

Interviewed: March 17, 1976

FISHERMAN & CANNERY WORKER:

Mr. Bob Ransford,
507 Steveston Hwy.,
Richmond, B. C. 277-7322

- Born in Steveston in 1913.
- Father worked in Richmond Cannery.
- Used to go fishing with my Dad at the end of the dock at Richmond Cannery for salmon.
- Father was bookkeeper for Todd's.
- Richmond Cannery burned down in 1924.
- First started work in 1926 with a gillnet boat.
- In 1927 went gillnetting with a friend commercially with a row boat.
- There wasn't any more than two to three White fishermen in the gillnetting industry in Steveston then.
- Back in the early 1920's it was all Japanese gillnetting.
- There were seines, but they didn't seine in the Fraser River at that time, the seiners were confined to the northern area at the time.
- By 1927 there weren't that many Indians gillnetting in the River.
- The Japanese were using the gasoline boats by then, and the only way to get a boat was through the company.
- It was difficult to finance a boat in those days unless you had a great deal of money.
- All Japanese lived in company houses.
- The Japanese were very hard working people, very productive.
- They suited the industry at that time better than any other source of labour for fishing.
- There were a lot of fish on the Fraser River at that time, your biggest problem was getting rid of them.
- The cannery couldn't handle them all and they usually had enough of their own fishermen (that lived in the houses and their wives worked in the cannery) that supplied all the fish to them.
- The cannery always took fish from their own fishermen before they would take it from independent fishermen.
- The canneries would have their own pack in by September 15th usually and then they would have to close down on their own fishermen.

- So if fishermen went out independently you would get along fine when there was a storage of fish.
- But once the main run came you would more than likely get cut off.
- In those days there was a limited market for fish, with most of them going to England and a few other countries.
- There was more fish than you seemed to get rid of every year.
- Remember in 1931 when I was fishing independently on the 4th of September (it was a pink run that year) I came in that morning with a deck load of fish, about 800 fish and I got \$3.00 for the load.
- Got 1¢ a piece for pinks; 5¢ for spring salmon; 5¢ a piece for sockeye, although it was late run sockeye.
- Don't believe the canneries made much profit in those days.
- Rowing in the gillnetting boat was rather rugged because you rowed yourself silly, they were heavy boats and the nets were heavy and you had to buck the tides.
- It was a young man's game.
- You had 5 days fishing in those days.
- You used to open at 6 a.m. Monday morning until Saturday 6 a.m.
- Sunday you had to mend your nets so the weekend went pretty quickly.
- There were a lot of gas boats by this time.
- Explains exactly how fisherman go about finding fish, the tides, the runs, etc.
- It's quite a study to do it correctly.
- No matter how long you have been gillnetting, its something you never stop learning.
- When I first started gillnetting just worked for buyers.
- In 1930 fished for the Gulf of Georgia and then fished for Phoenix Cannery until 1934.
- Then started collecting for Phoenix.
- The Phoenix Cannery started reoperating in 1934...it had been closed down for ten or fifteen years.
- They opened up with all Japanese fishermen except for myself and another White fisherman.
- I started the first White fleet, at the end of the season we had 12 White and Indian fishermen.
- By 1940 Phoenix had the largest White fleet in the Steveston area.
- Goes into great lengths of the discriminations between the Japanese and White fishermen.

- Also talks on the companies preference to the Japanese.
- There was a great separation between the Japanese and Whites.
- The Japanese kept strictly to themselves, with their own customs and cultures.
- In the early 1920's on the average the fisherman made about one thousand a season.
- Describes the Japanese living conditions.
- Speaks at great length of the Japanese evacuation in Steveston.
- Canneries tore down all their row houses in 1942.
- Mentions the Chinese being ~~passed~~^{phased} out and talks about the Chinese contractors.
- Fished in 1948 for Millard and Co. and got 85¢ @ fish, got paid every day.
- Next year Millard & Co. folded up.
- If you were a independent fishermen you could always get a little more money.
- Speaks on collect boats.
- The collectors had a fleet of boats that he had to looked after, also sometimes had to help the fishermen in the winter.
- We paid the fishermen "those days at Phoenix" every Saturday.
- Talks all about the Japanese saltery in Steveston.
- The salted fish was usually for the Chinese market.