

Interviewer:

Buck Suzuki and

1973

Everyone seems to think that in the olden days the development on Lulu Island existed only in Steveston by mostly of persons of Japanese origin engaged in the Fraser River salmon fishery and the people who worked on the shore who were mostly of Chinese origin and settled Richmond insofar as the second generation is concerned. But while I have no way of actually showing you the actual buildings that existed on another part of Richmond, that is in the northeasterly section. There was another large industry located there known as Ewenís Cannery at one time considered to be the largest salmon cannery in the British Empire and possibly the world. The fishermen who fished for them were of either Scandinavian origin or of Japanese origin.

My father happened to be one of them that fished for that company with headquarters or residence on another adjacent island called Don Island. Well, persons of Japanese origin apparently had been working for and fishing for Ewenís Cannery since the mid-1890s or possibly a little earlier even, but there were not too many of them. During the latter part of the 1890s and the beginning of the 1900s there happened to be two very strong-willed people who came from the north-eastern part of Japan who were acting more or less as bosses or representatives or spokesmen for the fishermen fishing for the cannery. There was some very bitter rivalry between the two leaders and one leader whose name was Sato apparently had a larger number of fishermen than the other man who was known as Oikawa. Now, that would never do so Mr. Oikawa went back to Japan around 1904 and tried to recruit a number of farmers and other people around his area to come over to America, as they used to call it in those days, and that it was a very rich country, that the returns would be great, and that within a few years you could make enough money and return back to your home country and live happily ever after sort of idea.

So anyway he went around with that story and the Russo-Japanese War caught up with him and he was for a while put in gaol under suspicion of espionage but they soon found out that he had nothing to do with anything against the Emperor and they let him go free. Just as soon as the Russo-Japanese War was over, he quietly recruited a number of people, 87 to be exact, and they made plans to cross the Pacific on a 196-ton schooner. This was in the summer of 1906. They loaded this 196-ton schooner up with all the rice that they could put on there and other food products with water for ballast they took off. What they didn't know was that the Japanese authorities had notified both Canadian and American authorities that there was a suspicious fishing vessel leaving this port which was located in the north-eastern part of Japan in, I think the province of Miyagi. The authorities were quite sure that they were not bona fide fishermen but that they had intentions of landing either in Canada or in United States.

So, anyway, they didn't know that and they just kept coming and coming and it took them almost three months to come across. So by the time the three months was up, they were down to the last barrel of rice, one bowl of rice per day, nothing else, hardly any drinking water left. So seeing that the schooner was running quite high and when they reached the mouth of Juan de Fuca

strait they hit a terrific blow there and the ship was very light. They didn't know what to do, they needed more ballast. So Dad said he can remember, he was still young in those days, everybody stripped to the waste and they got buckets and they didn't have to lean over the side to get the water but they got the salt water, put it in these barrels, lashed it down below decks for ballast. In that way they saved their ship.

But the navigator was uncertain of the entrance there and I actually know that the entrance to Juan de Fuca Strait from the American side is very dangerous and on the Canadian side is known as the Graveyard of the Pacific. These people even though they came from Japan had been forewarned of the dangers of this

entrance so they tacked for three days back and forth waiting for the weather to turn on side. And when it did, when the weather became better, they sailed up the Straits of Juan de Fuca put up the yellow flag at Williams Head. They requested water which was all gone by that time but they didn't realize that this was the immigration station where all ships from foreign nations made a stop and were subject to scrutiny by the Canadian authorities. So they were immediately detained there. While they were lying at anchor there Dad said that he could still remember how good the fish tasted that they had bartered with the native Indian people and he said that, come to think of it now, it wasn't salmon and it wasn't cod but it was the lowly dogfish. But nevertheless after being starved for quite a period of time and living on a bowl of rice and a little bit of water, dogfish tasted very, very good.

These, well half the crew landed even though they were told to stay on board ship under cover of darkness, they landed and were immediately picked up by the Northwest Mounted Police at that time and taken into a pub, an English style pub. That lady that was here when you first came, her husband, the , had made it to the shore and I can remember him telling me that when they were taken into this pub, there were all kinds of strange foreign-looking people, he said, with big noses and red hair. He said they were huge people but, he said, all of a sudden one man took his hat off and he went all around the pub and he took up a collection and he looked around for the leader and, he said, he dumped a bunch of foreign coins into our laps. He said, I'll never forget that.

So, to make a long story short, they were detained there for awhile but were asked, do you want to be deported or will you become Canadian citizens? We need, we are short of labour here and we need help. So that was their original intent anyway so they said, I will

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across the strait of Georgia, they came up the Fraser River and they landed at Don Island. This man, Oikawa, already had a establishment there in connection with Ewen's Cannery. He was in the habit of salting chum salmon, or Akita (??) salmon, and shipping it to Japan in small quantities. Well, that year, those fishermen that were left here already had several hundred cases of salted salmon and the ship, after unloading its human cargo, took on this cargo of salt salmon and returned to Japan. That's the way my father came to Canada.

He had worked at other occupations other than fishing, I think that he said he was part of a gang, as they called them, a group of workmen under an Irish foreman who put in the present

Burlington and Northern Railway here into Canada which was known as the Great Northern. And he worked on the C.P.R. up as far as Revelstoke and he took out his British naturalization papers in Lethbridge, or Raymond, Alberta. In those days, he said, you didn't have to wait five years, they came around selling British naturalization certificates. An old timer who passed away last year at the age of 93, said right to the very end, he would not change his British naturalization certificate for a Canadian citizenship certificate. It came on his 82nd birthday, there was an order saying that in order to obtain a fishing licence you must be a Canadian citizen, must have a Canadian citizenship. After a period a British naturalization certificate wouldn't be recognized. So he said, 'Well, that's good' and he quit. (laughs)

But these people were, well, they lived a very happy life. I can remember we used to look forward to an occasional group of entertainers that used to come from Japan to Canada perhaps once a year or once every other year. There were enough of them residing in this area to make it worthwhile for these kind of groups to come over. Even as a child much later, I can remember these people making the recitals and if you seen or heard the Japanese besides just and hearing at the same time, the more melodramatic the more you can cry, the better the recital. The men would go through all the motions imitating the females, imitating all the other characters in the recital and really, even at the time, I could understand what the stories were all about. They were the classics.

They used to have parties. Their way of life was very primitive. If there was a birth in the community, all of the ladies would go over there and assist. If there was a death in the community, everybody . It was, well, one of the only settlements other than Steveston on Lulu Island.

Interviewer question inaudible: Any idea how many there that might have been at the most, you know, when it was at its peak population?

I would think that it would be in the neighbourhood of, oh, forty or fifty. Incidentally, this man here, he had great ideas and started a winery and he brought in experts from Japan, he bought a big supply of rice, he put in a special steam engine for steaming rice in large quantities, he had huge barrels for the rice, you don't see some of those barrels now ñ they were 8 or 9 feet high. They were put together by a cooper and strapped with bamboo to hold it together, golden bamboo. Apparently, he made many thousands of gallons of this brew, this wine and his idea was to make some money other than from fishing by selling this wine to people in Vancouver and New Westminster. It just so happened that the rival party got a sniff of it, notified the authorities, and said the authorities came over there with axes there the little creek that flows through Don Island was running pure sake, it was a shame.

But that venture plus another one in 1913, he attempted another similar sort of an immigration project to the one that he was successful in 1906. Only this time the ship was 500 tons and it was called the Kinkasan Maru, if I remember correctly and it was going to bring 400 people over. But this time the captain told the police and quickly put a stop to it. Nevertheless, so much money had been already invested that that ship had to do something, you know they couldn't just leave it back there and call it quits. So he sailed across on that ship, came over to Don Island, and they

went back with a load of salt salmon to Japan.

They arrived here in September of 1914 and left at the end of October. Now the skipper himself knew the North Pacific was not a very nice place to take a heavily laden ship that weighed only 500 tons at that time of year so he took a more southerly route. It took a longer time, the weather was much warmer, by the time he got to home port the fish was not fit for human consumption so this action broke that man. His son carried on for a few more years and this son was one of the first Japanese playboys, I guess He was very well acquainted with the aristocracy over in Victoria                      wonderful                      even though he was a married man in his own right, he had money, he spent                      father's money                      he had a grand time.

That community kept going for many years afterwards but not with same population, you know not 40 or 50. But gradually diminished because people who had children had to think of their education and there were no schools over there on the island. At the same time, the municipality of Delta, which is where I am living at the present time, was short of children of school age in order to perpetuate an already existing public school. The government insisted that they must have so many potential students or else they would not give assistance or they would not supply you with a teacher. So the people in the Delta area came over there recruiting children over 6 years of age, or people with children who were 6 years of age or over, to move over to the Delta side and help supply the necessary number of children in order to have a teacher assigned. That's when I came across, in 1919.

Interviewer questions

You                      apart from, as you say the occasional dances and things it is quite a small island, Don Island, how many acres would you say, it is?

Yes, Don Island is a very small island. I would say roughly 30 acres and on that 30 acres though, the soil was very good. There was huge barrels brought over from Japan and assembled here to make wine as I was telling you earlier, previously. They became very useful, they began to grow radishes and cabbages and the Japanese have some sort of a salted concoction of cabbage and radishes something like sauerkraut that the German people have. I can still remember they used these barrels to salt down these 2 vegetables, and it was all grown on that island, I can still remember. They only had 2 horses working but the production was something from heaven. Now, it's a shame, that island in order to dredge the river, it's entirely covered with sand.

Interviewer:                      as a child coming across

I really don't know, I just existed as a child, I guess. I didn't have too many things (or friends) to me that was the world. My father never encouraged me to read or write, I was too young anyway. I was only three years of age. I have a very dim memory. I know that our house was located near a huge grove of cottonwood and spruce trees and they were used for, I can remember years later, when one of them was cut down, I think it must have been 9 feet at the butt, must have towered 200 feet. There was a grove of it quite close to where I lived. My father never lived in the bunkhouse because not long after he came out here, he made arrangements to have mother join him. They built, what you call a float home, that's where I was born. Incidentally, that house is still there mother and dad lived in it till they died. And the funny part

of it was during the past second world war they travelled all over British Columbia, all over Ontario. Then years later they came back again, my wife and I were living in a small place and we didn't have too much room but Dad and mother stayed with us for awhile and they went around looking for another small house. They found one just up the road from where I lived, they bought it, they brought it down there and moved it to the place that I own now. Something seemed very familiar about the house although it had been changed suddenly we found out it was the very house they had built when they first kept house together in 1910.

Interviewer: And it's still there in one piece .

Still there in one piece. I can remember where the carpenter had made a mistake in the joint. I remember pointing out this mistaken cut in the corner and, sure enough, it's still there.

Interviewer: And that hut, that's still standing there now that was a landing at one point called wasn't it?

That in front of Sunbury, the old sternwheeler Skeena, that used to carry Ö..

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