

Researcher: Darlene Clyne

Int. 9 + 5  
Tape 65; 2 & Tape 66; 1

Interviewed: March 4, 1976

CANNERY WORKER: Mr. Roy York,  
4749 - 52A Street,  
Ladner, B. C. (946-6971)

- Born in Vancouver August 7, 1934, lived at Central Park.
- Family moved to Steveston in early 1900's, father worked for Joe Steves looking after his cattle.
- Lived on No. 9 Road (now known as Steveston Highway), and went to school in Steveston.
- The biggest business in those days in Steveston was the canning industry in summer time.
- Remembers the sailing vessels that used to come into the canneries in the early 1900's.
- There were eight sailing vessels tied up to all the canneries along the river.
- From #2 Road to the Scottish-Canadian at Garry Point.
- There was no land at the Scottish-Canadian Cannery then it was a plank road bridge for about half mile down at the point.
- There were ships tied up at the Star, Gulf of Georgia, Imperial, Phoenix, and Beaver.
- These sailing vessels used to lay up at the cannery as the pack was made and put into the holds.
- And in the fall, the cans were all labeled and loaded in the hulls of the ship.
- Then they would pull out; the tug boats used to come and race them out to Cape Flattery.
- Us kids, used to come and go watch the tug boat called the <sup>Loan</sup>~~Loan~~; she was the best one we could see, she would make the fastest trip.
- This took place around 1909 to 1910.
- Started in the cannery when I was 14, counting fish.
- As the fishermen threw the fish up I would count them, so many sockeye, etc.
- The coho would come up in the fall, and the humpbacks and dog salmon.
- You kept them separate, you got so much for it.
- Mostly they were all sockeye salmon, they used to go up the river so thick that you could see them swimming along the wharf.
- The salmon was so thick that the cannery used to take only 25 fish from each boat.

- Worked in the Gulf of Georgia Cannery in 1914 as a tally man and worked the Iron Chink.
- There was no gasoline boats then, just row boats with a sail.
- They used to fire a gun off 6 p.m. every Sunday night.
- There were thousands of fish going by and the fishermen fished right outside the cannery door.
- Tells story of belonging to the militia in 1914.
- Steveston had seven hotels then and they all flourished in the summer time.
- Because there were over ten thousand fishermen that came in for canning.
- There was also seven or eight thousands Indians (?) along the river banks, where there were huts for them.
- Very few Japanese fishermen then although they were starting to come in thick then.
- The Indians did most of the cannery work cleaning the fish.
- It was all hand work then, used to cut the heads off them and clean them and brush them by hand until get the the Iron Chink.
- There were Chinese men there too, they used to do all the cans.
- Put them through the solder machine and tap all the cans and seal them and lable them.
- They made all their own cans in the cannery in "those days".
- They used to put the cans into the steam boxes and they steamed in there for twenty minutes at 212° and then they would take them all out.
- The cans would swell and the Chinese men would tap a hole in the cans with a little needle and let all the air and gas out of them and then seal them all up.
- The steam boxes had little tracks that went in them that carried one pound tall and one pound flat cans that were on trays piled five or six high.
- Describes the steam boxes.
- The steam was pushed in from the steam boiler.
- From the steam boxes they were put into a big retort until they were perfectly cooked.
- Then they were brought out and cooled, washed and scrubbed in a water bath with acid in it and all the slime was taken off.
- They had a machine that cut the fish into the size of the can, then the Indian women would fill the cans by hand.

- They got so much a tray for filling the cans.
- When the canning was over the Chinese labled them and packed them into the ships.
- Most of the packs went to England in those days.
- There were eight ships at the most at Steveston along the river that would lay over for six months.
- Just about every cannery made their own cans.
- They had dyes to make their lids and cans and they used machinery to roll them up and the Chinaman used to solder them with their soldering irons.
- The cannery started in the spring to make their cans.
- There were only about four or five White men working in the cannery those days.
- Sockeye salmon were only 25¢ a piece then.
- The Japanese used to get the dog salmon and salt them and put them on the scows, but they only got 2 - 3 cents a piece for them.
- They used to pack them up like card wood and send them to Japan.
- In 1914, I was making 25¢ an hour.
- When I came back from the war, I went back to the Gulf of Georgia and got \$115.00 a month.
- I thought I was really well paid in those days, that in 1919.
- Sometimes worked 16-17 hours.
- It didn't matter how may hours you worked you got the same wages.
- Was all gillnetters in those days, never heard of seine boats then.
- Used to fill the tanks with blue stone solution for the linen nets, there were no nylon nets then.
- Used to have salmon traps at Boundary Bay that used to come in by scow loads.
- There were trollers that used to get the blue backs early in the spring.
- The canneries had a lot of their own boats.
- When the gas engines came in the Japanese took to them faster than any one else.
- Remembers when Ben Rose putting Vulcan engines into the Japanese boats.
- Mentions the old one cylinder Palmer engine that are being used
- The fishermen had a lot of trouble with the engines in the beginning.

- But the Palmer engine was good, they pretty well stayed with that one, they were reliable, would go for hours.
- They pulled their net in by hand those days.
- There were two men to a boat, but they didn't go out to the Gulf they stayed in the river.
- There's not as many fish today as there was then, too many fishermen today.
- Along No. One Road to Steveston was all China town, right from Moncton Street to the river.
- Speaks on the Columbia Cold Storage.
- Only the Imperial Cannery had cold storage.
- Remembers buying fresh fish on the West Coast in 1919.
- All the fresh fish went to Seattle for the fresh fish market.
- Talks on the activities of Chinatown.
- In the summer time the population of the Chinese was about ten to fifteen thousands (?).
- Mentions the Chinese contractor that look after the cannery.
- The cannery paid the Chinese contractor who in turn rounded up all the Chinese labours and he paid them.
- Believes the Chinese started disappearing when they started buying their cans from American Can Co. and canneries were using new and better machinery.
- Remembers the Chinese did the labling and looking after the cans and Indian women did the clean, washing and hand filling of the fish.
- All Indian women had their children tied on their backs when they were working.
- The Indians had huts all along the sides of the cannery and down below the dykes.
- Enjoyed working in the cannery in those days in the early 1900's.
- The sanitation conditions in those days were filthy in comparison to today's conditions.
- Speaks on the conditions of canneries in the early 1900's.
- Steveston was a very wide open place in those days.
- Tells on the Light Ship at the mouth of Fraser River.
- Says there were fish boats as far up to the river as New Westminster.
- Says the canneries brought in the Japanese because of all the drinking the White men did.

- There was "hell a popping" when the Japanese came in because the Japanese would fish while the White men laid around and drink and wouldn't get the fish to the canneries.
- Remembers the canneries would get sore at the White fishermen because they would go out and get so darn drunk and they wouldn't go out and fish when they wanted them to.
- Remembers the social activities of Steveston in those days.
- A steamer used to bring in three to four thousand Indians in from the West Coast (?).
- Don't remember seeing any Japanese women in the canneries in those days.