Gerry Miller

Interviewers: Eddie Campbell, Marilyn Clayton & Stephen Read (for the Britannia Heritage Shipyard Project)

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(Project) Tape No. 100:1 & 100:2

NO RESTRICTIONS

MC: When was the dyke put in?

GM: The front dyke, (facing) the little low one and the ABC put their own about 1935 or 36. I remember when it was done, I used to run along it going to school, playing along it. Portions of it are still there. This was the back of the property, all the traffic between No. 2 Road and the top of Steveston, and Steveston was along this walk along here, and this was the back. (the north of the property) Now Kishi Boatworks, Kishi family had a house right in here, this was the house. (Indicating the grove area to the east, behind Kishi boatworks). And then Lanky Mizaguchi's and different people all around, and there was two, three houses in here and this side here too, but they were all on piles (west side of property across from grove). And this was where they put sand. (sand fill put in from Phoenix Cannery to Pacific Coast Camp). Oh, in the '50s sometime when they were dredging out the Steveston Harbour here, after they put the rock pile in. They put the rock pile in, they put the rock pile in '53-54, made the island longer. (Shady Island) And Britannia Shipyard was the first property that was exposed to the cross river winds in the winter time, the south east winds. They couldn't store boats here, they used to take the boats up in the lee of the islands right across from Trites Road and No. 2 Road there. A lot of the ABC boats used to be stored there all winter. And they bring a boat and haul it up and work on it.

EC: So they'd only store the boats there in the summer time? (correction: boats stored in the winter time)

GM: Yes, through the spring. They'd bring three to four boats here, they didn't have much in the way of facilities. Even the gill netters. Eventually ABC dug a hole (west of Phoenix) in the property and made a protected harbour in there that was in that time after the war. (When they were ready, the boats went North to fish for the summer)

EC: That's what they call a slough?

GM: Yes, a bit of a slough. Nelson Bros. did that big one that's Hong Wo's bean field by No. 2 Road, that big one in there, and its been enlarged. B.C. Packers had it enlarged in 1975. There used to be a narrow channel into this big round pond.

EC: So did Britannia work on boats in the winter time?

GM: That was basically what it was built for. The ABC had a fleet of boats and they needed some place to work on them so they converted this little cannery that was never going to be used again to a shipyard in 1919.

EC: Why was the cannery never going to be used again?

GM: Basically the flow of fish into the river here was severely depleted when the Hell's Gate collapsed in 1913, I think, and it killed the major run. That was the biggest run that came on the first of August. But it came back again about three, four years ago, very strong.

MC: Mary (Gazetas) mentioned that this area in here, which is now all the grove, she was trying to estimate how many houses, huts were in there.

GM: Oh, I can't remember how many were in here, there wasn't that many here. There was a lot of open area, there wasn't any solid houses. There might have been solid when the cannery was running, when the cannery was running Britannia, because every cannery needed, everything was done by hand, they even cut the cans out of flat metal and rolled them and soldered them. There were banks of these soldering pots and they prepared charcoal in the bottom of them, in the early days and they had their (soldering) irons, four or five, everybody had four or five. I've still got one of these great big irons with a great big ugly handle on it. And they keep these irons hot. And they'd be soldering away. A lot of Chinese labour at that time.

EC: Can you give us an idea of how many people would be living here or employed in the cannery?

GM: Each cannery must have had a couple of hundred people anyway, at least. Some were in Steveston in the off season. They (population) went up to about 100,000. There was 15 hotels and whore houses. Steveston was bigger than Vancouver really for a while, I believe. This was the Richmond Boatworks where Jim Kishi's dad and his dad's brother worked. Jim's dad and uncle, two Kishi's here, they used to do all the boat work there.

EC: So what was the last date you worked here then?

(Poor Sound)

GM: We cleaned up, supposed to be finished Christmas 1968 and then I started in 1951, but it was seasonal. I was only here in the winter and spring (summer in Alert Bay). I was assistant manager there '58 - '60, and then I became manager there in 1969, stayed there four years and then I went to Quatheaski. And then down here I was Fisherman's manager here in Steveston for years, too many.

EC: And then what was your job specifically at the boatworks here?

GM: Well, when George (Shorey) retired I was the manager of it. But it was a funny, it was sort of a foreman come manager. More of an operating manager. I say manager because that was my position on the payroll. I was more of a foreman. Of course there was the company boss under the reins of the Phoenix manager, Buster McKenzie who was the over all manager. Kept going up the ladder.

(Poor Sound) A lot of these buildings, in the '40s and early 50s, were moved around. A lot of them are not in their original spot. The long one, that we call the Indian House, that used to be back up against the dyke as I remember. Actually, along there (indicates west side of property) was solid houses. And there was a boat shop here with a house beside it. I forget the name of the people that ran that boat shop. And then down in between the houses, even down in the low lands, there was boat shops. All the Japanese that came here were carpenters, that was what they did in Japan and they were good carpenters.

MC: Would that have been, would everything have been on pilings?

GM: Oh yes, everything was up in the air like this (about 3 to 5 feet). And in the summertime it was dry and in the wintertime it was muskeg. And a lot of times the water would come pouring over. Flooded here in 1948, the last big one I guess. This was all under water. I remember everybody from Britannia. We were called down to the ABC, to the store down there at the Phoenix Cannery. We were called down there because the water was coming over all along. We took everything off the ground, off the floor and pretty soon we were taking stuff off the bottom shelves and moving it up. Everything was up in the air. (around 1954-56. There was 2 feet of water in the store) Every year at Christmas time there was horrendous big south east winds, it was basically at that time, it wasn't the freshets. You take a good south east wind and a 16 foot tide or whatever the top tides are and they come in June and then again in December on New Years day I think. One there was water on top of the wharf here. There was water six inches to eight inches deep on the wharf at Britannia. By the time it got down here there was no bottle neck you know. So the yearly freshets were worse up there. When it got here it was really bad. Up in the Langley area the water was way up into the corn fields. Do you know underneath Patullo Bridge? 1948, that was all under about three to four feet of water. We had a lot of freshets around here but not the height. The last spot was around the rice mill just past the tunnel. It reached right through the big dyke. So after that, that was a winter works program. I was even involved in it once for a couple of weeks while the cannery was, well everything was closed down in 1950 something. They cleaned all the bush off and they raised all the dykes up three or four feet.

EC: What can you tell us about the Kishi Boatworks, Richmond Boatworks?

GM: Your best form of information would be from Jim Kishi. He'll be in here working after awhile.

EC: What was the relationship with Kishi and the cannery?

GM: All of the property here was owned by the cannery and the canneries wanted to have boat shops to up grade their gill net fleet. Every company had three or four boat builders, even after the war when the Japanese came back. Atagi Boatworks were given a spot by BC Packers and another Nakade Boatworks was given a spot up at the No. 2 Road, where the fish company is now. Have you seen that big cement building at London Road and No. 2 Road? Mas is up there all the time, he's a nice fellow. He'll give you a lot of local information. He's a little bit sarcastic once in awhile but he's a nice fellow.

MC: Do you remember some of the names of the skiffs that were built here?

GM: Well, the last boat built here was called the ""Silver Ann"" and its still on the river here. I saw it the other day. That was under my tenure 1968. In the spring in 1966 or '67, the boat that was built here was called the ""Britt"". And they were built under a system that the Japanese used before the Second World War. Canadians don't build a boat like that. They put the ribs in after they plank. They plank the boat first and they called it ""Tanaita Tsukuri"", which means shelf planking built.

EC: What's the idea of building without a frame?

GM: Well, they put a mold up and all the strapping that's outside the window there. That's what they got the smooth lines with on the outside of this thing and then they divide it all up where the planks are so all the planks are even and then they nail them on to these frames. The frames are four feet apart roughly. And then they put the planks on and then they take a saw, then they follow the seam so that its perfect and then with the plane and then they keep clamping them down tight and they get up to the shape of the boat. Then all these planks are nailed to these frames by this time all the straps are off and then they installed the ribs. Most of them are right round and up the other side.

MC: So they do that in the steam box?

GM: Oh yes. That's what the long steam boxes are for, long planks. And then the ribs had to go from one side right round to the other. And then, they'd push them down one on each side, couple or three guys working like this, and they'd push them down and then nail it to the keel. So you couldn't pull the keep out because there was a ridge of nails. And then they drove and forced the ribs out to the hull shape and then they nailed from the outside. The comical part is every time they pulled the damned frames out eventually and they put the bulkheads in to pull out the shape (mold) and started to take the frames out and they forget to plug up all these holes up. Even those last two boats that were built here, we'd launch them, you know, watch the water, take them up, take them up, and they'd have to haul them back up again, and they'd watch where they were, you know. And then they'd fall off the outside and they'd have to scrape the paint off and find it then they'd put plugs in these things.

MC: What was the process called?

GM: Shelf planking.

MC: Was there a Japanese term for that?

GM: Yes, Tanaita Tsukuri. I speak Japanese. That old fellow who built those boats was Mr. Azari.

MC: He would have been the one who built the ""Silver Ann"" and the ""Britt""?

GM: He built several boats. Even in the fifties he was in another firm and he built three or four boats there. A 55 foot seine boat called the ""Glen Dale"". (in the '30s)

MC: Would that have been here?

GM: No, they were built where the airport is, the south airport is, Vancouver Cannery.

MC: Can you recall boats that were built maybe a little earlier than the 60s?

GM: In 1946 there was a boat builder here named MacLashin. He was renting the place. He wasn't working under the auspices of Britannia, it wasn't Britannia until after he finished. MacLashin built four boats, ""V"" bottom flat things that were supposed to be like torpedo boats. ""Sandra E"", ""Verna G"", ""Andrea"". Bill Gardner had one ""Verna G"", Jack Thompson had the ""Andrea"" I think, I don't know. And the other, there was four.

MC: Were they often named after their wives?

GM: Wives or children. ""Roving Beauty"", ""Salmon Queen"". There was a boat called the ""Regal I"" and it was pretty much like the ones Kishi built here in '36, '38, '40. He built a lot of west coast trollers and his model was used for quite awhile by people, they were quite a successful. Compromised stern. They were easy to drive in the water and they worked well. (compromised stern means pointed like the bow)

MC: Is the ""Silver Ann"", is still around?

GM: I saw it the other day, it was up river. I've lost contact but somebody up the river bought it and the ""Silver Ann"" was owned by a man named Osaka for a number of years and he retired a couple of years ago and then David Hoffstad bought it.

MC: Were these last two boats double ended?

GM: These last two weren't because double ended went by the way of the dinosaurs. They are not too practical, you can't get close to where the net comes up, you know the roller across the stern. When you get this long point you can't get too close and so they don't pack as much and they don't go as fast and the stern sinks down too far. So these were built with a square stern, just a plank straight across. And this tanaita tsukuri, you couldn't put too many fancy corners in it anyway because you had to bend these ribs, you couldn't make convex or concave curves and be too successful. But they were square stern and they were 34 feet long.

EC: We were told that some of the boats were square sterned, originally just had a sort of wooden roller and then later on they developed the drum.

GM: Gill netting up until the 1940s mostly it was pulled by hand but just before the Japanese left there was a major change here. The first drum went into a boat in 1934-35, in the mid 30s, in Soin Tula up by Alert Bay, that's a little community on Malcolm Island.

EC: Is that where it was developed?

GM: Yes. I can't remember his name, you'd have to go up there to get his name (Mr. Jarvis). They started, they built one boat in the 30s, '36, '38 probably. And that was the first boat built with a drum. And they had 6x8s or 10x10s, whatever they run from the engine room back to the stern. They figured the strength of this power would pull anything out and it had to be narrow and it had a pointed stern. A little narrow boat. And in those days there was no safety things, they had great big 5/8 or 3/4 inch chain off the front of these heavy duty slow engines. You know pong, pong, pong. And the shaft would run along (the side), they put a transmission along the way to go into lower gear or higher gear or higher speeds, and they had a lever from the transmission handle. This pole ran to the back and when they wanted the drum to go on they slammed it into gear you know, and they had a bull gear on the side of the drum and then a pinion gear turning so it was awesome the strength of this thing. So they'd yank this thing in. Well, several people got wrapped up and drug because they couldn't stop it. In later years they put these belts tighter and a V belt on the front of the engine and they were smooth and good but still they were mechanical tied, and those chains and bearings. Now everybody's got hydraulic. Also with your hydraulic, if you're running out of net the (drum) free wheel comes up so they all have to have an elaborate breaking system to put some strain on it or stop it. Every once in a while (the net) would jam in down between the wraps and it would backlash. It would go around the other way instead of peeling off, it would go around the other way and then tear it all to pieces. So they have to be able to stop it, whereas the V belt system was the ideal. That would allow it to come off nice. Most of them use it because you had to be able to start and stop it. You had to have a fish or something heavy to fall on it or something.

EC: So what was the relationship between Britannia Cannery and the Kishi Boatworks?

GM: Britannia cannery wanted this place under their own. 1950 they weren't using it, the odd Japanese fisherman would rent it for awhile and build a boat in it. They used to try and build one a winter. But the Britannia Shipyard used to deal with power skiffs and do a lot of repairs, had their own small company fleet and that's why these runners were here. They'd store the (boats), they'd bring them up and then roll them over onto the side. It was just a narrow roadway between that building over there. There was about 10 boats on this side (west) and only four boats on this side (the east).

(Poor Sound)

SR: That winch house with the cable coming...

GM: Well, it went where ever they needed it. There was a permanent block where that hole is there and it went over and on to the drum and then from there they could just about push it by hand. If they want to pull it in here further, actually on this they used to have a little snatch block up here and then when they wanted to pull the boat sideways with their winches they had heavy blocks of cement in the middle of each spot and they'd put a snatch block down and pull the cables over and then haul them (the boats) over. And I think they used to have to stop maybe there was another block down there, cause I remember when we got it over the top it used to stop here for some reason. But that was just the way you had it laid out. You couldn't make much difference.

EC: How did they get the boats going sideways?

GM: They had a whole pile of about one foot long two inch pipe, it jacked the boat up. I guess when they were doing it, this timber the size of the, this thing here, they'd.. what is that 8 feet? They'd put this 8 foot piece of 3x12, very similar to this and wider and would tie it on there and put rollers under it. And sometimes they'd jack the boat up and put rollers in, which ever was the fastest, but they'd take these off put the boat on there and block it solid. And then they'd just pull it along and just pull it along and just keep changing the rollers. And if it started to go one way or the other they'd just steer it by moving the rollers.

EC: They'd have to block it up?

GM: And the sides were all level with this (the cradle). And they used to just come close so the rollers could just continue on.

EC: Yeah, we were wondering about this?

GM: It was quite easy, and it went smooth and nobody worked hard but they had to know what they were doing. Practice makes perfect and they'd been doing it for years. First there was only one boat, and then they made it a little longer and then they added right over into the fields.

MC: If you were the first guy on, you were the last one off!

GM: Oh yeah. Nakade used to have about 50 boats up there and Atagi Boatworks, they had them along the wharfs here in the wintertime. There was boats all over the place. Like Paramount, you know the blacktop, that fancy boat carriage with straps on it?

EC: Can you tell us a little bit about the people that worked in here maybe, real basic stuff? What sort of hours? When would they start working?

GM: I think we were on a 44 hour week when we first started at Britannia in the 50s. I don't know when 40 hour weeks started, in the mid 50s or so, in there I guess. The crews that worked in here were I guess, I'm going back. I don't remember the people that worked here in the 40s. I know old MacLashin, he was in here, he used to fish. But as far as the people in the 50s, that worked here, Allen Steves, there was Jack Hill, Adrian Allegretto was a seine boat captain in the summer months, in the winter months he was a carpenter here. Jack Weinrauch used to live next door to General Curry School. He came from Stoltz Boatworks too. In fact one of the Stoltz's and him were brothers-in-law. George Stoltz is his brother-in-law.

MC: Jack lives in Ladner.

GM: I live in East Ladner now too. We moved, the municipality bought our property for that care centre they're building. We were on Bennet, the south west corner there. I'm one of the people who stopped them from putting the theatre in the park there. Unfortunately it was my name that got put in the court order to stop the work because I had a list of names.

GM: So we had a money raising campaign for this court case that we were having. We needed some money for the ""Save the Park"" that was being established and we went into the malls one weekend collecting money. I never seen so many old women coming in from Minoru Senior Citizen's Place and wherever they were, they seemed to come out of the wood work. Archie Blair, Mayor Blair's mother, she was there, and we started going to the council. Here I'm sitting there and the Mayor's up there and his mother's sitting beside me. My mother and Mabel were good friends you see.

MC: Good for you.

GM: Well these people come in ""Darn you're doing a good job. There's no way they should build. My husband worked hard to give that money."" It wasn't a pile of money but I think they got the message, they had a problem and they backed off. (continuing the court case)

SR: There is a plywood rack.

GM: Yeah, that's not historical but it was put in, in the 50-60s.

SR: And that band saw was that belt driven or motor driven?

GM: Oh yes, there's a big belt there you can see, the belt, the motor was up on here and we had a couple of line shafts. The planner was here and the band saw was there. (see Steve's Drawing) The band saw also lines up with the hole in the wall over there for the long planks to go through.

SR: Okay.

GM: I think the planer was over quite a ways, might have been even there, over quite a ways anyway. And the band saw was well up and just in centre of that hole. That's about all the permanent things that were here. I think the original winch was up in here. The Kishi's winch was here, lined up pretty straight here. That winch shed is not that old, I'd say it was built in 1950. It is not truly heritage. Its going to stay there so you might as well call it heritage. What is it, 20 years old its a heritage? Now this work bench, that is heritage.

MC: What are all these little drill holes, was that to practise?

GM: Yes practice, yes because they had to be exact and they'd get lazy and rather than pick up a piece of wood they'd just go like that (he demonstrated) and then measure it.

SR: So they had adjustable bits?

GM: Oh yeah, little hand ones, the end had a sliding cutter out. This was the old, you know with the screw on it. That was in here because most of the stuff was right here.

MC: So would there have been a vice?

GM: That was right here, the vice yeah. I've still the knawl?

(Poor Sound)

GM: I was the boss here. The herring fishermen in the winter time need a big skiff and they were constantly tearing the front end out of the wooden ones. They were up behind the boat and they'd pick them up, they had big steel plates all the way down the side and they'd yank them out. They were constantly having trouble with them so the guys were telling me, ""For gods sake, build a decent skiff that is nice and high, not too wide because

GM: they had two boats on the back. Make the one with the power and so on it, so it won't fall apart."" So I designed that steel bow and then we knew what we were going to do. And then we got the plate made up and bolted it to the front of it and they never had any more trouble. When the ""Atlantis"" sank outside Tofino, they had a life raft and a big power skiff and this one and they decided to pull this up to the top of the cabin and over the galley. The boat was going down and they stepped into it and they just stayed as bone dry. Whereas the other boat sunk and smashed up and the life raft was faulty and didn't work so they decided to use this one.

EC: When did you build this boat?

GM: '61, '62, somewhere in there.

EC: Is it entirely made of plywood?

GM: Yes, its all plywood. All the strain goes on the front because it used to come up to the stern and it would bang and they'd yank it, like you would drag a dog by the collar. So its got a nice flat front so you can always set up nicely. The wooden ones are pointed and they'd be this way and that and they'd catch. It worked very well.

EC: Do they still build boats of the same style?

GM: No, they have changed now. The herring fishermen fish in fair weather because they fish close to the spawning grounds and they also have pumps to pump the nets, the fish out of them. So they don't even take the nets in and out.

MC: Can you tell us anything about this dwelling? (building #16) Who might have lived here?

GM: (In the '30s) Timmy Kamide, he was a fisherman (correction: He was a mechanic). He wasn't associated with the Britannia. And then Ed Ljunggren lived in here, he was a (carpenter) foreman for the Britannia.

MC: He was the Norwegian fellow?

EC: So this was a foreman's lodging?

GM: Well, yes originally in the '40s and 50s. I think it started around 1948.

EC: How did it look originally?

GM: Well, originally this board is the original here. What they used to do is build out (of) about six or eight 2x4s and

GM: they'd build these houses and they'd go from house to house with the 2x4s, so there's no frame (in the walls). There is no 2x4s in this thing. (not as we know now) Originally when they used these 1x12s, they'd put one (2x4) at the top and one in the middle and one on the bottom. Then they'd take these 1x12s and nail them on and they had battens (or 1x3s). This one had two layers here, this is a fancy one.

MC: How would this building compare in size to other buildings?

GM: As for a single family, this is about the average size. A lot of them were duplexes and triplexes, about the standard size. The odd one was longer and bigger. They might have originally been built as duplexes and then changed to single family, in my memory. Now for bachelor pads they weren't as big as that shed there, very small. Some of them were just six feet wide.

EC: What would they have in them? Just a bed?

GM: Oh yes, they'd work all the time you know. One little tiny room 8x12 or something. And the little heater and they didn't have insulation like they do now, one little tiny heater kept them warm.

EC: How did they keep warm in the winter time?

GM: Everybody burnt wood, a lot of wood. All these houses all they had was kitchen stoves. I can remember all those cheap five dollar specials, you know, 30 inches high and oval shaped and there'd be a little make shift chimney out. (the wall and up the outside.) They used to put a shelf about half way along where the stovepipe came from, plugged with plaster on the outside. Some of them went right down to the ground but most of them were on a sort of a shelf and they had chimney's up.

EC: Would that be a proper stove, or just sort of...?

GM: People still have them when they're going up the mountain, they're favourite ski camp stoves.

GM: And then there were the cast iron long ones. My son's got one about 18 inches wide by about 40 inches long, cast iron with a door on the front.

(Poor Sound)

MC: When was the door made bigger?

GM: (Describing interior of building #16) That went into the kitchen, and there was a lean to on the back of this one too. Every house had to have a lean to on it for some reason.

MC: Do you have any idea what this is? (metal holder on door)

GM: That's a pyrene fire extinguisher (holder). That's that very toxic stuff. (Pyrene was banned in late 50s, early 60s)

EC: This would be a single family dwelling in the 40s?

GM: Oh yes, and the 30s. The Japanese left here in 1942. This was main street (talking about the boardwalk). It wasn't up high like this, this was raised up to go more in line with the Britannia. And up here its all lined up for hauling lumber. When I first started you couldn't come along the dyke in the 60s I guess. So all the lumber and everything was dropped off at Phoenix. And this sidewalk, big long lumber carriers, two wheeled, the carpenters or helpers would haul stuff back and forth. This sidewalk went past No. 2 Road, almost to London Farm.

EC: What kind of traffic would go along here?

GM: Everybody. The Phoenix Cannery's Chinese labour force. Which was about 30 Chinese, used to live at Hong Wo's up here and they'd walk back and forth here. And when I was riding my bike in the morning they'd be walking one way and then I'd be asking, ""Excuse me, excuse me"". And they'd give me a hard time. And coming home in the afternoon, same thing then they'd go up at noon hour to eat.

MC: Who would have lived in here? (grove behind Richmond Boatworks)

GM: All the Japanese fishermen. There were over 2,000 families of Japanese in the Steveston area. (correction: Richmond - Child of the Fraser places number of Japanese families at 200 before WWII). That's how I learned to speak Japanese. I was in a buggy in their houses. Back here further, there was a pool room. I don't know whether it was in that net loft.

MC: What about those old pilings?

GM: If you look at the old buildings there's a bit of a wharf there. There was a little shed there, and I was trying to decide what it was for. There's been several stories but I think it might have been the lead house. They used to cast lead lines for the gill nets and they'd mold these leads onto the outside of the cotton lines for weights. Because they had this hot, hot fire going all the time the risk, insurance wise, was high. They had to keep it separate. Every cannery had one. That one had it for years. When I was a little kid they had a cat walk up there 2 - 3 feet wide and barrels, 45 gallon barrels. Wine barrels all the way along with rain water for in case of fire. A lot of them had

GM: a little escape hatch (to get on the roof), to throw water (on a fire). They had these chimneys going up and a lot of wood fire. There'd be sparks coming out of it and starting it up. (on fire)

EC: So they didn't have hoses connected to it?

(Poor Sound)

MC: (pointing to shipyard sign) Do you have any idea what was underneath there, where its whited out?

GM: Probably said Anglo British Columbia Packing Company first, then Canadian Fish Co.

MC: Okay, so its probably a combination of all the different owners.

GM: The red box, that probably the alarm put in by Canadian Fish.

SR: What is that box? (small room above the deck in the shipyard)

GM: That's a good question. As long as I can remember its been used for storage. A couple of guys just used it for storage. I don't know whether it was sort of a foreman's quarters or what. I don't even know if it was there when the cannery was operating.

MC: Is this the original winch?

GM: I could have changed power but I think its the original winch. Probably was a steam donkey from a logging operation.

MC: So where do you think it might have come from originally?

GM: Oh, I don't know. George (Shorey) found if somewhere in Vancouver. So this would have been like a second had winch form some defunct logging operation. I spent a lot of time here. This was the clutch to engage it, this was the brake you know.

MC: So before BC Electric, it would have been a steam? Would it have operated as a steam?

GM: I don't know how he ran it here at first. I think he would have run by engine if not electricity. That motor is quite an old motor. As long as I can remember, that motor has been there, and looking at the switch box system, its pretty old.

EC: And it was used for both sides of the ways?

GM: Yeah. They had one set of blocks and one of them was a haul back. It went down a single line down and back for hauling the carriage down. And sometimes if the boat was there too long it would set. It wouldn't move, you know. In fact I broke one of those (the shackles) once and it went charging down there. It broke the big one inch shackle and away it went, bumpity bump, bumpity bump. It seemed like three hours before it hit the water. It broke the stop, there was a big timber across the bottom for a stop. Well, it broke that and went right off and the carriage settled down nice and slow into the water and the boat was sitting there nicely. Somebody came out to see the boat, ""Are you going to launch it tonight? Where'd it go? Its gone!""

MC: What was the name of that boat? Do you remember?

GM: It was the ""Pine Leaf"", an 85 foot boat.

MC: Oh, that's a big one. So was the boat okay? The cradle was on the bottom? How did you get the cradle back out?

GM: One of the fellows that worked for me was a diver in the navy. So I got one of the boats that had a nice flat deck on it, so he dove down and he hooked on to the cement blocks, they were all relatively new cause I'd modernized it. He hooked it on and he got it to come up straight and its muddy water but he brought it in, towed it up, brought it back into position and nobody knew it sunk.

MC: How long did that take to raise it?

GM: Just a few hours. The whole experience happened in an afternoon.

MC: Well that's a good story to remember. Speaking of stories, do you have any stories about rum runners, like boats or anything?

GM: Well, Mr. Bell Irving was here. He hadn't heard about it but they did build one boat here. He said they never built boats here. I said they built a rum runner in there. He said, ""Its news to me"". But they built the rum runner in there.

MC: Do you know what it was called?

GM: No, I can't remember. It didn't last very long. It was seized over by Pender Island somewhere about its first trip or something.

MC: There was a still like right quite close wasn't there?

GM: I don't know about here, but Reifel had one over on Westham Island. That's where he got his start was rum running. They had very competent engineers here. It was one of the best shipyards in the lower mainland, speciality work. They were all professional. They all served their time in the various trades, they were very good engineers.

EC: What king of boats would they use for rum running?

GM: Oh any kind of boat. There was fish boats. There was fast ones and slow ones. Just anything that would float and sneak across the line. This was supposed to be a fast one but I don't know how big it was and the company that built the boat couldn't have been that big or would have had to tear the whole place apart to get it out to launch it.

(Poor Sound)

MC: Somebody told us that there was a still in the pig works.

GM: Oh that's somebody's home brew. At the corner of Moncton and Railway Avenue. (the pig farm was only there in the mid 40s)

REMINISCENCE ABOUT OLD TIMES ON HIS FARM

GM: Now here is an important room.

MC: Oh yes, that's the washroom right?

GM: That's a two holer. Then it was changed into a his and hers.

EC: Straight into the water?

GM: Yep.

SR: (about the door in the end wall) What went out there? What was that all about?

GM: To cart anything through here. Actually there was a net rack over here, a lot of fishermen had storage property here. If you were swinging something around you couldn't come across here (the track) so they used to walk around here for years and years. As soon as George (Shorey) retired I made that thing up over that cat walk.

MC: What about this storage bin?

GM: All along here there were storage bins. These were all storage bins for different boats. Every boat had a name on it and that shed over there. They'd store their gear, like blocks

GM: and tackles. Locks on them so that it wouldn't be stolen when the boats were being repaired.

EC: How many of these would there be?

GM: There were twenty or so storage bins all the way along here.

MC: What about that room up high with the name ""Alaska Queen"" on the door?

GM: That was a seine boat that came here in 1953.

MC: (Question about the rock ballast pile that used to be to the east of Britannia Shipyard) And it would have come from probably all over the world?

GM: From England or where ever they last unloaded and they came in ballast here. Maybe from the west coast of Vancouver Island, maybe from Mexico, maybe Japan. They dug it all out when they dug the basin. There's still the odd bit of it around here somewhere.

SR: (About cat walk across ways) Would you have to take the thing out when you were putting a boat in or out?

GM: Oh yes. See the swivel post there, there's one on that one over there too. I had a set of blocks up here (in the rafters), somebody's taken them down. The ring came there, you'd lift the ring up and put the blocks on it, take it up and it would all fold up neatly. When you brought a seine boat in, generally the wheel house would hit up there so you couldn't get the stern much more than here anyway. So got this nice average spot and we'd bring all the boats in and we'd stop them when their stern was here. So then they could sit and paint them. The stern would be nice and handy for painting or if you wanted to do some hammer work it was very handy for working on. Yes, just the right height. Dandy. The odd stern was up high, some were down low. But for years and years this damn thing was a curse to me. So as soon as George (Shorey) retired I had this thing made so fast. Not much to look at but boy it worked.

MC: What about these vertical boards?

GM: That's just a lot of patching. That's a lot of the houses around. This would be (an inside) wall cause its blue. They were white and a lot or red oxide paint, that used to brush off. It was terrible stuff. All up and down the coast they were either white or red, the trimming was either red or green, a lot of green on white houses. (Company colours mostly)

EC: Is that that white wash stuff?

GM: White wash, its just lime and water. Inside all these buildings were done that way for light purposes.

MC: And cleanliness too when it was a cannery.

GM: Yes, everything was white washed.

MC: What about this storage area here?

GM: Its been there for years. Different people used it. The last person I remember is the old ""Sea Ranger"". In the 50s it

GM: was the ""Sea Ranger"", generally some halibut boat got it. They shared it. This dock used to go, there was a jog in it from here it went out here another 100 feet and it was here for years. There was a space here none of them had wharves right up to the side. Any place where there was a wharf up against it like this, the splashing it would get rotten. So generally on an unused area they kept the boat.

SR: That ceiling used to come out more?

GM: It used to come right here. It was about (1938-39) somewhere in there. There was a huge thunder storm and lightening hit the thing (north end) and tore the point out so they just pushed it in further and left it.

EC: Is that an anchor chain up there?

GM: Yes. There was a block hanging. See where the timbers are rotten there? There was a boom step there. A boom went up in the air and they used to pick up the rudders and things out of boats that they were working on.

MC: (Talks about wrecked boat out front on the island)

GM: All along in here boats galore, sunken. There was an old fish packer up the point. When I was a little kid there was a boat about a 50 foot boat there, sank. It had out lived its usefulness so they just left it. Its probably still there, that one.

MC: Have you ever been out on that island? What's it called, Shady?

GM: Shady Island, Steveston Island. The original island stops right where those rocks are. Right on the tip of the island is where they put the landing, they made a sort of a rock fill and the trucks used to back down in there and get rocks from the scow when they built this all along here. But the first thing they did was work on a row of rocks right down to the very end and then they put sand (up on either side.)

(Poor Sound) Its quite a unique area. They had right from the few sandy barren dunes right to an island that was well established. As long as I can remember its had trees on it and marshy though it was, I used to swim over there and row over there and play on it all the time. But it ended right here. All these trees are new since 1953. Tom Goode was our member of Parliament at that time and he had a great big opening ceremony down at Imperial Cannery in 1953 or whatever it was. They had huge letters on the inside

GM: of the rocks there. I can always remember -> ""A Goode Job"".

MC: So you said there was a spur of rocks, would it have been put down as far as it (the island) goes?

GM: Yes, no, no right to where the end of it is now. You can see it down there.

MC: The boats used to be able to come straight over?

GM: Well, there was channels. There was quite a wash on the other side of the island. There was these jetties that went out at right angles from the island. They'd go out and down this way, to the top and then there was one right out here. And as soon as the tide got passed that, it would come in and it went right into Imperial Cannery so there used to be a gill netter drift called the Shady Drift. The Shady Island is what its named after. And they'd start picking up when they hit Phoenix. They'd pick up this end and by the time they picked up the other end of the net they were down to Imperial and then they'd go back up here.

MC: Why would that spur have been put in? Was it for a break water?

GM: Well, Steveston didn't have a harbour. Steveston was wide open. You couldn't tie a boat all winter. From here up you could. From this place (down) you couldn't leave a boat. So all those pilings up there were relatively new. (Pilings along Island) Right up to No. 2 Road. These people used to take their boats up because of the south east gales. Because of the north east gales. It was too windy, they'd chew the side of the boat out on these pilings and they'd bounce and the water would be sploushing. And I'd be riding my bike down along the dyke and in certain areas, like between Phoenix and Imperial was a bad spot, and then further on down there was a spot but I didn't get exposed to it too much and even in here at high water it was quite bad. There was net lofts here, the seas would come in, hit the dyke and splash over the walk way, you know. And I'd get soaked going to school sometimes.

MC: When did fibre glass construction start to be popular?

GM: 1958-59 was the last big push on wooden boats. So say it started in about 1960.

MC: Would that have been out of that Stoltz (Boatworks)?

GM: Stoltz was one of the original boat builders that came in, (used glass) especially commercial boats, several Beaver glass

GM: hulls. And different people got on the band wagon very quickly. But he was the leader, and they're still solid boats.

EC: What are some of the drawbacks of the wooden boats?

GM: Deterioration. Stoltz boats were so heavy that they could hit a rock, in fact they have hit the Steveston jetty down here and just yanked off at the tip of the nets and continued fishing. The only damage to the net would be underneath. What this hole was, (circular opening in a vertical post of the shipyard) lot of areas where there was work being done there was a hole like that, of a size like that 1/2"". A lot of times these things were used for straightening out pipe. (or bending pipe) These timbers up over your head there was a line shaft up here. What was in here I don't know cause this is a warehouse. Yeah, in some of the pictures its not here. I don't think the shipyards, cause there's white paint on it, it had to be cannery time. Now what they had here I don't know. Maybe they had a lacquering machine in here years ago. A lacquering machine being a machine they used to put a lacquer sort of like a tar, oily tar (on cans) and they'd have these long sets of rollers on them and they'd roll through this vat of hot lacquer. Come out and then they'd have this big blower blowing air up through it and as it went through it, it had quite an elaborate long blowing shoot, huge blower this long (about 15 feet) and they'd blow air through it and the cans would go along and this thing would be turning and slowly the sets of half inch pipes all along that far part and they'd roll along on the conveyer slowly and the cans would roll on top. Rows and rows of them and they'd come out just the colour of your hair, beautiful, beautiful. Funny enough it was just a light brown like that.

MC: What about these brackets up here?

GM: These brackets I put up. The water used to came along through here and it was forever freezing so that box that come across with the sidewalk there from the dyke and all along here, built a box to put the hose in, water hose, and insulated it. That's all it is. And that was in the 60s. (talk about salvage items on the floor of the boatworks) It is not pertaining to this place at all.

MC: What about the curved metal bar in the rafters above?

GM: The metal hoop is the width of a boat. It used to be around the stern of a boat, you'd drop it down just level with the end of keel and what not so that the net could be pulled up and come clear. The first original drum seiners had that. They had to have something to hold it (the net) away. It was a very

GM: poor system. It had to be heavy otherwise the net coming up (from underneath) this way would lift it up. It had to stay down there, there was nothing to hook it to, gravity held it down. But that's a hoop. They used to call them hula hoops but its a net hoop to keep the net away from the propeller and rudder. You see its quite smooth in the corners. How everything's recessed in a hole there so the net didn't hook on to it.

(Discussion: Heavy dolly salvage item, probably from Phoenix Cannery. Boom Chain.)

GM: That's just a boom chain with a big ring, four inch holes, something like that, into a log. (Walking Tour Through Various Rooms In Shipyard)

GM: That little doorway (in stockroom wall) was for exotic material like stainless steel shafting or brass fittings. This one was for the special, the racks were for steel.

EC: So they wanted to keep it secure? What else would be in here?

GM: The stock for just net and general merchandise, he had some paint. Yes. This area had the more awkward types of things, seldom used things in here. This used to be a paint locker in here. This was the stock room. All the paper work was in this corner. Yes, this was the carpenter's shop. There was a big band saw here. (points out old location of the boiler and steam box) Some changes were made in this area over they years you know.

EC: How long would that steam box be?

GM: Oh, I can't really remember, about eighteen feet anyway.

EC: About the same size as in the Kishi?

GM: Yes, for the long running rails or ribs and planks. Very few steam boxes were 30 feet. Most of them were about 20 to 25 feet.

MC: What is this here?

GM: That is a pump, a wash down pump for washing the boats and for fire. But basically it was a wash down pump to squirt the barnacles and junk off the sides (of boats)

MC: Power wash?

GM: Yes, same idea. Its about 120 lbs to 150 lbs they used to pump out. Not like the steam power washes now a days are 2000 lbs. This one was put in by Canadian Fish because the one we had here was a picturesque (one). It was coming off the line shaft and it was oscillating. We had a pop off valve outside so if you had too much pressure and it would be popping there every time this thing went back and forth. Sometimes a small man couldn't hold it (the hose). It had to be a guy your big size (Eddie) or mine to hold it. It was all I could do to hold it. It was a classic.

MC: I wonder where it went? It must have been noisy working in here?

GM: No. That thing wasn't a very high decibel and this thing just grinds, it wouldn't be a high decibel noise either.

EC: Do you know the age of it?

GM: Well it is not new. They haven't made Viking pumps like that for years but around canneries that pump's been around for years. That was put in here in the 70s. Canadian Fish did it. They wouldn't put up with that other one. Either that or they didn't know how to fix it.

(Poor sound)

Into Mechanic Shop

GM: These are storage shelves for whatever and parts. And the exhaust, you couldn't run an engine so if you wanted to run an engine you had to tube it down and out. (pointing to the exhaust escape tubing in the floor) The steam box came all the way out here so there was another four feet, five feet beyond in there. So it was a good sized steam box. When the boiler was running I had a (heater). You can see the piping coming in and it went out over the top and it circulated through an old car radiator I had here and it had a fan behind it and it kept it nice and warm. There used to be weeks at a time when we had one man cutting wood like that steady to keep the steam up when they had the steam box going. And they had these old flunky, or manual labour guys around. And one guy, that's all he did is keep the steam box going. Oh, it was a small fortune. I put oil into it. So I came in here just when there was a lot of change. George Shorey, the fellow that built it, he didn't worry this at all. There was a washing basin here, as you can tell, and it was a solvent for washing engine parts and they had to put that on top when it wasn't in use. This folds up, its quite an obvious thing. This room here was the battery room and the other was a paint room.

MC: How about this? What would you store on the racks?

GM: Racks of steel, different sizes and shapes, shafting.

MC: What is that metal thing there?

GM: That's the lid for the chimney for the blacksmiths.

MC: This area here was a combined blacksmiths and machine shop?

GM: This is where all the work (was done). This is where the sweepings were dropped (through the floor).

SR: Environmentally friendly machine shop.

GM: This one (another trap door) was for the lathe cuttings. The lathe was right here and they would just swish it out

there. That's why there is that big pile out there in the water. It was up to the hole here and we had to pull it down. Eventually we had a winch, crane, block and tackle and we couldn't move it. We didn't know whether to blast it or what. Well, they just knocked it over and started again.

SR: So what belonged here? Was it motor driven?

GM: Yes, it was an electric motor. Just a small little kind, it wouldn't take a lot. But this one massive motor up here [drove most of the machines]. This is what's at Phoenix. There's a full set, the motor isn't quite as big as the one that was here but whether its needed or not I don't know. Its still running several things over there. And it had a big pulley to get the speed down quickly. It had a big pulley here and then this one ran over to another shaft that drove a key cutting machine and the shaper was over there, the lathe went over there. Compensation made us put these protective things (screens) on the belts so that they wouldn't fall on any body if they broke. There used to be a battery charger on the wall here and this is where the batteries were and that's why this is eaten out here. It was acidy and it was, all the wood was all gone soft from the batteries boiling (over), you know. And when they were boiling there were little drops eating (at the wood). (pointing to the lever from the ceiling). This is the clutch for the shaper that was here. The old hack saw was right here behind you. It was a beautiful hack saw, it had a water cooler on it and it had an automatic (blade) raiser. There was a cam that raised it on the back stroke so that it just cut, it doesn't drag and wear the teeth.

MC: Do you have any idea where those types of things went?

GM: I don't know where it went, a lot of the machinery when they took it out, what they didn't use at Paramount they just gave away or sold.

EC: Were these machines heavy enough to just sit there?

GM: No, this was bolted down. This was the chimney that had a grand old home made heater here. There was a shelf up here somewhere and a little pump had a suction line and it would pump it through this thing and it had a little pet cock on it. Open this up and get the right amount of air into it and the pressure line came around and into this end and it would just, he pinched a quarter inch tube and he pinched it to a little tiny hole so that it squirted and he put more or less air into it until it burnt clean. It never did burn clean. There was always piles of smoke.

MC: What would be the purpose of it?

GM: Just to keep warm. To stand around and tell stories.

MC: Evidently this brick was made locally, its grey brick, and that's why they put this banding on it because it is not strong?

GM: I wouldn't swear that it was local brick. I think they bought it at the cheapest price.

MC: What would this have been? (pointing to metal pegs coming out of chimney band)

GM: A coat hanger to keep your coat warm. It was all overalls hanging and when you came in and took your coat off you put your overalls on. There was a set of stairs up here. The old original stock room was up here. The lunch room was in there. (Moving out on to the outer deck)

(poor sound)

GM: (pointing to the crane on the deck) It was used to lift the big power skiffs and net gear and stuff. We'd store them up here.

MC: So you'd lift all the heavy articles with this crane.

GM: They (the power skiffs) were heavy in those days.

MC: How long would those skiffs be?

GM: About 22 - 24 feet. This is an old drag line case that we rebuilt here in 1958. George Sturgeon did most of the welding, the blacksmith that was here. We all had a crack at handling it, anybody that worked here. Its an old Continental Industrial (engine). But it was an old drag line, the old scoops that pulled buckets and they dump them. But they bought that part

GM: cheap. But there used to be a hand winch here, a mast with guide poles on it, hand cranked.

(tour boat goes by)

GM: The guy that was going back and forth for years on one of those things was telling tall tales and one day I met him and I said, ""Geeze I wish you'd get your stories straight"". And this guy says, ""Yeah, you know what the hell's this for? What's that for?"" And he started asking what everything was for so I told him and he said, ""Oh, that's not what we've been saying"".

MC: Maybe they could hire you to go up and down the river.

(pointing to bottom of crane)

GM: That was for the drag line, the only time we used it, we put a snatch block on here if we wanted to pull something towards us.

SR: We might undertake to rebuild this thing.

GM: You should cause it was a beautiful gear. I tried to get the company to put it on to something more concrete and usable because going into containers, you know containers of water slush ice and fish, they haven't got anything that can lift it and they could have gone that route and used this you know. Because this thing was fantastic.

MC: Where was the initial part purchased?

GM: In a junk dealers in Vancouver.

EC: Did you ever operate this?

GM: Oh yeah, I was one of the main operators. George Sturgeon did most of the welding on the boom. Cecil Fisher did all the machining on it.

EC: Can you give us an idea of what the levers are for?

GM: These are for the clutches on the winch and on of them is the clutch for the turning. Which one is it now? This one is for turning and these two are for the two winches, two drums. This is an additional thing for the boom on top, just kept them separate. They just converted the hydraulics into that and they lift or lower the boom with that. The winch way down in there just runs off that one gear.

EC: What is this?

GM: That is the main clutch to engage the engine to the hydraulic pump.

EC: You wouldn't have to mess with that much?

GM: No. You'd just put that in and when she'd start to run. This is a flow control valve here and really when it was a real drag line it was completely mechanically driven. And these you just pull on them gently and then when they start rolling, pull it right in gear and it'd be completely engaged or else you'd just slip them you see and then the brakes of course for the drums would stay. But the way we ran it with the hydraulic you'd put it in gear and then we'd use the hydraulic control. It was a lot smoother for turning and for lifting things.

EC: Not much head room in there? (Gerry standing in control area)

GM: Oh, there was enough you know. Its about 6'3"".

MC: Does this bring back good memories.

EC: Do you remember what it said on the side there?

GM: No. Some machinery company, no. I put the load gage on the boom. Compensation made us put stoppers on it. We had to have some idea of how many (pounds were being lifted). I got that one passed. Its the load gauge. The further out you go the less of the lift. Its a safety guard. This gives you the number or pounds of whatever. We never

looked at it but it was there for compensation. Yeah, they came around and raised hell in my tenure here. That's why all those baskets underneath the belts and this sort of thing.

MC: This winch over here (at the boat hoist).

GM: [Cecil Fisher made this hoist and a couple more for up the coast also.] The size of the cable [has to fit the drums]. This one is flat, in fact they are tapered a little bit. This spool is hollowed out for the cables. If we were going to use this again that floor has to be taken out and the metal checked because its just ordinary steel, mild steel. Channel iron and there's several layers of it granted but I think that should be checked over and the pulley's, make sure they still turn.

MC: Looks like there was a painting done on there.

GM: Whatever you do to a boat was done on there. (referring to the hoist platform) The boat would be leaned and tied up against there (posts) so it wouldn't fall this way , and lifted up with one of those tapered blocks. Generally they just sat straight,

GM: as close to straight as possible.

MC: Would they do barnacle work and scraping?

GM: Scraping and annual refits and shaft work.

MC: Now that water pump, would that have been utilized out here?

GM: Yes, all run from that inside one. And it was George Shorey that built the place. He'd served his time before the war in Ontario in the mines. He was a perfectionist and especially Cecil Fisher. He was impossible to work with. Stella, his wife, was a fantastic person. She's a nice person, really nice person. Cecil died of cancer in '61 or '62. He was maybe 64 or 65.

END OF INTERVIEW