

FORMER PRESIDENT OF A.B.C. PACKERS:

Mr. Ian Bell-Irving,  
1869 West 64th Avenue,  
Vancouver, B. C.

Researcher: Darlene Clyne

- Recalls his family's history in the cannery industry.
- Grandfather (Henry Bell-Irving) came out to Vancouver with the railway - Canadian Pacific Railways in 1886.
- He entered into partnership with R. P. Paterson and they formed the firm of Bell-Irving and Paterson.
- He saw in the canned salmon industry a useful product which could be preserved over a long period of time that would stand various economics pressures with the market and so he shipped the first ship-load of canned salmon to Great Britain.
- Great Britain is still today the largest consumer of canned salmon in the world.
- He took up options on several canneries on the Fraser River.
- Then went back to England and interested some of his family to form a company.
- The company---Anglo British Columbia Packing Co. Ltd. was formed in London in 1891.
- They started out with several canneries on the Fraser River and expanded up the Coast to the Skeena, Nass.
- In 1895 the only cannery that Henry Bell-Irving ever built himself was the Good Hope Cannery in Rivers Inlet.
- Recalls their Alaska Cannery and its operation.
- Speaks at great lengths on this.
- In those days the fish were caught in front of the cannery and they were packed in the tin in almost the same day.
- In those days they made their own cans.
- Recalls the early problems of the canneries of over fishing the area, the short runs, the salmon not returning, too much money being put into boats, too many fishermen's debts, etc. etc.
- The First World War created a demand for certain products of fish for the armed forces.
- In the early years the prime species of salmon caught was the sockeye.

- British wouldn't look at anything else but red salmon.
- Recalls how the logging industry ruined the salmon runs.
- Recalls the early days of the unions.
- The canning was carried out by Chinese who were under contract to management.
- The Chinese contractor did screw the worker down as far as he could.
- An instance of this was if a load of salmon was coming into a cannery from the grounds the foreman would try to delay the unloading of the fish until 8 A.M. there by, he wouldn't have to give the workers breakfast.
- In those days they used to contract to the canneries for the canning of the fish on a per case basis.
- If there was a large pack of fish there would be a lot of money in it for the workers.
- The cost per case would be less to the management because of the volume.
- Most packers have gone broke not necessarily on short packs but on big packs where sometimes they would get so much fish, and then they couldn't sell it.
- These companies were normally financed 100% by the bank.
- If the banks told them to get rid of it, they would have to sell it for less than the going price.
- Recalls the world market at that time.
- Believes that some canneries made some very good profits in the early years, but some had some very bad losses.
- There was never a shortage of workers in the summer time.
- Speaks in great lengths on the sanitation conditions.
- Discusses trap fishing.
- Discusses the A. B. C. Packers Co. in Alaska and troubles that arose.
- Obtained a plant in Eastern Canada in herring fishing in 1966.
- The first year of fishing "we hardly put enough fish through the plant to dirty it".
- The second year we brought some fishermen from the West Coast around to the East Coast to show them how to seine.
- Explains the operation of this plant.
- In 1968 we were making good money in the East when out here on the West Coast we were losing our shirt.
- In 1967 it was the end of the herring fishing here.

- We had fished ourselves out.
- Explains how A. B. C. Packers got greatly into debts with fishermen's debts, boats, poor salmon runs, and world market not being that good.
- Discusses how A. B. C. Packers got out of the fishing industry on the West Coast.
- Our plant in Steveston had 25 acres of land when we sold it to Canadian Fish.
- Discusses the selling off of all the companies assets on the West Coast.
- H. Bell-Irving and company who were the managing agents for A. B. C. Packing Co. also were share-holders of A. B. C. Packing Co.
- But the majority of share-holders were still in England.
- In 1970 decided to move the head-office from Great Britain out to Vancouver.
- Tells story about this.
- Discusses the economics of A. B. C. Packers and the fishing industry.
- Very few fishermen had their own boats in the early 1900's because they couldn't afford them.
- In those days they were row boats or sail boats.
- They were towed out to the grounds by a packer or a tender, and they were dropped on the grounds and they would fish.
- And the fish would be collected from them and then on the week-ends they would be towed back in again.
- Then they would hang their nets, put them in blue stone solution and then mend their nets, and go out again on Sunday night.
- The fishing season then would last a month, maybe six weeks depending what area they were in.
- Discusses the fishermen and the fishing technology of today.
- Discusses the pattern of the Japanese fishing.
- Recalls some of the racial problems that did occur in the fishing industry.
- When A. B. C. Packing Co. decided to bring their head-office out to Vancouver it was no longer necessary to have H. Bell-Irving Co. as agents.
- So H. Bell-Irving Co. name was changed to A. B. C. Packing Co. and the employees of the H. Bell-Irving Co. just went over the A. B. C. Packing Co.

- H. Bell-Irving Co. ceased to exist as a agency and just became a holding company.
- Tells story of this.
- Left the company in 1973.
- Discusses the fishing and the A. B. C. Packing Co. on the Eastern Coast.