

This recording is from an interview with Eggert Eggertson, a retired longshoreman and member of ILWU Local 502 who worked on various terminals along the Fraser River. The major themes of the interview are his longshore career, the equipment used on the dock, and the effect of longshoring on his lifestyle and family.

Interviewer: Dean Johnson

Date: 20 January 2014

Date range: 1960s - present

Sound Recording Length: 1:14:07

Eggert Eggertson worked on the Fraser River waterfront from 1962 to 2000, experiencing the changing waterfront and longshoring occupation. He tells the story about how he one day had a quota of 24,000 sacks of flour, and could go home early if he finished the quota. Having worked on multiple docks along the New Westminster waterfront, he has handled almost all kinds of goods and knows the ways of a longshoreman "gang." He hated handling animal hides, as they would leave a smell on your skin for multiple days, but enjoyed the high salary that the job gave him. He reports that he was such an eager worker he was once turned in by his foreman for working too hard.

Companies and sites mentioned include Pacific Coast Terminals, Fraser Surrey Docks, the rice mill in Port Moody, Overseas Terminals, Brackman-Ker, and Westshore Terminals.

Section 00:00 – 03:52

Describes how he learned about longshoring. Eggertson describes his workday as a longshoreman in New Westminster, before he got his "number." He got his number in 1962 or '63, and his first shift was "winging up fletchers" (4x6, 3x8 or 6x8 pieces of lumber). He describes his experience with unemployment insurance.

Section 03:53 – 07:34

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson talks about loading flour, rice, lumber, plywood and nickel plates at various docks. Many jobs had quotas, and Eggertson wanted to work on the ship as it paid more than on the dock. When they needed to go to Port Moody or Vancouver they would all get in one car and pay the owner of the car a dollar each for gas. When he started longshoring, the terminals did not give him any gloves or other protection, and he received no training.

Section 07:35 – 10:39

Eggertson describes the different gear they had on different docks. He wanted to work "midship" as you would not have loads go over your head when you worked there. He talks about the tanks in the front of the ships, and how they would load lumber on Liberty ships.

Section 10:40 – 13:51

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson talks about how each longshoreman was responsible for his own safety at the docks. He states that on a regular day you would reset your gear, pick your partners who were in your gang, and head down to the hall to get a job. He would work

mostly dayshifts in the beginning as the afternoon shifts would pay time and a half, and were reserved for union members.

Section 13:52 – 17:25

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson describes Pacific Coast Terminals. When they loaded lumber or fertilizer, he was given an apron, and that was the only protection they would get. Eggertson and the interviewer talk about the effects of the chemicals and fumes, and laugh about how people are now scared of asbestos. Eggertson discusses different equipment, and how cranes were easier than swinging sticks to operate.

Section 17:26 – 18:55

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson talks about the 13-man gang. He lists the various roles in the gang, and describes the role of the “hatchtender,” who would be the signaler to the winch drivers. Eggertson states that he did not think it was a noisy job.

Section 18:56 – 23:28

Eggertson states that Brackman & Ker was the scary and doomed dock, and they mostly processed lumber scows. He liked to work at Overseas Terminals as they would use machines to unload the stacks of plywood. The two men talk about their friend Kenny and how there were no women on the docks when they worked out of the longshore hall. There were two East Indian men at the time, and they were respected workers. They tell stories about one of the men who was a foreman at Overseas Terminal.

Section 23:29 – 28:15

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson talks about how he would take any job he would get when he worked out of the hall. The pay and benefits were good, and he states that he has no regrets. Both of the men share stories about how they learned on the job during their first days as longshoremen.

Section 28:16 – 33:28

Eggertson talks about the equipment they used on the dock. He describes the peavey and how to use it, and they discuss the tool nicknamed the “assassinator.” He was taught to drive the “cat” (lift truck) by another gang member and was assigned to the trucking jobs for the next two years. He worked some days in Vancouver, and describes the difference between the two ports.

Section 33:29 – 36:47

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson talks about how he did not like working with animal hides or with nickel plates. He states that it was smelly, and the smell would stay with you for days. They both tell stories about smelly work and co-workers. There is a brief discussion about the steam engine at Pacific Coast Terminal.

Section 36:48 – 38:11

In this section of the interview, Eggertson talks visiting bars with co-workers after work sometimes. They would visit The Best, Windsor Pub and Freddy’s on Columbia St.

Section 38:12 – 44:01

Eggertson joining the longshore union in 1972 after nine years as a casual. When he was a member he could take the jobs that he liked, and was also a part of strikes over wages and the “three shift model.” Eggertson states that if you did your work you had no problem with the companies or the foreman, and that there was respect between the foremen and the regular longshoremen on the docks.

Section 44:02 – 48:54

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson a shoulder injury he received when he was a foreman at Westshore Terminals. He was off work for six months, and this was the only time he was hurt. He talks about how safety has improved significantly on the docks, and Johnson explains how the longshore gang has now increased to 18 men from the 13-gang model.

Section 48:55 – 49:59

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson talks about how he only saw one fight on the job in his time. In addition, they talk about skilled work, and confirm that checkers, side runner, drivers and “topside” workers were considered skilled workers.

Section 51:00 – 55:41

Eggertson talks about how the work on the waterfront made him feel like a man, and that he was proud of his work. Most of his friends were longshoremen, and the two men discuss who was good and bad to work for. Most of the men who were foremen in the past had been longshoremen, but now foremen do not necessarily come through the ranks.

Section 55:42 – 01:00:57

Eggertson considers how longshoring made a difference to his family. He describes the changes from working as a longshoreman to being a foreman. He came to Westshore Terminals because it was stable and paid better, but he did not like the upper management of the company towards the end.

Section 01:00:58 – 1:14:07

In this portion of the interview, Eggertson shares stories about different characters on the waterfront. Eggertson truly enjoyed the work, but talks about the few individuals who left the occupation. The two men state that there was drinking, and when it was slow on the dock the foreman would treat his crew to a drink. The interview is closed by a conversation about how the union has changed. At the time of Eggertson and Johnson, there were 350 members of the union, but now there are 800, and they state that when it was smaller it felt like a family.