In the 1870 the huge runs of salmon in the Nimpkish River drew the attentions of two entrepreneurs, S.A. Spencer and Wesley Huson. They decided that Cormorant Island (Alert Bay), opposite the river mouth, was a good location to set up a salmon saltery.

Alert Bay developed into the largest commercial fishing town on the central coastline. Spencer and Huson were joined by other fish processors and the harbour was crowded with gillnetters, long-liners and trollers. There were canneries here, as well as in many locations within a day’s sailing time of Alert Bay. First Nations families moved in, the women worked in the canneries, their husbands and sons fished.

The Alert Bay Accord between the Village of Alert Bay and the 'Namgis First Nation. It was signed in 1999 and renewed in 2012, and is the first agreement of its kind between a Municipality and First Nations Band in Canada. It describes our common goals and pledges mutual support in civic and cultural matters affecting both jurisdictions.

Alert Bay is on Cormorant Island which is 4.9 km long, and 0.8 km wide at its narrowest point. The 'Namgis First Nation has the largest population on the island, with 450-500 people. The Village of Alert Bay has a population of 450-500 people, and the remainder of the island's population the Whe-la-la-u Area Council, which represents seven of our Kwakwaka'wakw Tribes approximately 250 people and the Regional District of Mount Waddington 35 people.

The U’mista Cultural Centre, with its collection of priceless Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch regalia, is also a must-see. U’mista’s Potlatch Collection tells an epic story of resistance and resilience. The Centre opened in 1980 to house repatriated Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial regalia that had been seized by government authorities in 1922. One of the most complete and important collections of its type in the world, U’mista’s Potlatch Collection is a source of great joy and pride for the Kwakwaka’wakw.

**The potlatch ban was legislation forbidding the practice of the potlatch passed by the Government of Canada, begun in 1885 and lasting until 1951**

**First Nations saw the law as an instrument of intolerance and injustice. "Second only to the taking of land without extinguishing Indian title; the outlawing of the potlatch can be seen as the extreme to which Euro-Canadian society used its dominance against its aboriginal subjects in British Columbia."**

**Though often ignored and circumvented, the ban remained in Canadian legal codes until 1951, when Section 149 was deleted from a revision of the Indian Act. Arrests for charges under the Act were few until 1921, when a raid on the village of Memkumlis held by Chief Dan Cranmer saw the arrest and charges laid against 45 people; of these 22 were given suspended sentences (three were remanded on appeal) and 20 men and women sent to Oakalla Prison in Burnaby. The sentences were two months for first offenders and three months for second offenders.**

Alert Bay has a small amount of people fishing these days, but we remember and learn from our past as we plan for the future.