

Interviewed: March 18, 1976

ICE-PACKER: Mr. Isamu Matsuzaki,  
705 Francis Road,  
Richmond, B. C.

- Born in 1902 in Courtenay, Vancouver Island.
- His father was a coal miner for the Cumberland Mine.
- He has no recollection of Cumberland.
- His father fished until 1927.
- They lived at Steveston where the B. C. Packers, Imperial Plant is now.
- They had a big company house with some single fishermen boarders.
- His mother died when he was 14; he had 2 sisters and 1 brother.
- His father returned to Japan in 1927, for good, to look after some property there.
- His brother was educated at U.B.C. and returned to Japan to work.
- When he started to live in Steveston here was a large Japanese community of about 2,000 people.
- From end of Dyke to Garry Street at No. 2 Road, full of canning company houses: B. C. Packers, New England, Scottish Cannery, Atlas, Ballard, Gulf of Georgia, Imperial, Steveston, Phoenix, just on the Steveston side.
- There were lots of Indian fishermen as well from Cooper Island, Alert Bay and other parts of the coast.
- They lived in company shacks during the season.
- Later in the 30's the number of Indian fishermen decreased on the Fraser.
- They fished on other parts of the coast.
- He went to grade four in a school in Steveston.
- In a three-room school house.
- After 1913-14 there was a Japanese school there as well.
- They taught Japanese there from 3 until 5 after the regular school.
- He fished just one year for the summer time at 17 years old, then he became a skipper on a packer boat.
- At age 19 he built his own packer boat and was the skipper on it and was there until the war started working for several different companies.
- Was a cash buyer for two seasons but he worked mostly for B. C. Packers.
- His boat was (?) feet long, a full load was 14 tons.
- Today, packers are bigger.

- He changed engines four times on it.
- When the war came, the government took it and sent it to the East Coast.
- He had property and a house which he lost when the war came.
- He was sent to Castlegar near Nelson and worked for a mine there for ten years.
- The mine was "a base metal mine" an American outfit.
- Before that he worked in the woods and he even bought some properties there.
- Returned to the Coast in 1952.
- He went back to running a packer.
- Everyone was surprised when the war broke out.
- He did not get adequate compensation for the loss of his house and property.
- After the war it was hard to start all over again.
- But companies did help finance some of the fishermen.
- He went back to work for B. C. Packers and then he ran his brother-in-law's boat (a packer).
- Packers improved their techniques of storing fish.
- The fishing gear improved from cotton net to nylon which allows them to gill in the clear water.
- Cotton nets got dirty faster.
- When <sup>he</sup> ran the packer, he used ice, now a days they use a freezing system and a little bit of salt.
- Brine does not hold the fish for as long as freezing and the fish loses some of its taste when stored in brine.
- Packers sometimes bring fish from over 500 miles away.
- All the small canneries are gone now, better for the company but a lot fewer people employed now.
- Need for more fishermen these days.
- Fish catches are down for the last two years.
- There are a lot fewer boats in the fleet now than in the old days.
- His brother operates Matsuo's at the end of No. 2 Road processing fish.
- Chinese worked for the contractor for B. C. Packers.
- Japanese women worked filling the cans.
- The Chinese lived in a big bunkhouse, no women, just single men.
- Indians, Japanese and Whites got along fairly well, but they lived in segregated houses.

- Now adays Steveston is more cosmopolitan with a wide variety of nationalities, inter-mixed, which is much better.
- Indians came only in the summer months, so that there were few Indian children around during the winter.
- They used to celebrate May 24th in Steveston, with races, not much judo and kendo in those days.
- Japanese wrestling was held in the old opera house.
- The tournaments of judo and kendo were very popular.
- One hour from Steveston to Vancouver by tram; his parents went to a Buddhist Church on Hastings Street in Vancouver.
- There was a Buddhist Church in the present Steva Theater at one time.
- He and other children went to a Methodist Church (later United) in Steveston.
- Most of the Japanese remained Buddhist, at least 80% still attend there.
- He went as a child to United Church and he didn't really think about it not too many children knew any different about religion.
- Japanese Hospital was operated by the Japanese Fishermans Association; it had a Japanese doctor on staff in the hospital.
- Dr. Hall from Marpole also practised medicine there.
- There were about ten rooms in the hospital.
- The Fisherman's Association negotiated fish prices with the company.
- The White union often conflicted with the Japanese union over prices.
- Sometimes they cooperated in a strike, there was one big one after the war.
- Before the war it was hard to strike because fishing was only for a few months of the year and there was not much money in it, in those days so that fishermen had to work at other jobs.
- Lots of farming was done by the Japanese as well.
- In 1920 they tried to cut and reduce the number of Japanese in the fishing industry; they were confined to one area...now adays you can move anywhere with a license.
- This was a case of discriminations against the Japanese.
- It was a hard time for the Japanese then.
- Today the fleet has about 2,000 Japanese people in it...probably less as there is only about 6,000 gillnetters in all.
- In winter time, Japanese operas came from Japan to play in the opera house in Steveston.

- Movies were also shown there in the old Steva.
- The operas were very popular.
- There were lots of hotels and saloons in Steveston at that time.
- Steveston Hotel used to be called the Sockeye Hotel.
- There were lots of single fishermen then and there was lots of gambling.
- There was a gambling joint in the Chinese part of town, often fishermen working 2 or 3 months, would lose it all within a week.
- The Japanese drank and gambled the same as the rest, mostly single men.
- Steveston has changed: the first generation of old people has passed on.
- Steveston used to be mostly farming but its almost all gone now.
- Many Japanese used to farm on small two acre lots.
- There was also a winery which made logan-berry wine owned by McKinney and Simpson.
- Most of the vegetables come from the States now, as there is a lot less farmland in Steveston.
- It's difficult to predict the future of the fishery, you never know until it happens.
- The Fraser River has changed a lot; in 1952-3 to the 60's fishing on the Fraser was way higher then it is now; then it went down and now it's coming back.
- There are lots of small creeks and spawning grounds which have been ruined by logging and industry.
- Fraser River has become more polluted with raw sewage being dumped into it, it hurts the fingerlings a lot and many are lost before they get out to the Gulf.
- Shell fish has declined as well.
- Those such as oysters which doesn't move around much on the flats, are not good to eat because the tide does not change the water very much.
- Shrimp is a deep fish and more mobile so they are better quality.
- He doesn't think the fish from Burrard Inlet are any good.
- Point Grey still has two or three sewer outlets coming into the water.