

This recording is of an interview with Ron Amero, a retired longshoreman and member of LLWU Local 502, who worked out of the longshore hall in New Westminster, as well as at Westshore Terminals later in his career. The major themes of the interview are his longshoring career trajectory, the longshore community in New Westminster, and changes to the marine transportation sector.

Interviewer: Dean Johnson

Date: 6 January 2014

Date range: 1960 – present.

Sound Recording Length: 1:26:36

Ron Amero grew up in Coquitlam as the son and grandson of longshoremen. He reports that would watch freighters come up to the Pattullo Bridge while fishing as a child, and so it seemed natural for him to take a job at the waterfront. When he was twenty years old, he and his best friend met up for his first day at the longshore dispatch hall. From there onwards, he learned on the job and soon became both a winch and crane operator. Amero experienced the evolution of equipment, freight and the waterfront in New Westminster. He describes unloading the first Japanese automobiles. Companies mentioned in the interview that he has worked at are Fraser Mills, Overseas Terminals, Brackman & Ker Terminals, Fraser Surrey Docks, Pacific Coast Terminals, and Westshore Terminals.

The interview is at some stages collective history between the interviewer and the interviewee, and this is noted in the relevant sections .

Section 00:00 – 04:35

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about how he was a third generation longshoreman, and grew up seeing the freighters come up to the Pattullo Bridge. He started as a longshoreman when he was twenty years, and his first job was loading lumber at Fraser Mills. Amero talks about the people who started at the same time as him and the dispatcher at the time. The union hall was located on 10th Street in New Westminster, and Amero describes the area around it.

Section 04:36 – 09:02

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about his father, who he says liked to gamble and chase young girls. His father eventually moved to Richmond, managed a farm, and claimed unemployment insurance. He talks about a time when he had to replace his father on an afternoon shift, as his father was fired for being drunk and late.

Section 09:03 – 15:44

Amero talks about the evolution of equipment used by longshoremen. He talks about the teamwork involved in the physical work, and the dream about operating the winch or the forklift at the time. He eventually knew how to operate the different machines, through conversations during coffee breaks. Amero reports that he was involved in the development of the first training manual and processes in the 1970s that created the training program at Fraser Surrey Docks, and later in Vancouver. He closes the section by talking about how the smell of hydraulic oil brings back the memories of working the steam engines.

Section 15:45 – 18:04

Amero states that he was never injured while working, nor did he observe any accidents. He states that there could have been many accidents, but they never talked about it on the dock, and safety has improved significantly. Amero says they used to have snowball fights with asbestos, and never heard about the dangers of the material.

Section 18:05 – 21:59

In this portion of the interview, Amero describes the evolution of handling automobiles as well as containers. Initially, containers were tied on the ship's deck, and were handled manually as they had no cranes. The first cranes were installed at Fraser Surrey Docks in the 1970s, but the dock did not handle a large number of container ships.

Section 22:00 – 23:42

Amero talks about the day of the Fraser Surrey Dock fire, but he was not working on the particular day. A person on the dock was doing torch work near sliding doors, and pulp rolls under the door caught fire, and spread because of wind to the other wood products inside the storage space. He reports that about \$20 million of worth of cargo inside the storage space was damaged.

Section 23:43 – 26:21

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about Pacific Coast Terminals, and the steam engine and rails on the land. He talks about the lead ships, and the effects of lead on the workers. At the time, there was no monitoring of working conditions or health risks.

Section 26:22 – 38:25

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about working with different types of cargo. He operated different equipment, and saw a variety of ships visit the port. He describes the entire process of loading sawdust, flour, lead and fertilizer. He tells the story about the man who lost his watch in the load of sawdust, and how it ended up in Japan, and later returned. He talks about how he did not like working with hides, as they would be "runny with juice" in the summer, but enjoyed operating the winch.

Section 38:26 – 42:37

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about how they would use the engine room at the ships to dry their clothes and have lunch in the mess. The smallest ships would come in to Fraser Mills, as they were small enough to come under the Pattullo Bridge. He liked working at Fraser Mills loading lumber, and he could eat his lunch at the Windsor Hotel. Amero contrasts working at the docks at the rice mill and at Fraser Mills.

Section 42:38 – 46:29

Amero states there is "no end to characters" on the dock. He talks about how there was no synchronized pay system at the time of his father, and they would drive to all the different stevedoring companies along Front St to pick up the paycheques, before shopping at Safeway and returning to the farm in Richmond. He closes the section by talking about the "F-Troop", who liked to go to the liquor store before they started their afternoon shift.

Section 46:30 – 53:19

In this portion of the interview, Amero tell a variety of stories about the foremen he worked for.

Section 53:20 – 57:55

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about how he left the longshore hall for Westshore Terminals after 24 years. He wanted regularly scheduled work, stability and holidays. He talks about how he was laid off six weeks after starting to work at Westshore, but was rehired less than two years after. The two men talk about the harder times, and the contracts with the BC Maritime Employer's Association at the time.

Section 57:56 – 01:01:43

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about how he did not golf, but went to all the Christmas parties. He would fish with some of his old work colleagues, and talks about Dave Odd who was the friend who he came to the dispatch hall on his first day.

Section 01:01:44 – 01:03:

Amero describes working at the grain elevator, and explain the process of stabilizing the ship while loading wheat. The foreman would count the men going down, as there was so much dust you could drown in the wheat. Amero was in Gang 9 at the time, but he states that the system was becoming less profitable.

Section 01:03:25 – 01:08:45

In this portion of the interview, Cliff Palser's party at Pacific Coast Terminals with dancing girls and pizza is discussed. Amero talks about how he would idealize the men working on the dock, but soon realized that their drinking was excessive. He talks about the men who you would not hand a bottle to, and the men who had been through the war.

Section 01:08:46 – 01:11:27

In this portion of the interview, Amero states that he did notice any racial discrimination while working. He says there now there seems to be a split between the East Indian groups "the brown boys" and the other guys. The two talk about Jack Singh, who was a foreman at Westshore Terminals, and who liked to play cards.

Section 01:11:28 – 01:21:49

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about pulp and how they came in bundles, and could be loaded by a crane. He explains what the tanks were, and how they would load different cargo in them. He tells the story of ships from South America that arrived at the Fraser Surrey Docks with salt, transferred into barges, towed up to the Port Mann Bridge and transported across BC. He talks about how they would look forward to the orange and apple ships that would come in, and how at this point, Pacific Coast Terminals had the best freezing system on the West Coast.

Section 01:21:50 – 01:26:36

In this portion of the interview, Amero talks about how some of the men postponed picking up their holiday cheques because they were scared they would spend it all at once. Amero finds a cheque from one week in 1967, and talks about how he made \$3.88 per hour, and \$109 for four

days of work that week. He closes the interview by talking about how if you were a member's son, you could get away with many things.