

Interviewed: February 23, 1976

Mr. Charlie Gillespie,
499 Wintergreen Avenue,
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- Dad started in cannery in 1910, worked his way up to manager.
- I was born in 1916 in Vancouver, Dad used to take me to Vancouver Cannery when I was small.
- Lived on Sea Island all my life.
- When the three canneries went together to make the B. C. Packers; B. C. Packers amalgamated in 1928 from three small companies: B. C. Packing and Fishing, Gus Mallard, and Wallace Fisheries.....Dad became Manager of the Fraser River district that was in 1928.
- Remembers going to the Star Cannery and looking out the window at the boats going out on a Sunday night.
- Also on Sunday nights, Dad used to take me down to the Burrard Cannery in Steveston to watch the boats go out.
- The boats had sails in those days.
- In those days fished night and day.
- Not as many boats then as today.
- Worked in net loft one summer when young.
- Helped fill the net needles so the net men could make the nets.
- Three years later, started work in the Great Northern Cannery in North Vancouver in 1932 for 3 years.
- Worked in the boiler, and on the lines, then was night watchman for a while.
- All cannery machinery was owned by American Can Co., canneries only leased them.
- Wages weren't good in "those days".
- Got \$50.00 a month, then paid your board \$30.00 out of that ending up with \$15-\$20.00 a month spending money.
- When working in a cannery got paid on a monthly basis, could work 14 - 15 hours a day, there was no overtime.
- Then went to Skeena for two years, and worked for Océanic Cannery on Smith Island.
- Looked after the retort machine and the oil and gas shed.
- In 1937 came back down to Steveston to work in the Imperial Cannery, pipe fitting and work with the engineer, and also did carpenter work.

- From there I worked in the Reduction Plant one winter doing odd jobs, pressing and screening.
- Then went to the ware-house two to three years.
- No fork lifts in those days, nothing to take a load of salmon off the pile and put it on the truck you had to do it by hand.
- Had about ten Chinese men and about ten steam boat dollies to pile up the truck.
- Bought a boat, gillnetter, and my Dad and I went fishing one season.
- First night we went out we didn't have an anchor or water, and we caught the net in the wheel.
- Didn't catch much fish that year and only fished the one season.
- After that I went to work in the stores dept. at Imperial.
- Also worked in the store at Namu for three months.
- All canneries had their own stores where they sold all supplies (food, etc.) to the fishermen.
- Remembers having to get up in the middle of the night and open the store to fill fishermen's orders of milk, bread, meat, etc.
- When the store closed in 1965 I moved over to the stock room.
- In the early days used to fill all cans by hands.
- Worked all year round.
- A lot of Chinese working in the 1930's unloading the boats, running the Iron Chink, which cuts the head and takes the fins and tails off.
- And then there was the bigger fish which they had to get the Chinese to split them.
- After the cans came through the seamer they used to go on to a rack then into the coolers, this was all done by Chinese.
- And then went on dollies, ten or twelve stacks of cans on the coolers on a car, this was pushed into the retorts.
- After they came out of the retorts, they all went through a lime tank and were scrubbed by hand, and this was all done by Chinese.
- Not too many Natives living around Steveston at that time (1930's), mostly they were up north.
- There used to be a lot of Japanese fishermen that used to live in company houses.
- All the company houses were side by side, five or six in a row with little wharves between them.

- The Japanese houses disappeared shortly after the WW II.
- Believes work conditions were pretty good in the canneries in 1930's.
- If the companies made a good profit that year you got no bonus but you might get a turkey at Christmas.
- Never joined the union because I was always on by the month.
- Believes in union, thought the union was good when it came in.
- Remembers one herring season when the Imperial Cannery had some trouble with the union.
- Mentions that the sanitation weren't as good then as today.
- If there was a day when all the canning had been done, the Chinese would come in and scrub the floor down with lye.
- In those days fishermen were paid at the end of the season.
- Explains how this was done.
- Canneries only hired their workers from season to season.
- The canneries had their "key-men" like the Iron Chink men, the filling machine men, the closing machine men and the engineer man and retort man.
- You would have 5 or 6 of them, then your foreman then you would have your general labourers to work under them.
- Some of them worked for six to eight months of the year then that was it, as that was all the works that was available in the cannery.