

FISHING, TUG-BOATING, FARMING

Bill Hunter, with Mrs. Hunter  
363 Sexsmith Road, Richmond, B.C.

Interviewed: March 5, 1973.

Born in Vancouver - November 8, 1903. . . . lived in Vancouver, moving to 20th Avenue near Ontario St. adjacent to present "Little Mountain" where black bears came out, heavy timber area. . . father William S. Hunter came to Vancouver one year before railroad 1886 . . . same year to Steveston . . . worked in canneries . . . fishermen then all Scotsmen . . . fish plentiful . . . put out some net and net sank due to weight of fish . . . Scotch fishermen bought liquor with cannery money and wandered drunk in streets . . . canneries therefore brought in Japanese to work . . . father left to work for farmers in Ladner and Richmond . . . worked for Sam Brighthouse, probably for Steves family . . . then returned to Vancouver, sold real estate . . . between 1886 - 1900 Sam Brighthouse imported oak trees from England and planted on estate . . . recalls that Brighthouse Racetrack built on Brighthouse property . . . track centre social activity . . . thousands came out on inter-urban to attend racing . . . clubhouse a centre.

Fishing - 1886-1910

A chief industry in Richmond . . . large number of canneries around Delta on North Arm of Fraser, another further up on Jimmy's Island, another on Dinsmore Island, another on same centre channel. On South Arm, stretched from Steveston to New Westminster . . . pulled down three old canneries . . . cannery from Dinsmore Island sold planks to farmers to make bridges . . . as young man recalls Vancouver cannery, Acme Cannery at mouth of Fraser . . . all old

canneries gone . . . Imperial Cannery at Steveston now fishing activity centre, also Gulf of Georgia cannery.

Steveston had 8 saloons at one time, before prohibition . . . one main street . . . canneries on river banks most conspicuous buildings . . . rough roads . . . father on police force with Chief Andy Waddell, both Masons, was at Steveston fire . . . Bill, at home on Odlin Road saw smoke.

### Schools

Three main schools in his youth. Mitchell School named after Sam Mitchell, Cambie & #5 Road, Lord Byng School, old section built by Japanese. Bridgeport School included only high school - 3 rooms on west side upstairs . . . teachers there with influence on students and community were Mr. McIntosh, principal and Miss Esterbrooks . . . strap used then . . . deportment different then from now.

Ecological is greatest change . . . Richmond started as all farms except along B.C. Electric right-of-way which carried the inter-urban following the steam train from Vancouver to Steveston . . . people lived near railroad . . . bulk of island is natural state. Winter - large lakes of water with ducks, geese, swans . . . Richmond a haven for Vancouver hunters . . . water muddy so little sport fishing.

Gill net fishing for B.C. Packers . . . 10-12 pounds considered a big fish now.

c.1920 Hunter delivered newspapers, mail to Vancouver Cannery. Saw spring salmon weighing 130 lbs brought from up coast . . . fish lay on cannery floor . . . hunter caught spring salmon over 80 lbs. and coho weighing 40 lbs. . . saw freighters taking fish away.

Father recalled seeing sailing ships in the harbor. Early

No gas engines in early days. Fishing boats for salmon - flat bottomed large skiffs or round bottomed Columbia River boat with center board and one mast (used on Gulf of Georgia) . . . had one sail.

c.1900 - Japanese used that type . . . incident one day missed river mouth, struck mud flats, rolled over and 70 lost.

. . . incident: Monday morning out fishing for B.C. Packers, gas boat took many Columbia River boats in tow . . . fish boats were dropped off along way . . . used sail . . . when not sailing took mast down, wrap sail around mast which lay along gunwale, put up pup tent for living . . . boat was 28 feet long, 6 foot beam, with centreboard which could drop as keel for stability. When Hunter was 5 or 6 years old he saw lumber loaded into sailing ships at Old Hastings Mill, Vancouver.

Trapping Richmond a "low land" . . . subject to flooding . . . dykes were low early days . . . had ditches to drain off water . . . habitat for muskrats - good commercial quality . . . at 14 years he trapped and sold them for 25¢ before getting own license.

Milk delivery to Vancouver recalled. He saw long wagons loaded with cans of milk from Richmond dairy farmers on No. 5 Road, Fraser Street into Granville Avenue. When Hunter lived at Townsend's Crossing (now 70th Avenue) he saw first run of B.C. Electric inter-urban car go to Steveston with official.

Roads - were narrow and rocky, with high crown. Horse and wagon for transport or team of horses . . . then old Ford Model T and Chev. 490 . . . horses shied from autos, tipped carriage into hand dug small ditches (4' - 5' feet across).

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Peat bog in center not a bog because elevation 16 feet higher than surrounding land, but holds water because of growth . . .

Rifle Range there. . . with platforms 200 yards to 100 yards from it. In World War I soldiers brought out to practise shooting on range . . . climbed up to top of range 30 feet high, quite long, . . . made of timbers filled with peat moss . . . put targets up . . . island of big canals and small ditches those days . . . Beside No. 4 Road, No. 5 Road and No. 6 Road were dredge-dug canals which received water from smaller ditches . . . no pumps then . . . got pumps 15 - 17 years ago . . . saw peat fires burn.

Schoolmate at Bridgeport School of Arthur Laing . . . father of Laing prominent chairing local meetings . . . early history of Sea Island . . . also Jake Grauer . . . recalls old Jake hobbling over the bridges with cane (father of Rudy Grauer, later Reeve) . . . at first only power in vicinity B.C. Electric Railway.

Dairying - at 17 he was phoned one Christmas morning at 5 a.m. to milk 35 fresh cows by hand . . . in place of drunken farm hands at Eburne Dairy, Sea Island.

Marpole Infirmary originally was Marpole Hotel built by Jake Grauer with bar . . . prohibition came in and killed hotel business . . . government made Infirmary an adjunct to Vancouver General Hospital.

Roads - for delta land Richmond rock brought in by scows 40 feet long by 25 feet wide loaded with crushed rock . . . hauled by farmers to make road surface . . . came from high land, quarries up Howe Sound and North Shore, Indian River area.

. . . early depression years heads of families here with no vocation were paid 25 cents an hour to dig ditches by the Municipality . . . several days a month.

He had nothing to exhibit so didn't take part in Brighthouse fair . . . family had few chickens and a cow . . . largest chicken farmer at Garden City Road and Alexander had long wooden building with individual pens.

. . . Hunter's father owned remaining 5 acres of old Sexsmith farm, corner of Bridgeport Road and River Road . . . recalls living there attending Bridgeport School.

At Cambie School - manual training was outside building used to play basketball . . . later built old Cambie Gym, no Sexsmith Road then . . . came down barbed wire cow trail to Gym to play basketball during Hunter's last high school year at Bridgeport. . . . going to school delivered papers for Vancouver Province in Brighthouse area, to No. 4 Road, Cambie, Sea Island including the Canneries, plus mail to Canneries, used a bike . . . repaired own tires from parts (Vancouver) . . . recalls Blacksmith White located between the two Sea Island bridges . . . one in Steveston.

Towboat - Scratchley farm was No. 4 Road and River Road . . . son William Scratchley built a tugboat . . . Hunter eventually bought it to tow logs, scows to New Westminster, "beachcomb" cut logs from river, sell to farmers for fence posts . . . deadheads of hemlock explained, danger while towing logs . . . boat building popular, started by Japanese , . . anecdote re Miss Esterbrook and students . . . Bridgeport School held largest sports day . . . incident Ruskin Wright, son of Presbyterian Church minister Rev. Wright, hit teacher Mr. McIntosh in face with snowball outside school . . . heard strap applied every day in school . . . never today.

Richmond Hospital - built 1957. Has bronze plaque with his name inside door . . . all started with Richmond Ratepayers meeting (Hunter was secretary) which paid his way to interview minister of health, Victoria re building local hospital . . . hospital now too small . . . reason for building here was lack of beds in Vancouver hospital.

Logs - left in salt water subject to borer worm called a "toredo" makes holes . . . logs useless for lumber . . . doesn't bother cedar . . . bores into fir . . . advantage to have area to store logs in fresh water (toredos die there) so booming grounds on North Arm of Fraser, clear of river channel fairly sheltered from storms . . . later tugs take the logs to destination . . . used to see holes in wood brought around to homes for burning . . . chief vocations: lumbering, fishing, agriculture and gold panning on sand bars but not mining.

Sediment in river . . . large dredges pump out sand . . . used in foundations for buildings . . . sand porous, not cold or wet like clay . . . clay just ground up rock deposited by avalanche . . . only five feet down to blue clay . . . mixed with humus good for growing . . . Fraser River brought down deposits which make up these islands . . . same vegetation on top of mountains as in middle of bog . . . peat at middle and upper end of Lulu Island swamped over top of deposits . . . North Arm circles around Point Grey into beach on upper side . . . opposed sewage plant on Ione Island because would ruin beaches.

Logs all branded . . . tugs bring logs at high tide over Point Grey . . . logs break loose in wind . . . jump over boom sticks . . . people are sleeping on beach below Point Grey . . . Hunter had job

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to salvage logs ashore . . . got rolling hitch on logs then pull it off with boat . . . government dock nearby . . . incident of coiled towline rope near accident with legs . . . Hunter's brother lost his life walking logs in dark . . . working night time must carry a pike-pole.

Apple growing - on father's land (part of Sexsmith property) were trees -some from Ontario. Bellflower apple, large, pale yellow skin, a good cooker. Early transparent, color similar, first maturing, cooking and eating.

Cherries - baking and cooking cherry, English Merila, Bing, popularly grown is an eating cherry.

Logging - B.C. unique with cypress or yellow cedar . . . differs from red cedar because cypress leaves droop or hang . . . important for non-deteriorating ability of wood . . . doesn't rot in water . . . used for boat planking and boat ribbing . . . earlier as auto separators in auto batteries . . . wood has very fine grain . . . cypress is oldest timber in B.C. and not found below 3,000 feet . . . wood can be bent, fitted or carved.

Flume - wooden structure used to transport wood down mountains . . . water source at head of creek . . . dam is built at top end . . . flat bottomed wooden structure two feet with sides sloping out . . . water carries lumber down flume in rough terrain . . . flumes also carry drinking water instead of pipes . . . Mill on Fraser River cut yellow cedar for battery separators.

D. Cleland