

Interviewed: February 5, 1976

Mr. Hugh Montgomery,
204 Westminster Hwy.,
Richmond, B. C.

- Born in Ireland, came to Steveston in June 1913, the year of the good salmon run in the Fraser River.
- Started work at the age of seven in the cannery.
- The fish were so plentiful and the canneries were so short of help that they hired at any age.
- Put empty cans on trays and then took them to the women so they could can the salmon.
- That paid 2½¢ an hour.
- Started work seriously until 1925 up the coast in the cannery in the labour gang.
- Soon became a journeyman, worked up coast all the time.
- Worked at Bella Bella, Walkers Lake, then to Rivers Inlet, Namu.
- Namu was one of the major plants of the coast where he became chief machinist and can maker for nine seasons.
- Then got married and went to the Queen Charlotte's as Foreman of the plant.
- Then went to Canadian Fish Cannery at Skeena River as Assistant-Foreman for five years.
- The accommodations were rough; just wooden shacks, but the cook house was good, always lots to eat, good food.
- Worked long hours 6 a.m. to 12 a.m. and refrigeration at cannery or on boats so fish had to be processed right away and had to clean the floor every night.
- Straight labour was paid by the hour but the filling of the cans was paid by piece work.
- The key men of the plants such as the mechanics, tallyman and net supervisors were paid monthly.
- There was no overtime but if it was a good season sometimes received a bonus around \$100.00.
- In those days the average wage of the key men were around \$150-\$200, a month, and that included board, also included your fare up and down the coast which was paid by the cannery.

- During the war years worked from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. with half breaks then for 12:30 to 6 p.m. with another half break then straight through to 10 p.m. or 12 a.m.
- During that time worked a six day week until the union came in.
- Believes union was badly needed.
- Talks about Chinese coolies getting 16¢ to 20¢ an hour.
- Talks about Japanese being evacuated during the war, thinks they got treated very badly, also of their belongings, furnitures, etc. got sent to the Skeena River where it was stored in a Japanese warehouse.
- There was only one watchman, somebody broke in and stole everything.
- Remembers the first year Japanese came back only two boats for the first year at Skeena.
- Had old radio given to him by a Japanese when he was evacuated.
- Noticed a lot of changes in the cannery brought on by the Health Dept.
- Declares the Health Dept. a lot tougher than unions.
- Talks about proper facilities, washrooms, lunchrooms, etc. in canneries today.
- Talks about the struggle to get the union started.
- In 1930's the fishermen usually had a company boat and nets, etc. and were only paid 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ per fish. Sockeye in 1920-29 around 25¢ each; stores sold canned salmon at 15¢ a can.
- Believes canneries made a big profit those days because there were so many of them.
- In Steveston before the big fire there were 23 canneries.
- Talks about modernation of canneries.
- Recalls the big fire in Steveston, 1928. 3 canneries, lighthouse, Steveston and Star cannery burned down and three hotels burned down.
- Says we don't have the run of salmon today that we had then.
- Speaks of old days (30's) when if they got 10-15 thousands cases per genson that was a good season.
- Believes machinery put a lot of canneries out of business.
- Recalls in 1930 in Rivers Inlet, the fishermen's strike, where R.C.M.P. were put on every boat; some were for the strike some against because of the war fare going on a ^dmist of the fishermen themselves.

- That happened mostly in Rivers Inlet the fishermen had voted strike and then company got fishermen from Bella Coola to break up the strike, causing a lot of trouble.
- When strike over fishermen did not get any increase that year.
- Liked working in cannery better before union, when not busy allowed to go fishing in the lakes.
- Interesting remarks on fishing department.
- During the 30's in Namu to keep the beaches clean a scow took the garbage out 2 - 3 miles then dumped it.
- During war processed herring.
- Superintendent at Gulf of Georgia plant; had two ten hour shifts, could never get enough help ads in Eastern papers, everything done by hand, had 350 women working there.
- 15 ton of herring to each bin.
- Hired a lot of Native women from the coast.