

MARINE

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Tape 28, S.2
& Tape 29, S.1

Mr. R. Smith
1527 - 53A Street
Delta, B.C.

Interviewed - March 21, 1973.

Born in Richmond in 1906, September 27th - was one of first two children to be baptized in First United Church, corner of Steveston and No. 3. When he was 8 yrs. old, moved to a farm in Surrey. Had started school in Richmond - lived in a pink house on Steveston. House still standing. Came back to Richmond - lived here 33 years. Worked in canneries - was paid \$80.00 a month and board. In "the hungry thirties", 40¢ an hour was a good wage - could get full carload of groceries for \$10.00. There was lots of food available and plenty of salmon.

When he started fishing, he bought a sailboat - 28 feet long - converted it into a gillnetter - put a motor in it - took 16 days to bring the boat down the river. He helped build trawlers with Nelson Shipyards - 22 years ago - has been boatbuilding since then.

His father's youngest brother (Geordie Smith) was jailkeeper at Steveston - picked up men who were bounced out of bars and put them in jail. Drunks who ended in jail were bailed out by farmers, who put them to work on land. Farmers took bottle of Scotch along - and fed them well. Loggers picked up men that way too.

Alex Ewen was mother's uncle. His father worked in Imperial Canners - went back to Scotland and brought his mother and sister back. Ewen brought over his mother's family, who farmed for Ewen on his 640 acre farm. One of largest farms on island - oats, beef cattle, 200 pigs - raised horses. There was only a plank road to the farm - all produce went to Westminster - milk went to

Government House for distribution to hospitals - had 60 milking cows. Farm produce taken by sternwheeler from Steveston to New Westminster - this was before bridge built to Lulu Island.

Got around in horse and buggy until first cars appeared in 1910 - T-Ford, Cadillac, Packard. His first car was a Maxwell - in the 20's (Chrysler took them over).

Ewen bred Clyde and Percheron horses, hackneys and sorrels - all work horses - used for farming, logging and pulling dories - the big stores used dories for transportation. His father shipped his grain to Woodward's. Horses got hard feet from pavements - were put on Dad's farm 2 to 3 weeks to soften feet.

In the 30's, remembers seeing salmon fins when runs were on - Dad said were so thick could walk on their backs (old saying in those days).

Remembers a gang of 30 to 40 chinamen working on beach with pitchforks, throwing salmon back in Channel under canneries. Salmon not used by canneries were taken out in scows and dumped in gulf. Each cannery could only pack 300 to 400 cases a day. The cans were hand made - very slow operation. Cannery would take certain quantity of salmon from each boat - surplus fish was put in scows - if canneries couldn't handle, sent to oileries - if they couldn't handle, fish were dumped. Tin plate came from England, a British made machine stamped the lids and formed the bodies. Cans were made up in the winter. Dad told him there were 29 canneries on Steveston waterfront in his days.

Fishing license cost \$1.00 - bought it in Steveston. Lots of farmers fished in skiffs, factory workers too, all moonlighting. No quota at that time - only what canneries would take.

Iron chink was invented and manufactured in Seattle. American cans brought from States - canning machines also from States. Several big machine shops set up in Vancouver to make machinery for canneries.

He fished Sockeye, Red Springs, Chums (not many humps) - chums went into saltery. When fishing, first there, first served. Boatbuilders on island were Macadie, Sakamoto and several others. Boom time in boatbuilding when canneries opened - 28 foot sailboats. Japanese boatbuilders designed own boats - started motorising in the 20's - car engines sometimes used in boats. Easthopes in Coal Harbour built engines - Yale engines also used.

When runs were on, fished 5 days at a time (24 hour day). Sockeye runs lasted 3 to 4 weeks.

Oilery on Macmillan Island smelled badly -- even in Vancouver if a S.E. wind.

Houses built by hand in his youth - lots of houses and barns built by hewing out logs. Good community spirit - all neighbours helped - always a craftsman around to design your house. In his youth, mother made own blankets, suits for him. New arrivals helped out. Remembers Mr. Senay, came from Quebec with 7 children, and 55¢ in pocket. Mr. Smith's father gave him an old cow, brought straw for them to sleep on in their tent. 7 to 8 people helped him build a house - got job in sawmills at 55¢ an hour - soon all right.

Remembers buying clothes in Blaine. Shirt 30¢, coveralls 80¢, shoes 50¢ to \$1.00. Bought gasoline in Blaine at 14¢ to 18¢ a gallon.

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Remembers big sailboats coming to Steveston.

Went to Opera House in Steveston - saw Buster Keaton films -
10¢ to 15¢ a show.

Alex Moir