

Interviewed: February 27, 1976

Mr. Tom Johnson,

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New Westminster, B. C. 521-4201

- Started fishing in 1912.
- Was living in Steveston then.
- He then moved to Rivers Inlet.
- There were no power boats in the fleet then, all fishing was done from skiffs.
- Skiffs were still used in Rivers Inlet, Smiths, Skeena, etc. up until 1930, the last of the skiffs disappeared around 1940.
- In those days (1912) gillnetting was done at night as the fish could see the linen nets in the daytime.
- The seine boats were not allowed to come into the waters where the gillnetters were operating around 1912.
- There was no market for pinks during WW I (1914).
- He was getting 12¢ a piece for red spring in 1914. "You pay \$2.00 a steak for the same salmon today".
- Salmon fishing was done mostly by gillnetts in 1914.
- About fishing at night he says "In those days, mind you, the nets were made out of linen and they were much coarser twine, and the fish could see them in the daytime so there wasn't much use in going out daytime".
- The companies owned all the nets then (1912).
- Each company had a painted cedar block attached to their net: Brunswick Cannery had blue blocks; Wadhams had red, etc.
- He was part of the Pacific Coast Fishermen's Union (1946).
- They amalgamated with the Salmon Purse Seiners Union. "Whether right or wrong we done it anyhow, because we believed that union is strength".
- "Somehow or another, today the fishing is overdone; too many boats, too much gear out and modern type of gear".
- Lived in cannery houses at Kildala.
- Each fishermen had a shack of his own, sometimes two fishermen to a shack and they had a great row of shacks for fishermen to go on weekends. They were just simple summer cabins.
- 48 shacks in one bay; they were 10 foot by 12 foot or something like that, bed on one side and a stove in one corner, that's the way we lived.

- The company did not charge anything for the shacks; everything was free except for the canvas used for tents over the bow of the skiff.
- None of the fishermen had their own nets until around 1917.
- He remembers when Mike Davis got his own net.
- Power boats arrived in River Inlet around 1924.
- The gas boats didn't make too much difference on the fishing because the nets were the same, you didn't have to push with the oars, it was much easier on the men, from there on, they got power pick up drums on the boats, that was around 1930.
- Talks about the progressive mechanization of the boats and the effects of this progression.
- Has never been involved in any major accidents on the sea.
- Spent some time collecting fish (packer). Started around 1938 worked with his wife.
- Discusses wages, hours, etc.
- Settled in Steveston for a while, bought the Lulu Island Marina which his wife operated while he was gillnetting during the summer months.
- "I've always loved gillnetting anyway"; "I like this coast it just grows on ya...you can't very well let go of it".
- Says that when they were getting 12¢ a piece for salmon in 1912, it was not enough to live on through the rest of the year, so he worked in logging camps during the winter.
- About the U.F.A.W.U. he says "It's a natural thing to have a union. I am very much for it, I always was, of course, there is a lot of criticism against unionists, and all these things, but I don't see the justification for that. I do believe the fishermen should unite as well as the employers".
- Has been in the U.F.A.W.U. ever since it started.
- He remembers the big strike of 1936. He was in the executive board at the time. Discusses in detail.
- He remembers no incidents of violence in the strike.
- About race relations in the industry he says "There's bound to be a little bit of friction but not in a major capacity by any means".
- He fished during the First and Second World Wars.
- About the internment of the Japanese-Canadians during WW II he states: "Well, it's quite a blow to Japanese; a lot of innocent people were taken away from the coast...when a national emergency like that comes

in front I guess there was no choice, but to move the dangerous sections away from the coast into the interior....I guess Japan would have done the same thing in similar conditions".

- Steveston in 1912 was "just a ramshakel of canneries" .
- In 1912 you could buy a gallon of Hudson Bay rum for \$2.00, beer was \$6.00 a case; Scotch 80¢ or 90¢ a bottle...\$9.00 a case "We done a lot of drinking those days, same as we do today I guess".
- He believe that the fishing industry is in danger of extinction.
- Eventually the competition will get so keen that it will be only the survival of the fittest.
- Says that the cause of the 1936 strike was that the company lowered the price on the catch after the war. There was no more war time market. The strike was finally settled to the satisfaction of the fishermen.
- He would like to <sup>see</sup> a provincial department of fisheries.
- Fishing is becoming more difficult for the little guy to compete in.
- Describes his first boat and his present boat.
- Anchor~~s~~ used to be pulled by hand. They were very heavy, they are now pulled by power winch.
- Mr. Johnson is now 86 years old.
- Technology has reduced the work of the fisherman by 3/4's...hand pulling is no fun.
- Describes the differences between hand pulling nets and nets being pulled by a powered drum.