many other groups of working people. I don't know how that applied in the United States. I suppose it had a bearing something similar, but I'm now speaking of the Canadian situation.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of services did a local offer its membership at this time? Was the president part time, or was he a full-time member at the bench and then work as a president after work? What kind of things did the president and vice-president and so on do as a local?

BROWN: None of the officers during those days were full-time men. They did get paid a little, maybe $25 a year, to cover certain expenses, but they all worked at the bench. It was rather tough at times because some firms didn't like having the president of the local even working in their place because, although the men weren't allowed to come into the plant to see the president on business during the day, at lunch hour usually someone was there to take up part of his lunch hour or at quitting time there'd be one or two there. It was rather a strenuous job to hold down. And it went on for quite a number of years. The vice-president used to help out quite a bit. Certain problems were related to him; and naturally without bookkeeping machines the financial people in the local were kept very busy, but it was pretty well done at night. Meetings were held at night between the officers, and notes were compared and. . . I still have some of the old financial statements of those days, and they're rather interesting to look at and read because they're all done by hand. So the officers were kept very, very busy.

And I think their work was appreciated by the men because, when I look back, the men were very devoted to the officers. When they were asked to do anything, they did it willingly, which made for sort of a family grouping. Nobody complained to any extent unless he thought he got a raw deal, and then he naturally had ways and means of bringing it up before another committee. But there seemed to be a sense of cooperation between all the officers and all the men, and this made it better and easier for everybody to operate the local. I understand that all locals were not as efficiently operated as the Toronto local. I think they were very, very fortunate in the leadership they had.

Over the years we used to hold joint meetings between some of the other Canadian cities and conferences, and I think the influence within that kind of local and the leadership gradually rubbed off on all of the other locals and helped

them to speed up. When I went to the States in the early days and attended some meetings, I found out that our system and method of doing things in general were much ahead of what I was now experiencing; and yet we were newer locals, but we always had a system of bringing along leadership. We would maybe pay for any young fellow who was interested in taking a course in what they called the WEA in those days--Workers Educational Association, run by the university, for public speaking. And we would take about five young fellows and pay for the course. And I think because of our interest in developing leadership we were really in the foremost line of locals throughout the country.

INTERVIEWER: During this period the growth of industrial unionism started in the middle of the 30's. Can you recall what the general reaction was on the part of the lithographers in Toronto and that area to the growth of these large industrial unions?

BROWN: The first thought they had, when the International began to advocate that we take in other than lithographers, was one of resentment. They felt that they were highly skilled men, real craftsmen, and they looked back to the days when their fathers wore tall silk hats in England and went to work with dignity and so forth, and they thought it was very degrading. But gradually, because of the leadership, I suppose, they began to see it in a new light. Some locals in the Toronto area--all the Canadian locals even held out far longer than the American locals did in bringing in what they called the industrial or the general worker into the union. For some years after they were taking them in the American locals, the Canadian locals weren't having anything to do with them. You had to be a lithographer and a good one to even join the union. I think maybe that was a good policy, because we used to let it be known--and I've told employers around the bargaining table--that when they talked about some non-union people, I would sort of downgrade them and say that if they were real good lithographers and had all the skills needed, there was no reason under the sun why they wouldn't be in the union, that these were second-class craftsmen and that's why they were not there in the union.

INTERVIEWER: So during this period now, you're the first vice-president. Then 1941 you become the president of the Toronto local after your third try at running for the presidency?

BROWN: Yes, that's right. Then I was in office in Toronto as the president, and I was very friendly with the International vice-president of the Canadian region, a fellow by the name of William

Aitken. He was on the point of retiring, and so a lot of the members felt that I had done a real good job on the Canadian situation and that I should run for the office. I wasn't too interested. I had a wife and five children and enjoyed my home, so I told them I wasn't going to campaign for the job one bit and if they thought I was the man for the job, why, they could go ahead and put on the program.

So three presidents of locals in Canada were going to be nominated for the International vice-presidency. We felt that wasn't a good program--three from Canada and more than likely there'd be one or two from the United States, and we wouldn't have a chance of winning it. So we had a run-off in Canada, so that we would eliminate the third one, and there would just be two. And on that I topped the poll. But the unfortunate part about it was that the fellow that should have dropped out, when the International nominations came along, he got a nomination from a local out in Denver, Colorado; and he ran again. So there were three on the final run. And I was beaten by less than thirty votes for the International vice-presidency. But the term was only one year at that point, so the following term I ran, and I was the only other candidate. Now, this was the International election, so we had two Canadians in on it; and I defeated the other man they had--John Kelly, a Scotsman, who had just been in the one year. He was a very good friend of mine, took me around, introduced me to employers in the various unions around the country, and we parted the best of friends. So that's how I became the International vice-president.

INTERVIEWER: And this was in what year?

BROWN: 1944. I spent twenty years as. . . . I don't think I had anyone contest me over the twenty years, until I retired nine years ago.

INTERVIEWER: During World War II lithography makes a considerable growth because of the use of lithography in the war effort, and many lithographers trace their beginnings within the trade to that period. Can you talk about what it was like as the president of the Toronto local and then as the vice-president of the International during this war?

BROWN: During the war I was president of the Toronto local, and I made some very important contacts in Ottawa, which is the capital of Canada, because they were setting up an engineering section with air-conditioned units to lithograph maps overseas; and they wanted some good lithographers. Well, I made arrangements with them that whatever type they wanted, I would make a recommendation to them; and when this happened, any member that wanted to

get into the lithographic unit came to me. I wrote a letter of recommendation to Ottawa, and he was immediately taken in where he got a better than Private's pay. And some non-union people and even some union people just joined the forces, told them they were lithographers and thought they would immediately be put into lithographic departments. Well, this wasn't the case. They were put into infantry or artillery or whatever the heck it might be. Then they came to me later and asked me to do everything possible to get them transferred into the lithographic unit. And sometimes it would take three months, six months, to get them transferred.

We had another incident where the bank note companies in Ottawa, the Canadian Bank Note Company and the American Bank Note Company, were printing a lot of secret code stuff for the Government, and they needed men. So it was on my recommendation that some were even pulled out of the Army and brought into Ottawa where they received a civilian rate of pay, even though they were actually in the Army itself or in the forces.

During that period, it was a very good one for our organization. I think it was due to the contacts that we made with the Government because at that time they froze wages; you couldn't get a wage increase unless you got a promotion in your position, and you had to go and apply for any change of a job from one plant to another. You weren't allowed to quit or they weren't allowed to fire you. But due to the governmental connections I made as president, they transferred the right to me to make out these forms so that I could transfer anybody from one plant to another or upgrade them. So, naturally, anytime I felt that a man was worth more money and so forth, why, I just upgraded him and gave the reasons for it. Or changed jobs. Not many organizations got in on that sort of a deal, but it certainly helped us out to keep our people employed. And instead of wages lying dormant, we were boosting them during that period to a level that we felt the people were really worth. Now, what was the other part of that [question]. . . you wanted?

INTERVIEWER: We were going to comment about the increase of membership resulting from the use of the process. . .

BROWN: We didn't, naturally, want to flood the industry with new apprentices during the war period because we felt, after the war was over and all the fellows came back, there would be a lot of unemployment. So we kept the apprenticeship system pretty tight. We had to upgrade. . . in our industry, on all presses, they have assistants and top pressmen. And in some instances where the pressman would be called into the army or joined, we would have to take the assistant and make him a pressman. There was a lot of objection to doing this because in that branch they have to

serve their apprenticeship as an assistant and then serve another apprenticeship when they took full control of the press itself. We overcame that in that the system we had of doing it enabled us to stop flooding the market with new people. We fought against the schools, the employers. . . I remember someone, well, I remember the Canadian Employers Association saying that after the war there was going to be such a boon that they would need thousands of new lithographers. They sent a survey sheet out to all the members of the Employers Association asking them how many men they would need after the war. I saw the survey, and in some classifications they needed far more men than were even working at the trade at that time; it was just a "lot of bologna", should I say. They had just padded them so the union would break down the apprenticeship ratio. We kept a very good control of it, so that when the fellows did come back there were positions for them.

I don't know whether there is anything else I can add to that about the war period. Naturally, there wasn't any unemployment to speak of, and conditions were very good. As anyone would know in the lithographic industry, we were kept busy doing the big war posters and victory bonds and liberty-bond campaigns. So we really went to town, and it helped to develop the lithographic industry because the buying public and the industries found out that many things could be done lithographically that they never thought could be done. Previous to that it was always done by printing; and if you suggested switching over to lithography, the buyer would say, "Oh, no. We've had this done twenty years by this process, and we're quite satisfied with it." But because of the war developments, it was forced on them; and from then on they started going lithographically instead of printing.

INTERVIEWER: What about the lithography process made it so much more acceptable during the war period? Could you talk about the difference between the technology and why the war was able to break loose the acceptance of it?

BROWN: Well, I think part of it might be income tax forms and all sorts of other forms that the government wanted, and wanted in a hurry, and wanted many more millions than ever before. And they found out that by the lithographic prccess they could get it done much faster and even cheaper.

In connection with the forces, the big posters that went on the fences for the bond issues and the recruiting and so forth, whereas it would be just beyond price to do it by the printing industry, the photographic industry had come into the lithographic field and they could, after an artist

or designer designed the big poster, why, they could just set it up in front of the cameras, color-separate it, photograph it in one small portion of the time it would take to do it by any other process. While the other people were getting the plates ready, by the litho process they could have the job out and on the fences and so forth.

INTERVIEWER: During this period that you became a new vice-president of the International, it was required that you stand for election every year. I want to know whether you feel that that was in some ways a hindrance in that you always had to be extremely political. Or was it an advantage in that it kept you very much in touch with the membership? Can you just comment about this one-year tenure in office?

BROWN: All right. As far as the one year is concerned, maybe in those days it was okay. It did keep you in close contact with all of the members because a year soon passed and you knew you had to sell yourself to prove to them that you were doing a good job. Otherwise they had a choice of throwing somebody else into the ring. The disadvantage was, in my case, when I first went into office, I used to cover the whole of Eastern Canada, from Windsor on the west to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and some of the American border cities as well. So you can imagine how tough it was to get around and do any business that was beneficial to the membership when you had that area to cover. Planes were just coming into common use at that time. Some of the v.p.'s used to ride trains all the time. I never did. On the odd occasion I might have.

The one-year term was good for one reason: if you elected a man who wasn't doing the job--I think these lithographers were intelligent enough to judge people--and if he weren't doing the job, you didn't have to be burdened with him for two or three years. You could unload him in a year, and naturally, coming from the ranks, he could go back to the trade, and there wasn't really any harm done. The disadvantage was that you hardly got acquainted with the job in one year. I think the big advantage to me was the experience I'd had coming up through the ranks and holding all the different positions and then president of the biggest local in Canada before I stepped into that. But for someone who hadn't had that experience, it would be a pretty tough job to go into an International vice-presidency.

INTERVIEWER: What was the politics during this period like in the International offices? Were you in the International offices enough to be aware of what was happening? Was it stable in terms of the administration, or were there factions and interests and debates as to different courses that the International should proceed in?

BROWN: At that time I used to be in New York at the International meetings at least every three months, and they were very good meetings. You got a difference of opinion from different parts of the country because they had four vice-presidents; one covered the East Coast, one the West, and one Central and then myself from Canada. So you got a difference of opinion on the thinking of the membership and what should be done in a common policy for the entire organization. When I look back on those meetings, I think they were very, very good. There was no thought of anyone in the final trying to get some idea over that just suited his own area. They'd come to a common front, and that became the policy. I can't ever think of any real bad decisions that were ever made. And I think it was because of that sort of a set-up that we had.

Then the fact that it helped me a lot, being a Canadian and having Canadian locals. Like years ago, there used to be a sort of different thinking if you were an American or if you lived in the United States or if you worked in an American shop than there was in Canada. So the fact that I covered Buffalo and Syracuse and Rochester and border cities, it gave me a chance to get a different line of thinking. I can always remember in the city of Syracuse, I believe it was, when we were negotiating for further holidays. And Easter came up, and apparently the employers gave about an hour off so that people could go to church at this time. And I said, "Why, in Canada, that's one of the most important holidays the country has is Easter." One employer jumped up and said, "Don't bring religion into these negotiations!" But we ended up by getting Easter as another public holiday. But I learned a lot from servicing the American locals. I could then bring some of that thinking into the Canadian situation and take some of the Canadian viewpoints into the States.

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