

**TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
ROBERT (Bob) G. RANSFORD**

**March 28, 1972**

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***SIDE A***

**Q.** We're talking to Bob Ransford. Were you born here Mr. Ransford?

**R.** Yes, I was born just down the street, here.

**Q.** No kidding? In your parents' house?

**R.** Yes, actually at 1136 Railway Avenue and I lived within a half a mile of where I was born all the time.

**Q.** And, what year was that, sir?

**R.** 1912.

**Q.** 1912. It was a custom then for mothers to have their children at home rather than running into Vancouver?

**R.** Yes, with a mid-wife. I wasn't even registered at that time. I found it very difficult five or six years ago trying to obtain a birth certificate. It took me almost two years to establish the fact that I was here at all.

**Q.** And, of course, there would be complications to get a passport as well.

**R.** Yes, although not too much over the passport. In those days, when I first got a passport at least, they didn't require it. Subsequently, they did.

**Q.** So then, you were born down here and raised down here. I suppose you went to Steveston School?

**R.** Yes, Steveston School.

**Q.** This was just around...

**R.** 1919.

**Q.** 1919, just after World War One. Were there any Japanese going to school then?

**R.** Oh yes.

**Q.** There were a number of them?

**R.** Yes. I was part of a class in grade five where there were only five out of thirty one of us who were Occidentals.

**Q.** Really? Wow!

**R.** Yes.

**Q.** So there were, by that time, really quite a number of Japanese?

**R.** Oh, yes. Predominantly Japanese.

**Q.** And the Japanese, essentially then at that time, were working in fishing.

**R.** Yes.

**Q.** Were there many Chinese down here, do you remember?

**R.** Well, a lot were employed in the canneries, you know, during the canning season. And, there were quite a few Chinese in the farm market gardening and things of that kind.

**Q.** Do you remember Mah Bing's farm? Down on Number One Road?

**R.** Oh yes. I went to school with two of the boys in Steveston.

**Q.** Really? Did they speak Chinese among themselves?

**R.** Yes, actually there were only two or three Chinese children at school in those days.

**Q.** Really? In spite of the large number of Chinese working in the canneries?

**R.** Well, most of the Chinese were not with families, you know. They were single men from China that didn't have families. But there were two or three families around here.

**Q.** And, as a boy, and this would be around World War One or just after World War One, were there many Indians down here?

**R.** An awful lot during the canning season. They used to come in from all up and down the coast to carry on during the canning operations.

**Q.** And they worked in the canneries, as well as fished?

**R.** Oh yes. The women worked in the canneries and the Indian men did the fishing.

**Q.** The story I keep hearing about the Indians at that time has been that they seemed to earn their money at five o'clock in the afternoon and spend it by six.

**R.** Well, I don't know. I believe they were quite a factor in the fishing. They possibly didn't get all the opportunities other nationalities did. But, mind you, they were by nature inclined to live from day to day and, if they were up, why that would last them for awhile and then they would go out fishing again when they ran short. But they were a producing factor in the fishing industry, without a doubt, in those days.

**Q.** I was talking with a man called Sid Watts. Do you remember him?

**R.** Yes, very well.

**Q.** He was saying that during the Depression, in which there was no money in circulation at all, that the fisherman had it the least hard, because at least he got something. That is, even if the price of fish was down, he was making money. I was just wondering what it was like in other areas during the Depression. I mean, you weren't fishing were you, then?

**R.** Yes, I was gillnetting on the River at the time.

**Q.** Oh, really? Well then, is his story true?

**R.** I would have to disagree with it very much so. I started fishing actually in 1927 in a row boat on the Fraser. I fished in Smith's Inlet in a skiff in 1929 and the Fraser in 1930, 31, 32, up until 1934. There couldn't have been a rougher industry, as a white man, to be in then the fishing industry in Steveston. There was absolutely nothing. There were very few, as a matter of fact, there were only two of us, white people fishing out of Steveston. Well, in 1929, anyhow. By 30 and 31, there were getting to be a few more.

**Q.** There were only two?

**R.** Only two. I think Bill Shaw and I were the only two who fished out of Steveston who weren't Japanese. Mind you, there would be the odd one come in. But, I mean, actually Steveston fellows, Steveston men. We were boys of course at the time and we didn't realize it, I suppose. No, 1930 and 31 was a terrifically tough time fishing. There wasn't a hope in the world to try to make a living at it. You did make a living all right. You had nothing else. I brought in a deck load of fish in 1931 that I got three dollars for.

**Q.** Really? What did that represent in numbers? Say, in tonnage?

**R.** I would say it wasn't as big a boat as you see gillnetting now. It didn't have a drum in it. It had just a stern roller and a five horse power engine in it. It was about a 27 or 28 foot boat. So, I would imagine it held four or five hundred fish.

**Q.** Really? And you got three bucks for the lot?

**R.** Yes, it wasn't so much the three dollars that we got. But, in those days the market was limited for canned salmon. Consequently, when the canneries had put up the so called "pack" of all that they required, well then they had to fall back and take only their contract fishermen's production. As I say, in those days it was all Japanese. They lived on cannery property and they owed the cannery money. We had to go out independently because there wasn't any way of financing.

**Q.** You didn't have too much backing from the canneries then?

**R.** No, it wasn't set up to accommodate you. They had the Japanese more or less under contract, at least to the extent that they were living in cannery houses on cannery property. Their women supplied the labour for the cannery and the fishermen went out and fished, and so on, and it went on that way. Being there was a limited market for canned salmon, why, most of the time, these contracted fishermen supplied all of the fish that were required. As soon as that happened, well, anybody who was independent, like us, were naturally cut-off from selling. I know in '31, at that particular time, we went out on a Monday morning at six o'clock when the season opened. In our first drift we loaded the boat and then we went from Monday morning at about eight o'clock until Wednesday afternoon when we finally sold the load for three dollars. The real loss was in these two days not being able to fish when we were tied up trying to get rid of these darn fish. So it was a very tough situation as far as fishing, as I remember it.

**Q.** Was the oily on Woodward Island, no Kirkland Island, still in operation when you were a boy?

**R.** Yes, oh yes.

**Q.** That caught fire, didn't it?

**R.** I believe so. I don't remember when or how it came to its conclusion. I know my father used to be a bookkeeper and tallyman at the old Richmond Cannery and it burned down in 1924. They used to send a scow down every, about once a week, to pick up the offal from the cannery and take it up there for crude oil.

**Q.** I understand, from several other people, from the time the oilery burned down until the various canneries developed their own reduction process, they used to take the offal and just chuck it?

**R.** Yes, they used to take it out to the Gulf and dump it.

**Q.** So, that was a practice for several years?

**R.** It must have been because they didn't start to reduce fish... I think it was the Imperial Cannery that was the first.. until, I would say, around the first years of the Second World War. I don't remember them reducing prior to that, but they may have. Not long before, though.

**Q.** Some of the people have told me about the ferry from Woodward's landing going to Ladner. Was that in operation when you were young?

**R.** Yes, oh yes.

**Q.** Was that a regular thing? That is to say, was it scheduled a few times a day?

**R.** Yes it was. It was a steam boat actually. A stern wheeler. It handled about eight cars, I believe, or eight or ten cars.

**Q.** Oh, so automobiles could get on it?

**R.** Yes.

**Q.** I understand, in the older days, they used to transport cattle.

**R.** Possibly, I don't recall that part of it.

**Q.** Was there any other ferry system or transport up the Fraser, or the South Arm, I should say?

**R.** Well, I believe there were many of them, but again, that would be prior to my time.

**Q.** Oh, right. So there wasn't, around just after the First World War?

**R.** No, I don't recall any. There were coastal boats in and out, but not transportation of farm products and that, that I recall. No.

**Q.** Now, earlier, people have told me there used to be an event called the "Steveston gun" which would go off at six o'clock on a Sunday evening to indicate the beginning of the fishing for that week and everyone would have to be in and unloaded by Friday, I think it was?

R. Well, the fishing season in those days used to start at six o'clock in the morning and it was established by the gun and it would stop at six o'clock on Saturday morning.

Q. Oh, on Saturday?

R. Yes. That went on until, of until, nearly the Second World War.

Q. Oh, really?

R. Yes.

Q. So they did have the "Steveston gun" when you were a boy?

R. Oh yes. It was used all through the years that I remember. There was one at the Imperial Cannery and that's where it went off. And there was one at Brunswick over in Canoe Pass and another one around Sea Island. I just forget whether it was Terra Nova Cannery or Active Cannery or Vancouver Cannery. One of those canneries, anyhow. And that kind of started it off. When you couldn't.. you couldn't always hear it, why you could always see the black puff of smoke, if of course you were looking for it.

Q. Right. Actually it was more like a mortar than a gun?

R. I would think so. I don't ever remember seeing it.

Q. People told me that it would fire a charge into the air and then it would go off in the air.

R. I believe that was what it was because your could definitely see the black plume of smoke up about a couple hundred feet.

*Approx. 30 seconds blank*

Q. What was the policing agency?

R. I'm speaking now, let's say from 1926 on and I don't go way back beyond because I can't, and I recall federal Department of Fisheries boats. The "Mary Sea" was one and there were a couple of others, but I just don't recall their names. I remember an Archibald who was on for a long while. I don't know his first name, but his second name was Archibald. And, they all originated in New Westminster, you know. They patrolled the River down here and they quite often stopped in at Steveston and, so on.

Q. And, so they were the policing agency, as it were, for all River traffic and occurrences?

**R.** Well, I think mostly in connection with fisheries. I don't recall them doing any other policing work. They weren't organized to police other than the Fisheries Regulations.

**Q.** In your experience, or from hearsay, was there any fighting between the boats? People cutting each others nets and doing various things which sometimes takes place in a competitive occupation?

**R.** No, not too much of it. Again, it was predominantly Japanese in my time... in the early part of my experience with it and the Japanese were very... they were competitive but they weren't unfair with each other. They respected a position a person was in waiting for another drift or anything. If he was there first, well, they respected that. A lot of that has broken down in latter years. But, nevertheless, in those days they respected it. They were a very reliable people to live amongst. I never saw a lock on all of the doors of their houses or any one of their boats. No was it necessary for us to ever lock anything up or put anything away. It was as safe as if it was in your own home. That was during the time it was predominantly a Japanese fishery. No, they were very, very good that way.

**Q.** As a boy, were there still all those seven or eight hotels in Steveston?

**R.** Well no, the 1918 fire eliminated most of those. And, I don't recall too much prior to it. Although, I do definitely remember going down the boardwalk, and some of the hotels and one thing and another, with my mother. But that eliminated most of them.

**Q.** Oh right, they were never rebuilt then?

**R.** No they weren't. There was the old Commercial, which was destroyed here a few years ago, but it was never active as a hotel after that period.

**Q.** And the hotels were just an excuse to sell alcohol?

**R.** Well, I wouldn't say that. I suppose that's the position of all hotels with a liquor business.

**Q.** Because some of the older people have told me that the hotels used to be very active on Saturday nights and it was more the custom than the rule to see people weaving around intoxicated.

**R.** I just don't recall that part of it. But, I've heard it mentioned that way, all right.

**Q.** You said you raised mink for awhile?

**R.** Yes, may father went into it originally in 1923 right on this corner. This house over here was the old home.



**Q.** This is for the tape—this is at the northeast corner of Steveston Highway and Railway Avenue. So that's your original home?

**R.** Well, not original, because I was born down at 1036 Railway and then we moved on Railway to the foot of Garry Street and then in 1919 we moved up here and this was a 14 acre, actually a chicken farm and an incubator for raising chicks. It had been the White Wing Poultry Farm and I know my father changed it then to the Columbia Poultry Farm and went into raising chickens and raised chicks until heck wouldn't have them. He shipped them all over the country—to Alberta and Saskatchewan, even.

**Q.** How did you ship them?

**R.** By railway.

**Q.** Oh, so they started off on the interurban?

**R.** No we used to truck them into town.

**Q.** Oh, on the C.N. or C.P.?

**R.** Yes, C.N. or C.P. and they'd go out on the train that way. Day old chicks, you know. We raised thousands of them. This house over here and the incubator house and the chicken deal was built in 1906. When Dad took it over, he went more into the raising of chicks. And he used to build his own incubators and hatched chicks. Then in 1923, he went out of that business and went into raising mink.

**Q.** Was he one of the first to start raising mink?

**R.** Yes, he had to be, if not the first in B.C., certainly very, very close to it. He imported the first mink, I know, from Stanstead in Quebec and he was one of the originals in Canada. And, then ultimately, he brought mink in from Yukon and Labrador and all over.

**Q.** And you were right here and you were standing there watching him while he was working?

**R.** Oh yes. And then I personally went into it myself in 1934. I built that house over there in '34, then much later built for my son that one and then this one and moved to here. This was all mink houses. We used to produce around 1,200 mink a year.

**Q.** Really?

**R.** Oh, yes.

*Interjection by Mary Ransford (MR)*

**MR.** I'm going out for a little while.

**R.** Good, o.k.

**MR.** Anything you want when I'm out?

**R.** No. That's fine.

**MR.** Bye. It was nice seeing you.

**Q.** Good bye and I'm pleased to have met you. Well, this is interesting speaking about mink.

**R.** Yes, well it was a funny business in those days. Twelve hundred in those days was definitely one of the largest farms in Canada. I went right into pelts—into the pelt business. Up until that time, it was nearly all breeding stock, you know. It was just getting established. You were always able to sell as much breeding stock as you could produce. But then it reached the time of, about, around 1934 when you either had to get into the pelt production in mink or... the breeding thing—there were too many of them around and there was too much competition in it. So I went into that and then also swung over to using fish. I was one of the first to ever have used fish on the North American continent with mink.

**Q.** Really, you fed them fish?

**R.** Yes, and worked out a formula they could accept. It was all hit and miss. You didn't have anything to refer back to.

**Q.** Oh, right. If the animal died, I guess that told you something?

**R.** That was just about the way you learned it. You found out such things as you can't use salmon for mink feed and you can't use herring, which is not too good. The oil content in the body of them is too rich for them. But you could use bottom fish, providing you removed the livers because that's where the concentration of oil is, you see. And they just can't stand a diet of over a certain percentage of oil. About 2 or 3 percent oil is more than they can handle.

**Q.** Oh really? And so they would either not eat it or eat it and die?

**R.** Well, they wouldn't exist on it, anyhow, for any length of time.

**Q.** Right. Then, what would be the life cycle of a mink pelt? Starting from the time it is born? So you have a little mink running around...

**R.** They're born in April and they're pelted in late November, December.

**Q.** Of the same year?

**R.** Yes, same year.

**Q.** So the animal wasn't very big?

**R.** No, no it wasn't.

**Q.** So you say they're full grown in about, what, 8 months or 9 months then?

**R.** Yes, that's right.

**Q.** I understand they never get friendly?

**R.** Not really. You can concentrate on one and make it reasonably friendly.

**Q.** So you never had a little pet running around?

**R.** No, truly no. Never had time for them. There were too many. When you're raising for pelts you just don't get into that end of it. It's a gang ranch sort of deal.

**Q.** Did they smell?

**R.** Yes. Yes, when you get a concentration of them, they have a smell of their own and it wafts around. I know that's why we went out of it here. When we had the 14 acres and we were alone, you never noticed it. There was lots of room for it and, through cleanliness, you could keep them quite good. But, once it gets built up, it's no place for them.

**Q.** For the pelting, did you actually destroy the animal and take off the skin?

**R.** Yes, we used to use a gas for gassing them and we pelted them all here.

**Q.** Oh, really? And, then, with the pelts there was some place to send them?

**R.** Yes, there were raw fur auction sales. There's only one in Vancouver, but they're situated between here and New York in all pretty well all of the provinces and down south. Seattle has a large one. And, that's where they ultimately used to be sold.

**Q.** If any of my questions are a little impertinent, you could always say "I don't care to answer that". Was there, at that time, good money in this?

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**R.** Reasonably so, yes. It was always satisfactory as far as I was concerned. I did quite well financially with it.

**Q.** Then, you say your father was really the first to start mink ranching?

**R.** I would have to think so. I don't know of anybody else that was in it, even in B.C. anywhere. There may have been some very, very small ones or something. Two or three or a half a dozen or something. But not to my knowledge. I don't know of any, prior to 1923.

**Q.** And so, at the beginning when you started to raise them as breeding stock, this was a different procedure than just raising them for the pelt?

**R.** Yes, because your prices were higher for breeding stock.

**Q.** Would you keep them longer?

**R.** Yes, you would. Although, not exactly. In a way you would be eliminating... trying to get better ones all the time. Better furs, better texture and everything. You're always improving. And, with breeding stock, I suppose we used to eliminate as quickly as we could too, to get better stock.

**Q.** Did you run across any fatal disease, which would wipe out your stock?

**R.** Yes, oddly enough, it wasn't really a disease, it was more based on a diet deficiency. It's still a problem, evidently, in some ranches in some areas in particular. It was what they call the "yellow fat" and it was a lack of vitamin "e" more than anything and "c", which they found very hard to find a substitute for. Although, tomatoes were high in "c" and they were recommended by all the authorities as being the thing to use because it was a lack of vitamin "c" that produced it. But, I found that there wasn't a mink in the world that could assimilate tomatoes and consequently, it tended to aggravate rather than alleviate the situation because there was so much acidity in it and they couldn't manage it. We ran into it very heavily into the pelting end of it. I found the first cutting of grass, the first inch of growth of grass and some of this mixed through the feed eliminated it entirely. It's the best cure to this day.

**Q.** Really? And, how did this thing show up? Did the fur fall apart?

**R.** No, it built up over the kidneys. It was a layer of fat that tended to even harden and that of course would ruin the pelt because there was a burning reaction and you got what you called "hippy mink", "hippy pelts" and they were quite valueless.

**Q.** Oh really? Then part of the pelt, the part that came off around the back of the neck would be all right?

**R.** It was all right, but over the hip and around the kidneys and that area is where this used to form.

**Q.** So the fur was of a poorer quality?

**R.** Oh yes, much poorer.

**Q.** Oh so then the whole pelt was of no value?

**R.** Very little value.

*Approx. 2 minute blank*

**R.** ...they just didn't have the, you know, the wherewithal, to send them to a higher education and eighth grade seemed to be quite a criterion. If you reached that, you weren't hurting too badly.

**Q.** Oh, sure.

**R.** But there were a lot in the '20s that went on and through into university and so on. Those that could afford it. But, by the time our turn came around, our age group, shall we say, we just started on the edge of the Depression and it was very difficult for any of them to go, you know. There weren't too many families here in the Richmond area, in the Steveston area., that were financially capable of sending their children to a higher education.

**Q.** And, because of that, as well, the children's services were required.

**R.** That's true.

*Approx. 25 sec. Blank*

**R.** You had a chat with Rudy before he passed away, did you?

**Q.** Oh yes. He was very interesting. He told me about some of the early days in politics, which will bring some of the questions to you.

### ***SIDE B***

**Q.** Was there a ward system then?

**R.** Yes there was when I first started.

**Q.** So then, you were a representative for Council for...

**R.** For Steveston.

**Q.** For Steveston? And, did this involve meeting your constituents at one location? People have talked to me about the Opera House being used for example...

**R.** Yes it was.

**Q.** ...as a political meeting place and some of the meetings would be quite...

**R.** Quite heavy.

**Q.** Yes, right.

**R.** The Anglican Church hall was used too and also the United Church Hall in Steveston. But they used to be quite interesting meetings at times.

**Q.** How did you first start? Did you finally wake up one day and say "I think I'm going to be..."

**R.** No. I didn't all together. Although, I'd been Chairman of the Community Society in Steveston and I guess I was the second President of the Salmon Queen Carnival. I don't know... Bill Deagle had been representing Steveston for about eight years and he came along to me one day and he said: "Bob, I've had just about enough" and he was getting on in his years and he said: "I've just about had enough of it" and he said "how about if I step down, would you feel like running?" So, I gave it some thought and figured, well, it might be nice. So, I took a whack at it and I guess I was elected all right. But there was only a ward system for a couple of years after I was in and then it switched over to...

**Q.** And what year were you first elected, sir?

**R.** In '46 for the year of '47.

**Q.** Just after World War 2?

**R.** Yes.

**Q.** Was the political side of Steveston involved at all in the re-patriation of the displaced Japanese?

**R.** Well, I believe the fishing industry were anxious that the Japanese be moved out of it. Those of us that had been in the fishing industry up until then realized that it was predominantly Japanese controlled. I think they were willing to apply themselves more than the type of white fishermen that were in it up until then. They were

probably a loose knit bunch and an independent bunch and they weren't as reliable as the canneries wished to have and Japanese applied themselves very well that way. But they did have, but 1942, practically sole control of production of salmon on the coast and their attitude towards Canada was not all together as a citizen, or as a citizen should be, in my way of thinking, because they were not allowed a franchise. They didn't have a vote. At least they didn't have a vote federally or provincially.

**Q.** Really?

**R.** No, they were Orientals, you see and they didn't have the franchise. So, this I suppose, would create in their minds that they were not true Canadian citizens. Darn near all of the Japs lived on company property and they didn't have a vote municipally either. So, their true attachment.... and then another thing was it was a very well known fact that all children who were born here were registered in Japan at the same time. They had dual citizenship in actuality. Their whole endeavour seemed to be aimed at one thing and that was to make enough money to go back to Japan and the economy of Japan, where a hundred dollars wouldn't get you anywhere here it would get you an awful long way in Japan. So, they were definitely, in my way of thinking, satisfied to work at a lesser wage than we could live on. So, the opportunity of them being removed out of the fishing industry, the opportunity that was derived through the war, was something that I think all of the white fishermen of those days really appreciated and hoped that they would not be back in it. Because they were too tough competition, not too tough in the sense that they were better fishermen. But simply that they lived in, more or less, a world of their own and you couldn't compete with them. The very fact that, during the War when they were removed and the fishing industry got into a very tough position of not having any fishermen to replace them with, was a quite an experience and quite an eye-opener because, in the four or five years that they were absolutely out of it, there were more innovations and more improvements in fishing gear and in fishing ways, in the four or five years then the Japanese had been able to accomplish in the forty or fifty years that they were predominantly in charge of it. They're hard working, but they're not quite as resourceful as the Canadian fisherman when he really has to go and do it. Canadian fishermen expanded themselves no end and they went out further into the ocean to obtain the fish, which good, bad or indifferent, they did strictly in competition and they did it almost from scratch. And they did a marvelous job of it.

**Q.** So there was really a shake down in the fishing industry, because of the War. That is the pressure of the War for producing more fish. Plus the fact you had inexperienced men doing it. Plus the fact that those who did do it were no longer here. They were physically removed.

**R.** That's true.

**Q.** That's interesting in the evolution of fishing in this part of B.C.

**R.** That's right. I think that, if there hadn't been a war, it would have had to come to a conclusion of some kind sooner or later. It might have not been more easily accomplished than they way it did under this. Certainly there were those who wished to get into it. It was a basic industry of British Columbia and, I mean, white people were entitled to be in it. But there wasn't a hope of them living in it under those conditions. But, when Japanese came back and then we gave them the franchise, why they became citizens. They didn't locate on company property, like they did before. They came and built homes and became financially involved in the country and they had their vote. They've proven out to be just darned fine citizens. I think these are some of the good things that the War could be said to have accomplished.

**Q.** Well, it certainly has provided the opportunity for significant change which could never take place in any other circumstance.

**R.** Yes, that's right. It would have been much more difficult, I think, to have achieved it. Once the War was over, they were given every opportunity again to come into it, so they weren't hurt too badly. But their attitude before the War was strictly... you can get into a lot of argument over a thing like this. But I lived amongst it and I saw it. And they were very, very good friends of mine. I don't think there was a house in the whole of Steveston that I couldn't walk into and you didn't even have to knock. I mean I knew them. When the War started in '42 and when they established the Japanese Disposal Commission for their properties and their boats and so on, I bought, I think, 440 boats we put through for B.C. Packers because I was retained by them to handle that end of it, along with another chap in the Company. They were very difficult. You know they were going to come back in August. This was February and March when we were having to take over their boats. Mind you, not from them exactly, because the Japanese Disposal Commission had the right to seize and distribute them but they preferred to get the Japanese to agree to it. I think that in a lot of ways they were treated quite fairly, considering their attitude at that time.

**Q.** So the, just connecting this in my mind, after you were in the mink business, you went back into fishing?

**R.** No, I started fishing in 1927 actually and I fished though until 1934. I gill-netted. Then I went into collecting fish. They started the Phoenix Cannery up here and I organized a bunch of fishermen and I looked after them and I collected for the Phoenix Cannery for seven years.

**Q.** What does that mean "collect fish"?

**R.** Well, you have to get fishermen to fish first. And see that they got financing, that they got boats and so on. Then my job was to actually collect their fish out every day in a boat.

**Q.** Oh, so they don't all come back into the wharf?



**R.** No, no. You collect from them on the grounds.

**Q.** Oh, so if they were right in a productive area, then they wouldn't want to leave?

**R.** No, they did the fishing. We collected from them every day at least. They still do that. It's still carried on the same way.

**Q.** When did that first start? Because I've heard stories about people, right in the middle of a good run, they load up as much as they can but then they have to leave their nice little spot and go back into unload.

**R.** Well, this would have to be, again, before my time because certainly by 1919 they were collecting.

**Q.** Was there just the counting of the noses of the fish to keep track, or by weight?

**R.** Yes, it wasn't a poundage basis until about 1942. But they were bought by the piece in those days.

**Q.** So when you went out there, did the people on the boat have a general idea of how many fish there were?

**R.** You counted them out. You piked them out of their boat into the hatch of the collector and you counted them as you though them in. Spring salmon you had to weigh—they were sold by the pound and usually coho did in the Fall. Otherwise there were pieces like pinks, hump-backs and sockeye, they were by the piece.

**Q.** Oh and then you just kept a tally for the...

**R.** Kept a tally of it. You gave them a slip or filled out their book. They had what they called a fish book. Then you brought them into the cannery and were unloaded.

**Q.** And there was another tally at the cannery?

**R.** Yes, they tallied as well.

**Q.** Was there any mis-tallies?

**R.** No. There wasn't any incentive, or any good reason to. The fishermen were paid by the cannery. The collector was just a carrier and responsible for looking after them. Public relations and so on. You contacted them, you looked after them to a certain extent. That was the procedure and actually it still is today.

**Q.** Would you like to talk about Prohibition? I understand that there were two Prohibitions. There was the Canadian Prohibition which lasted a couple of years, in which Canadians couldn't get whiskey. And then, later on, there was the American Prohibition. Some people have told me that there was a certain amount of movement of legal whiskey out of Canada and entered illegally into the States. Was much of that going on in Richmond to your knowledge?

**R.** No, I don't recall it. It could have been. I guess I would too young to really recognize it. When was Prohibition ceased in the States? 1934 wasn't it? Oh yes, that was quite an experience. Where I heard most about it, I worked for eight years when I was at Nelson Brothers with a fellow named Art Newcomb and he was in charge of the rum running fleet from Canada into the States.

**Q.** Like a Coast Guard sort of thing?

**R.** He looked after the fleet from the breweries. He was Captain of the fleet. He was incarcerated in Tallahassee, I think it was or Encenada, I guess.

**Q.** Oh, right. I was thinking of him the wrong way. So he was in charge of some of the smuggling?

**R.** Yes. It wasn't considered too illegal from a Canadian point of view, unless you were caught in the States.

**Q.** No. of course not.

**R.** I heard his experiences. He passed away quite some time ago. But he was quite a colourful character to talk to on it because he certainly knew every end of it.

**Q.** Some people argued that it was too bad that Prohibition came into the States because it gave the opportunity of developing, what now turns out to be, organized crime.

**R.** I would imagine so, it has.

**Q.** From your experience, both as an observer and also as a public official, this whole notion of organized crime has never taken place around here?

**R.** No, I don't know of it existing, as such. Certainly you have laws that are broken. But organized crime, no I have had no experience with it whatsoever.

**Q.** So then it was considered a sort of business, a fairly risky business, but still a business to ship beer...

**R.** Oh, I think so. From what I can recall, there were some pretty influential men in the history of Vancouver involved in it. I suppose they had a product to sell and the laws

of the United States didn't entirely apply to them. I think it was handled in that nature, rather than being considered as breaking the law in particular. They weren't breaking any Canadian law, I don't believe.

**Q.** So there wasn't too much traffic, then, out of Steveston?

**R.** No. I don't think so. I can recall boats going out chasing down the odd rum-runner or so-called rum-runner that must have been breaking some other law in Canada for some reason or other. No, I can't ever remember hearing of any operation out of Steveston, shall we say, or out of Richmond, anyhow. Possibly, it just didn't lend itself to be in a good location to take off from. That might have been the reason for it.

**Q.** Part of our project involves looking at the development of some of the lands. Particularly, what's called Terra Nova flats and some of the other sections of the Island, bog sections. Some of the people involved in this are biologists and they are looking at the various kinds of plant life. The sand bar, the Steveston sand bar, has developed now from just dumping sand on it from silt so that it now supports trees and so forth. Who could I talk to who would know about... For instance, I'm speaking of a fellow like Bill Gilmore, who operates a dredge. Would there be any other people I could talk to along that.. who could tell me what the contemporary thought was in just dumping stuff on it to clear the channel?

**R.** Bill Gilmore should be able to give you a very good background on it. I don't know of anybody else that could give you anything any better. You know he was involved so long with the physical aspects of the River. It's not too difficult to find out when it was put up there. I think it was put up there just, oh it must have been around 1912, I would imagine, when it was pumped in there. And, I think it was pumped in there for a very good political reason.

**Q.** Oh really?

**R.** Sure. They used to land deep sea ships right in Steveston, you know. New Westminster became extremely politically strong. I can't see, for the life of me, any other reason for putting the sand bar there where it exists today other than just filling up the access to deep sea frontage. It was a terrifically effective end of Steveston from a deep sea point of view.

**Q.** Oh right. And, also provided a sheltered place for the...

**R.** Well, ultimately it did. But that was never, ever thought of at the time. We finally got that through. I think the Board of Trade and some of us got that completed through pressures and so on, into turning it into a protection for small craft. Strictly small craft. But I think the problem that it created was creating a dog's leg in the River, which they've had to contend with ever since. And they tried to straighten that out and created one somewhere else and when you start messing around the River that has a

straight flow out, putting sand bars in it, you create something that becomes very costly. And, it has been very costly to maintain. A crooked channel is extremely costly to maintain. Now they're beyond the point of recall. They've just got to live with it. But, I think it is well recognized that the intention of it was to confine deep sea fishing to the New Westminster area.

**Q.** Do you remember anything about the evolution of the Steveston Fire Department?

**R.** Yes. Yes, the A.R.P. Not before it was the A.R.P. We didn't have it. It was strictly bucket brigade and the old fire engine, the old pumper that is gone out of existence now. I was put out of commission actually—well I guess it became antiquated and they stored it down at the old Burrard Cannery. Halloween nights, we as kids, used to take it out regularly, each year, tearing up and down the streets with it. It had two things on the side running the full length of it, you know, and I think it held about six or eight men and you pumped it this way, you see. There wasn't any power to it otherwise, but it was horse drawn and if it couldn't be horse drawn a group of them would pull it by hand. It's too bad it wasn't be saved. That evidently came from San Francisco originally. We got it one time and took it down to the municipal hall, but it laid out in the back there for awhile. And the, Owen Burdett was going to rejuvenate it. He was a bit of a carpenter and one thing and another and so, when I was on Council, I got it released to him to have it done, but I think he reached the age where it was beyond him and the thing finally disappeared all together.

**Q.** That's too bad. It would have been a nice little artifact from...

**R.** It would have been a lovely one, yeh.

**Q.** The fire department down in Steveston was really, at least at one time, what each cannery used to provide from themselves?

**R.** Pretty well, yes.

**Q.** Because there were several serious and significant fires in Steveston.

**R.** Yes. Jack O'Neil was the so-called "Fire Warden" for Steveston for many years before there was a fire department and it used to fall to his lot to organize whatever could be organized. There wasn't any fire department before the A.R.P., that I can remember.

**Q.** A regular fire department started on a full-time basis fairly recently, then?

**R.** I think it's only this year that they've got a full paid fire department.

**Q.** Oh, then there's always been volunteer before that?

R. Well, they've had paid employees. But, you see, the way the San Francisco underwriters accept a fire department is on the basis that if you have one volunteer in it, it is classified as a volunteer fire department. You can have ninety-nine paid people, but as long as it is dependent on even on one, it's classified for ratings reasons as a volunteer fire department. And, I believe it's only now, if they've done it yet. I'm not that close to it anymore to actually know, but I believe this year they've gone on to a fully paid fire department which should have been done years ago.

Q. Oh, then the determination of a fire department depends upon, in part, on fire insurance and the underwriters' definition of a protected area?

R. Yes. I got in touch with them, one time when I was on Council, it would be 1957 or 1958, and they told me at that time—that was the head of the San Francisco underwriters—and I said 'what are we classified as Richmond?' and he said 'well, you come under a classification called class 9' and I said 'that's just fine, but I haven't got the foggiest idea what class 9 might be', you see. So he said 'well, let's put it this way, if you were up in the Prince George area, it also is in class 9' and so I said 'well, that would have to be rather ridiculous, we have all this beautiful equipment we're getting' and I said 'we have the finest volunteers that you could every get and we have many paid captains and so on, full time, why should we be under that classification?'. So, he said: 'well, as long as you have any at all volunteers, this is the classification you come under'. So I said 'how does that run for our rates?'. Well he said 'your insurance rates are all based on classifications and this is the poorest classification you can have'.

Q. Oh, so as you improve your classification, your rates go down?

R. Yes, they're based on two things. One of course, fundamentally, is this and the other is your water pressures. I think it is forty pounds. You've got to have forty pounds in volume. Once you have that, plus a paid fire department, you are then classified pretty well as high as you can get. Supposing half of your area is serviced by water mains that have forty pounds pressure at least, at all times, plus sufficient volumes for it, well that's the highest you can get to you see. If you had it in all areas, well then you'd be that much better off. If you only have 25% of your area, then so on and so on. That's the way your rates are set.

Q. Oh, I see. So, then they won't insure an entire area for one rate? They'll insure it for the lowest rate, which is determined by maybe one little section?

R. Yes, yes it definitely is that way. At least that is the way it was explained to me and I have every reason to believe that's the way it is because I spoke to the one that had everything to say about it and they're very open in their explanation of it but their just as adamant at the classification, too. I think through the years we've suffered by having a volunteer fire department, which, from a political nature, is a very bad thing to say because it is rather difficult to run down a volunteer that's dedicating time and

energy and so on to a very good cause. But, I mean, it was very obvious to us, at least to me anyhow, that Vancouver and New Westminster had paid fire departments and we didn't and I thought there must be a reason for it. So, I started to look into it and this is what I found. The fact that I was Chairman of the Water Board for seven years for the municipality and their appointee to the Greater Vancouver Water Board, you see, and had an awful lot to do with having bylaws being passed. We actually passed one million dollar one. I think it was in '57 or '56.... *(three second blank)*

Q. Speaking about fires, do you remember any of the bog fires?

R. Oh, God yes. They were an annual event.

Q. As a boy, as a young man, as a person growing, being a businessman here, what was the attitude, generally, of people towards these bog fires? It was "oh well, it's that time of year"?

R. More or less. Because it was in an area that was considered valueless from a farming point of view and it wasn't until more recent years that they started to commercialize on the peat itself and then it became a little more interesting to see that they didn't happen. The biggest thing about a bog fire when I was a child, was the darn nuisance of the smoke from it, you know.

Q. Really?

R. Oh yes. If the wind was right it would sit for days over here.

Q. Really, so like today, it is fairly, fairly clear... it is a little muggy out, but... it would just be thick smoke?

R. Oh, it would be thick, yes. You'd get an east wind and the Steveston area used to be just right down with it. There used to be acres and acres of it burn every year.

Q. Really?

R. Oh yes.

Q. And were there men out on the fire line?

R. No, not too much. It wasn't.. when it started reaching the edges of the road or houses or something... there were very few houses in that area. Nobody built in the bog much in those days. But, it wasn't thought of otherwise. Nobody considered it too much otherwise. Not that I recall, anyhow.

Q. Do you remember something called the Miller Stage? Now, maybe I'm not talking about the right thing. There used to be a stage running right down Number 5 Road.

**R.** Yes, down the old plank road. No, I can't say I remember it. But, other than having heard talk of it, I can't say.

**Q.** When was the last plank road used? Or, better, when was the last plank road replaced?

**R.** God, I couldn't tell you.

**Q.** Oh, that was before your time then?

**R.** Yes, not before I was born, I don't think, but certainly before I can remember it. I can remember going down them. I can remember going down Number 5 Road when it was planked. And, also of course, Steveston. But, when they went out, I don't know.

**Q.** Do you remember the first airplane?

**R.** Oh yes. Yes. It couldn't have been the first but I...

***END OF TAPE 1***

***TAPE 2***

***SIDE 1***

**R.** ...where Granville Avenue is now, for example, I could literally see them from Railway Avenue.

**Q.** Really? So they were right down there in what's now the end of ...

**R.** The Brighthouse area. During the First World War I can remember twin engines planes coming over here, flying around.

**Q.** Oh, then the development of the airport came later? That is Sea Island as an airport?

**R.** Yes, there was a... The first one.. well, they used that Brighthouse area, I suppose, not as an airport. But, I think officially, the one on that Alexandra property, you know the other side of Lansdown Park. There used to be planes coming in and out of there. They were there a very short time, though, before they went over to Sea Island, which I guess was around 1930 or '31.

**Q.** Oh, then Sea Island really started as an airport...

**R.** In 1930, I think it was.

**Q.** Right. Right.

**R.** Somewhere in there.

**Q.** Then, when you were a boy, there were a few cars?

**R.** Oh yes. Walker's Emporium in Steveston had a little truck that they used to deliver groceries around in.

**Q.** I was talking with Les Gilmore and he was telling me that had a phone fairly early over there by Number 4 Road, where he is and they used to call up and arrange deliveries from Walker's.

**R.** I guess it was.

**Q.** At least once a week and they'd have it sent over.

**R.** Yes.

**Q.** Did your father, when you were still a boy... your father had the chickens originally. Did he have anything else, such as milk, or pigs, or anything like that?

**R.** Oh yes. We used to have seven milking cows.

**Q.** For your own use?

**R.** Well no, for market, you know.

**Q.** But you got your own milk instead of buying milk?

**R.** Oh yes.

**Q.** You could have had access then to cream and butter?

**R.** Oh yes.

**Q.** Was that a similar condition of a great many people here.

**R.** Oh yes. You were fairly self-sufficient, you know. Meat and vegetables and milk and all that.

**Q.** Being a farming community and also a fishing community, I suppose then there was several veterinarians available?



**R.** Yes, there were. I don't recall their names offhand. Were you talking to George McKay?

**Q.** No, I'm going to be.

**R.** Oh, you are eh? I don't think he was born here but George was in the Steveston area at a very early age. His father was Dr. Hepworth, who delivered me, actually.

*Approximate twenty second blank*

**Q.** Someone was saying that some of the early taxes were collected by the police?

**R.** This could be, I don't recall.

**Q.** Well, I think it was Rudy Grauer who was telling me that the municipal police at one time collected taxes and, laughingly he said, some of it sometimes got mislaid.

**R.** Well, Rudy would sure know.

**Q.** There seemed to be an evolution of the police force from a little local force and names such as Waddell and Austin Harris and Alfie Johnson were mentioned. And then, at a later time, there was sort of a provincial police force and then, later on, there was the R.C.M.P. Where in your life, where did you fall in those ... ?

**R.** Well, Waddell was Chief as far back as I remember and Sid Young was his Deputy. That's the first that I remember. Then, of course, Alfie Johnson took over from Waddell. Sid Young got drowned up when they reclaimed the Sumas Flats up there. That must have been around 1920, or so, I guess. Then Alfie took over as Chief and he was Chief until the War came along. It seems to me in 1940 they went from provincial to municipal. Because, I know he joined, when they terminated the provincial in Richmond, he joined the provincial force. They absorbed most of the ones that were in Richmond into the provincial force and he went from Richmond with the Japanese up into the Interior somewhere.

**Q.** Oh, really? I was trying to get in touch with Mrs. Johnson, Mary Johnson. She lives just down here on Broadway.

**R.** Well I think you'd find her very interesting to talk to, especially because Alfie went into it right after he returned from the First World War. I remember a lot of political controversy over changing from the original Richmond force to the first provincial. Yes, it was quite a... There was those who were for it and there was those who were adamantly against it. It was quite a political issue at that time. I just forget when that took place, because it must have been some time in the '30s because it was eliminated, I think, in 1940.

**Q.** So the Provincial Police were only in operation in Richmond for about ten years?

**R.** Ah... no more than that.

*Approximate 20 second blank*

**R.** ... whether it was anything to do with the War or not, I don't know. As a municipality, I think we had the privilege of deciding which way it went. I don't think it was forced on us, yet I wouldn't be too sure on that point, but I don't think it was. By the same token, how the R.C.M.P. came about, that I think we had our say in also. I don't think it was a provincial policy that was forced on us at all. It was left to our own wishes.

**Q.** That's all the questions I think I can ask you right now.