

Interviewed: February 2, 1976

FORMER MANAGER & PRESIDENT OF B.C. PACKERS:

Mr. Ken Fraser,
8125 Angus Street,
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- There was three generations of Frasers who at one time in their lives were employed by B. C. Packers.
- Mr. Fraser's father was involved in the fishing business in 1894 on the Nass River.
- 1904, his father came down to Imperial Cannery in Steveston as fishing boss.
- 1942, Mr. Fraser became Manager of B. C. Packers.
- In 1958, Mr. Fraser's oldest son, Brian, joined B. C. Packers.
- Mr. Fraser started in the industry working for a Chinese contractor in 1923 which was before the minimum age came into the industry.
- He was paid 8¢ an hour and if he stayed the full season, he was given a bounce of 2¢ an hour.
- There were some very prominent Chinese contractors, for example: Mr. Woo Shoo (?) at Imperial; Mr. Chong Dot (?); Mr. Charlie Sooie (?); Mr. Maa Bing (?).
- "There was a lot of very prominent business like Chinese that got involved in this contractual labour in the canneries throughout the B. C. Coast".
- The Chinese contractors were responsible for keeping track of the employees' time, which were basically Native and Japanese.
- In 1923 the canneries didn't have the vacuumal closing machine.
- Salmon was canned raw.
- The cans of salmon were put into a "coding box" where the cans went around on different chain routeing where they gained sufficeint temperature so that when the cans were sealed, the retraction of the hot air in the can created a vaccum.
- Mr. Fraser worked on another machine called the "Clincher" which put the lids on the cans.
- "In those days you didn't have the high speed equipment you have now".
- In those days machines could handle about 120 cans a minute, today they produce about 300.

- The big break through in the salmon canning industry came in 1913 with the development of the Iron Chink, prior to that time all the heading and gutting was done by the Chinese by hand.
- From the Iron Chink the salmon went to the "Slime Tables" where they were inspected and cleaned sufficiently for canning. Most of this help was performed by Natives then the salmon went into what is known as "Gang Knives" which cut the salmon into pieces the height of the cans. These pieces were then taken in boxes to the "filling tables" where the salmon was put into the tins.
- The filling was done mostly by Japanese women.
- The salmon then had to be salted.
- The next big break through was the vaccum machine which came out in 1926.
- In the early years a cannery which put out 30,000 cases of salmon was a big pack because all the work was done by hand.
- Today a cannery can put out 400,000 cases.
- "The automation of the plants was the stepping point of this big consolidation and merger and closing down of the plants in the late 20's".
- In effect, it was technology which facilitated the consolidation and mergers of the canning industry.
- Technology increased cannery production.
- Mr. Fraser tells the story of some 60 year old hand soldered tins of salmon which he discovered. They were sent to the American canning company's lab in New York; the salmon was found to be faded but still edible.
- Before the advent of the vaccum packing machine, tins had a small hole punched in the lid through which air was withdrawn. The hole was then soldered closed.
- In the early years cannery help was brought in from as far up as Yale (mostly Native people).
- The women were brought in by stern-wheeler.
- The Native women were known as "Kluteshes"(?).
- They landed at the dock with all their supplies and bedding. The cannery supplied them with houses while they were working there.

- The houses were "primitive" but they served their purpose. At least they were sanitary.
- The houses had no shower, baths and had outside toilets.
- The Japanese located at the plant on a year round basis and lived in company provided houses along the Dyke of the Fraser on the other side of the Dyke they moored their boats. This continued until the war.
- These houses were torn down during the war.
- About the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the war, Mr. Fraser states: "To me, I still think it was a costly and unnecessary action on the part of the government. Because here's a country at time of war that need food production and there's no doubt about it they were the ones who could have provided the top catches of salmon..... it was a terrific loss of a country in times of war when we needed protein to feed the people".
- The companies financed the Japanese fishermen after the war when they were re-establishing themselves.
- Mr. Fraser can recall no serious racial problems existing between cannery workers.
- Mr. Fraser attributes the decrease of Native people employed in the industry to the increase in other available employment.