

Researcher: Darlene Clyne

Tape 65; 1 & 2

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Mrs. Ruth Kennedy,

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- Speaks on the early days of growing up in Steveston.
- Born in Steveston in 1910.
- Father worked for a number of different canneries along the water front.
- Was with the B. C. Packers, but the last cannery he worked for was the Richmond Cannery at the foot of #2 Road.
- He was the engineer in charge of the retorts.
- Canneries "then" were big sprawling buildings built out over the river.
- Kids had plenty of freedom to come and go as they pleased at the cannery as long as they stayed clear of the machinery.
- Speaks of the canning methods they had at the cannery in the early 1920's.
- Much the same as today but not so perfected.
- First worked in cannery at the age of ten.
- Tagged along with older sister, says: "If you got by the China Boss you did alright"!
- Used to take tins from the stacks and put on to wooden trays.
- Got paid 10¢ an hour.
- From the wooden trays they went through a gadget that dropped a bit of salt in each tin, then went down to the next floor for filling.
- By the time I was old enough for cannery work the Depression was on and jobs were scarce.
- Most of the cannery work went to the Japanese.
- Unless you had been a cannery worker before, you had no chance at all.
- Brother worked at the cannery in cold storage.
- It was a big social event in those days to go up to the dyke at 6 P.M. Sunday evening to see the fishing fleet go out.
- The larger boats used to tow the sail boat out to a place where they could navigate on their own.
- Remembers the big parrot outside the Steveston Hotel.
- Used to see piles of tin left over from the makings of the cans along the dyke.

- Remembers they made the salmon cans for many years in Steveston at the Imperial Cannery.
- Mostly Japanese lived in cannery houses along the dyke.
- In the summer, Indians camped there also, they had a lot of temporary summer housing conditions.
- The houses seemed to be cramped together, there were several rows of cabins joined together where a number of single men lived.
- The cabins were bare, nothing in them hardly, just a bunk and a stove.
- Used to peddle apples and eggs along the dyke.
- There were at the Atlas and Imperial Canneries what you called "China Houses" they were big boarding places for men.
- Very few Chinese women, maybe three or four.
- These boarding houses had a large common room; and then there were small cubicle where the men slept, and a large common kitchen at the back.
- One thing about the Japanese, they made use of every scrap of ground there was.
- If there wasn't any ground they had a box or a old row boat filled with earth for a garden, just to have something growing.
- Speaks on the Japanese that lived at the Scottish-Canadian Cannery.
- The Japanese lived in the cannery houses, they didn't buy any houses of their own until the early 1930's.
- Mentions that a lot of these homes had open floors, not very warm.
- They had wood burning stoves, where they used wood and bark from the beach in place of coal.
- Also stoves had a fence around them so the "toddlers" wouldn't get burnt.
- Japanese didn't go to school until about 1920.
- They had their own Japanese Language School with an hour instruction of English.
- Mentions the different schools there were, also the various social functions.
- The Japanese owned a lot of stores along Moncton Street.
- Talks on the great fire of May 1918 that burnt down several canneries and hotels.

- Sister and several other teenagers worked salvaging the tins of salmon that had fallen into the river.
- A lot was lost because this was the previous season's pack that was stored in the cannery.
- The cans had fallen through the floor and you had to wait for low tide before you could get them.
- Believes the fire started in one of the Chinese gambling houses, as so many of the fires did by a lantern being knocked over.
- Very common to see the old Chinese men smoking opium with their water pipes.
- I remember seeing East Indian men walking along the street, not sure whether they worked in the cannery or whether off the ships.
- Speaks on the old Chinese laundry and the Japanese bean curd factory.
- The Japanese used to peddle their bean curd all along the dyke.
- The Japanese and Indian women used to carry their children on their backs when they were working.
- Also during the war years they had a child-care set up at the Imperial Cannery.
- They didn't have drinking water in Steveston, it was brought in from New Westminster in big barrels.
- Always had a barrel under your eves to collect rain water for your laundry and washing.
- There was far more workers then than there is now because of the amount of work done by hand.
- Speaks on the long steam boxes about forty feet or more, sometimes they would get jammed up and you had to stop until they got all sorted out.