

Interviewed: February 13, 1976

FISHERMAN: Mr. Charlie Clark,
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- Recalls early days of fishing where there was all gillnetting on the river.
- They were all Scots fishermen.
- They used to do a lot of drinking and on Sunday nights they didn't get out fishing.
- Bill Irwin at Phoenix Cannery was the first to take Japanese on the Fraser.
- When Japanese started fishing there was a war between the Whites and the Japanese.
- The Japanese used to "cork" the White fishermen.
- The White man would set his net and the Japanese would set their nets on each side of his and so that the fish would come into the Japanese net.
- Mentions that they even shot at one another.
- Recalls of funny story of a Scotch man.
- The seine boats would drift up the river and drift back they used to deliver the boats twice in a night.
- Tells how the Scots would deliver their fish to the cannery, about 150 to 200 fish to the watchman then give the watchman a bottle of whisky, while he was doing that the other fisherman would pile all the fish back onto the boat, this was done twice a night.
- This was done quite often, until the canneries found out and put a stop to it.
- Scots faded out when the Japanese came in.
- Mostly Norwegians took over then.
- Japanese very honest fishermen, on the job all the time, didn't get drunk, didn't cause any trouble with the company.
- When Bill Irwin took Japanese then all the rest of the companies followed; that's when the war started.
- At the old Colonial Cannery, was net boss for 30 years.
- When renovating the cannery, found in behind one of the walls, ten tins of salmon that were put up in 1898, open the cans and they were just as good as when they were done.

- Talks about being brought up in Port Alberni and going out and catching a dozen spring salmon before going to school "There were nothing to it".
- Speaks of the first seine boat he saw at Port Alberni off of Observation Island.
- Seiner set the net first thing in the morning and was still taking fish, first out at 6 p.m. that night.
- Had enough spring salmon to keep the cannery going for 3 days.
- Believes no way is there as much fish today as in "those days".
- Talks on fishing ecology, spawning and the complete cycle of the salmon.
- If they don't dam the Fraser and if we can get no high seas, salmon fishing, in 25 years we will have more salmon on the coast than we ever had in history.
- Because we are farming fish.
- Believes that Department of Fisheries looks after things pretty well.
- Says that we have such a big fleet today that even if we fish one to two days a week, we can clean out one creek in that time because we catch them all.
- When started fishing, fished seven days a week.
- Went out last year on the West Coast for 2½ months and only fished 12 days.
- Doesn't believe it's possible for fishermen to make a living today.
- Fishermen need to work more than two days a week to make a living.
- Fish boats today costing up to half million dollars.
- Government should not allow herring fishing at all.
- It's a good eating fish, good for human consumption.
- All they use it for is the roe, fishermen make good money but it is going to kill off our herring.
- You can't have the fish and the eggs too, you got to have reproduction.
- Against the gillnetts on the spawning beds.
- Gillnetters use a certain size mesh to catch the big fish.
- If you catch all the big fish, and let the little ones spawn, you're going to have a smaller production coming back in the next couple of years.
- Had five seiners once.

- After the First WW, canneries had fishing concession, big areas, ^{on} on one else was allowed to fish them.
- Kildonan Cannery had all of Barkly Sound and they had all of Nooka Sound.
- The government gave them these concession to build the canneries.
- There was only two seine boats that belonged to the cannery that could fish Barkley Sound.
- The men that had come back from the war were quite upset about this.
- During this period there was a place at Smith Inlet called the "glory hole" where the sockeye gather before they went inside.
- The Japanese were fishing this area with a seine for the company, the gillnetters or no one else could go in.
- So the men who had come back from the war seeing the Japanese fish their fish when they couldn't, went out one night and got three Japanese skiff, took them out in the inlet, poured coal oil and gasoline and set them all on fire.
- So that year ended it, next year government took the concessions away from the canneries, so any one could fish in those areas.
- Speaks of how after the WW I Major got concessions and made \$100,000 although the Major hired some one else to do the fishing for him.
- This applied only to the West Coast areas.
- Fleets are too big today, can't get enough fishing in to make it pay.
- Went to Kildonan on the West Coast at seventeen as assistant store-keeper.
- Became youngest Post Master in B. C. at the age of 17.
- Did that for a year then went out in the seine boats in 1918.
- In the early days seine boats didn't have restrooms and you slept down by the engine.
- And you took in your seine by hand, no mechanical devices at all.
- I was the first one to bring in a six day week, it used to be seven days but you had to have one day off.
- How I did it was I went to the Padre and ask him if it wasn't against the law to work on Sundays which he said it was.
- So he went to the company and told them it was against the law for fishermen to fish on Sunday.

- Then the union got started and we got two days off, which was better.
- Says nylon net real blessing to fishermen, lighter, easier to look after.
- As long as you don't get the sun on it; sun ruins it.
- Canneries weren't sanitary in those days.
- Was in charge in dispatching all the boats when they went out. (for Nelson Bros.)
- Only thing about fishing when you're a married man, you're away from home a lot.
- Doesn't think the canneries made much profit in those days because so many canneries went broke.
- In those days if canneries did 20-30 thousand cases in a season that was a good year.
- Now they can as high as 200,000 cases a season.
- In them days they had two lines as compared with six lines today in the canneries.
- Where they turn out 175 cans a minute.
- In them days, it was steam, with the steam engines and the belts going all the time.
- Was head of the union in 1926 for 6 years. I quit and they joined a bigger union.
- Once I got a boat I got kicked out of the union, then joined the Vessels Union.
- If you had a boat and employed over three men you couldn't belong to the Fishermen's Union you had to join the Vessels Union.
- You have shares, seven shares to the fishermen and five shares to the vessel owners.
- Talks on the care of the boats.
- Speaks on the early engines, big and heavy called "Clunkers", they weighed from ten tons to twenty-six tons.
- Believes boats are unsafe today, because of the way they are constructed.
- Japanese were never in the seining, they were all gillnetting before WW II.
- That's when the Whites invaded the gillnetting end of it, (When the Japanese were evacuated.)
- The Natives also fished during WW II but they drink too much.

- The companies wanted the Japanese back after WW II because they were better all-round fishermen.
- Talks on Natives today who have their own boats and are doing well.
- Talks on how he once lost his net.
- In 1919 got 25¢ for white spring salmon and 50¢ for red spring salmon.
- Had 105 pounds white spring salmon which sold for 15¢.
- Mentions in the early days believes the weights for the canneries were "fixed" in the company's favour.
- Believes in the early days men who had their own boat made more money because they fished harder.
- Talks of the new fishing equipment on today's boat.
- Says gillnetting is the obsolete way of fishing, should never be allowed.
- The right way to fish is to have a trap at the mouth of the Fraser and take what you want and be finished with it.
- Believes the gillnetter loses 15% of his fishes, that drops to the bottom and rots.
- When first started fishing herring, got \$11.00 a ton, now get \$131.00 a ton.