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Tape 66; 1

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CANNERY PLANT FOREMAN:

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- First started work at the St. Mungo Cannery in 1932.
- St. Mungo was one of the second or third earliest canneries on the Fraser River.
- The cannery was brought out by B. C. Packers and is used today as a seine loft.
- Used what was called the four spindle machinery, that type of seaming equipment.
- That type of equipment came out with the sanitary cans.
- The first sanitary can came out in 1914 in the salmon industry.
- And we used a machine called the four spindle and a exhaust box which heated the can up and then we sealed it after it was hot.
- Before the First World War, St. Mungo Cannery was making their own cans
- The cannery would figure out approximately how many cans they would need for the season.
- For example, if they figured out they were going to do up ten thousand cases of salmon (depending on size of cannery) they would put their order in and have the tin plate shipped from England.
- They land it at the plant, bring the Chinese crew in and the Chinese crew would start making the cans.
- This would be in March or April.
- They would solder the bottom on, then they would put the fish in the can and then they solder the top on.
- Then they took the can and put it in the retorts and heated it for about 15 or 20 minutes at 212 degrees.
- Then they took it out and punched a hole in the top with a little wooden mallet with a nail on the end of it which punched a small hole.
- This let the heated air out of the can and it collapsed, then they would solder that hole up with a dash of solder.
- The Chinese were very adept at it.
- Then it was put back in the retort and processed again for the normal processing time, and then it was finished can.
- They took that can after that and they lacquer it.
- In those days they always lacquer the can because of the soldering and hand working of the cans some of the tin plate was broken.

- And the lacquering of the cans was a means of protecting the outside of the can from rust.
- Then the Chinese would label the cans by hand.
- They would take a stack of labels and go through them so fast you could hardly see them do it.
- It was beautiful to watch.
- They would put the labels on a angle and take a stick or a paint brush and put or draw glue down the ends that were showing and then stick them on to the can.
- The labourers in those days were mostly Chinese and the native Indian women did all the hand filling and cleaning of the fish.
- They had about 80 to 90 Chinese men and 150 to 200 Indian women depending on the size of the plant (this is around early 1900's).
- Recalls in 1932 used to hand fill 1/4 lb. tins of salmon and we used 90 women and at that time they were 50% Japanese girls and the rest were Indian and White girls.
- Just every nationality was there.
- There were some pretty crude hand fillers before that they were called Letson burpee fills that used to do about 75 cans a minute.
- There was also the Murray and Latta machine.
- The cannery used to buy their equipment in those days or they could lease.
- St. Mungo had pretty crude housing conditions in those days.
- They were usually just long rows of shacks on stilts over the water.
- And there was a Chinese bunk house which was a two story building with bunks in tiers.
- You could put fifty to hundred men in there.
- The Chinese were interesting because they would do their own cooking supple their own bedding, you didn't have to cater to them at all.
- They came really equiped, they brought their own cook and supplied their own food.
- Remembers they would arrive with their pigs and start a vegetable garden.
- The Indians also lived in row houses but they were a little more individual because theywere family groups.

- Remembers there were nurseries set up for the children of women workers.
- The nurseries were supplied with a nanny.
- The company gave them the facilities and paid the nanny to look after the children.
- Says as hard-hearted and money hungry as the companies were (you didn't have any control of hours and labours you took what they gave you in those days) even then the companies offered nurseries.
- In those days when the fish came in it had to be processed right away.
- If you worked half hour you only got paid for half hour.
- The only job you got piece work was filling the cans by hand.
- You would get so much for every tray.
- There were 36 cans on a tray.
- I worked for 15¢ an hour in 1926, on machinery.
- Then remember getting 20¢ an hour and thinking that was pretty good.
- I was operating and maintaining machinery and keeping it up to the standard it required for the seams on the cans.
- Describes the exact process of canning the salmon in the early 1900's.
- The fish arrived in the plant in those days most of the time in good condition.
- We would take the fish into the plant and clean it, we would put it through im what was called the Iron Chink.
- In some places it was hand butcher depending on the amount of fish you had.
- It was butcher, cleaned by the native women and then was cut into slices by a cutter called a Gang Knives, which was cut into different sizes for the cans.
- If for the half pound can it was cut into one and half inches and for the 1/4 pound can it was 7/8 inch slice, one pound can was around 4 inches.
- Then slices of fish would fall out of the cutter into baskets or into a large wooden vat which had brine in it.
- It would stay in there so many minutes then it was dipped out with a hoop net.
- It would then be put into little wooden baskets or trays.

- They would have holes in the bottom of these trays so that the brine could run out.
- Then they would be put into cartons and taken to the girls who in turn would put the salmon into cans.
- The girls would hand fill the cans then the cans were stacked on to a tray that held 36 cans.
- The trays were stacked on a small flat truck they were wheeled over to the lines.
- The lines were what we called the closing equipment, the cannery machinery itself.
- Now I am talking about the days after the hand equipment, this is the first mechanical equipment that came in.
- It would be fed on to a table where a group of girls usually five would inspect these cans, straighten the fish out, make sure they had the right weight in them.
- Then they would go into a machine that was called a Clincher.
- And then the cover would be put on the tin loosely but sufficient to hold it in place.
- It then goes through a exhaust box, where it goes back and forth on a series of chains and it usually that's nine minutes to go through this box.
- And the idea of this is to exhaust the air to create a certain amount of steam which drives air out of that can.
- That is why the cover is on the can loosely, so that air can escape.
- And yet you have to have a cover on there to keep the fish clean and you don't put the steam directly to the fish.
- The can then comes out on a series of chains to the four spindle closing machine.
- It is immediately closed up while it is still hot, this forms a vacuum in the can.
- This vacuum was very important if you had to ship the fish to England which was at that time our biggest market for salmon.
- The highest quality salmon went to England, Scotland and those places.
- It was advertised as the centre cut although it wasn't always the center cut.
- It is most important to have a vacuum in the can, one of the main reasons, is not so much to preserve the fish the bacteria has been

- killed in the can by heat processing, but because of atmospheric pressure during shipping.
- Explains this in detail.
 - The can then is processed after that, for half pound it is processed at 252 degrees for 62 minutes to make sure all the bacteria in the can is killed.
 - Also that processing time softens the bone up so it is quite edible and crunchy.
 - One pound tin is processed at 247 degrees for 100 minutes.
 - In the olden days a man would go to the retort and he would process by hand and by eye and by his natural skills.
 - He would have a thermometer and pressure guage and that's all.
 - There were slip ups, human error.
 - After it was processed the cans would be lacquered and then it would be labled.
 - Talks about the sailing ships that were tied up on the Fraser River.
 - In those days the canneries always supplied their own fish boat.
 - In those days it was a 25 foot double ended sailing boat with a set of big oars and a man would row it.
 - These boats brought in great amounts of fish because there were terrific amounts in the Fraser River.
 - The collecting of fish in those days was usually done by a tug boat pulling a scow around.
 - The boats didn't range so far in those days.
 - Mentions all the different canneries along the Fraser River.
 - The first cannery in B. C. was the Annt^lville in Gunnerson Slough.
 - Explains the story behind the name of the Annt^lville Cannery.
 - In those days the canneries sometimes got more fish than they could handle, they just simply took so many and then "packed up their suitcases and went home".
 - Believes the canneries made a good profit in those days.
 - Remembers hearing stories of salmon being brought at 5¢ a piece.
 - Remembers in 1930 bringing chum salmon in from the Gulf, load after load and getting 25¢ per fish.
 - Didn't notice any discrimination in those days, the Japanese were fishermen, the Chinese were shore workers, everyone got along fine.

- The better the machinery got the more people were employed because there was more fish processed.
- Before the war, the canneries usually put up between 35,000 and 75,000 cases per season depending on the size of the company.
- Back in the real old days the canneries would set themselves up at 5,000 cases per season and that was it.
- Talks on the union.
- Believes the companies didn't object to the unions coming in because it settled a awful lot of labour problems.
- Discusses the labour problems before the war.
- There was no fixed hours of work, the working conditions were pretty rugged in those canneries, such as bunk house facilities for people that went up and down the coast.
- Some of the boats were pretty crude, there wasn't any facilities on them, they didn't have much more than a dog house.
- The canneries felt there was a need for the unions, the companies welcomed them.
- Remembers working at St. Mungo Cannery for sixty dollars a month with board, work ten to fifteen hours a day with no overtime.
- Recalls and names thirteen canneries in one area of the Fraser River district.