

This recording is a follow up interview with Allen Domaas, a retired river and port captain who worked on the Fraser River and held several positions with the Fraser River Harbour Commission (later Fraser River Port Authority). The major themes of the interview are the residential developments in Queensborough, his involvement with the New Westminster Harbour Commission and the Port Authority, the decline of New Westminster shipping terminals, changes in the city of New Westminster and public access to the Fraser River

Interviewer: Peter Hall and Annika Airas

Date: 14th April 2014

Date Range: 1950s to present

Recording Time: 01:54:01

Allen Domaas, a New Westminster native, got his first job with the New Westminster Harbour Commission in 1973 after a conversation with the harbour master at the local grocery store. At the time, he was a student at University of British Columbia, but he dropped out and started work the following Monday. Domaas worked his way up and eventually became the President & CEO (harbour master) of the Fraser River Harbour Commission (Port Authority). In this second interview he shares his insights on the developments of the various ports, the fluctuations in port activity, technological changes and stakeholder interactions.

The Fraser River Harbour Commission became a Port Authority in 1998. In the interview, Domaas uses Harbour Commission and Port Authority interchangeably, but the summary refers to the organization by the official term at the time Domaas is referring to.

Section 00:00 – 10:02

In this portion of the interview, Domaas describes Queensborough in the 1950s, by going through the various streets of the area. He focuses on the children and how they could trace their ethnic origins. In addition, there were halls where the different ethnic groups would gather. Where main portion of New Westminster had separate areas defined by the demographics of its residents, Queensborough was ethnically mixed. Domaas talks about the development of Port Royal and how it changed the character of Queensborough from industrial area to residential area.

Section 10:03 – 23:49

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks about Star Shipyards started by Edward Mercer in 1908, which was located adjacent to where Port Royal is now. He talks about other shipbuilders in the area, and the legacy of the boats built in these shipyards. He raises questions about what will be lost with the destruction of the buildings connected to the shipyard, as the work on the waterfront will no longer be visible. He describes the work as crucial to the history of New Westminster and the river, and he states that the proposed trails along the waterfront will connect people to the water.

Section 23:50 – 28:43

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks about the “classic problems of how to designate the water,” by using the Port Royal and Pacific Pine properties as examples.

Section 28:44 – 40:49

In this portion of the interview, Domaas tells the story of his start with the New Westminster Harbour Commission in 1973 as a deckhand. Throughout the following six years, he learned about the characters that populate the waterfront and in 1979 he took on the role of the property supervisor. Intertwined with his work history, Domaas talks about the developments and interactions between stakeholders that took place at the New Westminster terminals (Overseas and Pacific Coast), Annacis Island Marine Terminals and Fraser Surrey Docks throughout the 1970s. New Westminster's history of "handshakes, nepotism and acquaintances" and a clear entrepreneurial spirit by key people in the Harbour Commission flavoured these developments.

Section 40:50 – 48:43

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks about the decline of the New Westminster industrial waterfront. He discusses relationships between Pacific Coast Terminals, Public Works Canada, Overseas Terminals, First Capital City Development Corporation, the city of New Westminster and the Harbour Commission. He states that the New Westminster was never destined to be a deep-sea transportation hub due to the lack of land, and that they had not been able to anticipate the speed in adoption of containerization.

Section 48:44 – 55:19

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks about the effect of the decline of the port activity on New Westminster. The city intended to create quality housing, but failed to create mixed-use buildings that would facilitate activity on the waterfront. He asserts that the developments of Fraser Surrey Docks did not hasten the decline of New Westminster terminals, as they were realizing that they were not viable as terminals. However, the city did not develop a strategic vision for a waterfront to avoid dereliction of the waterfront as the port activity declined. He describes the various companies that were located along the downtown waterfront, and the closure of marine fuel stations.

Section 55:20 – 01:00:17

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks specifically about Pacific Coast Terminals, and the actions taken by the company in the period of decline. He describes how they tried to obtain adjacent properties on the waterfront, but were not able to acquire adequate land. He contrasts PCT's New Westminster capacity with that at the Annacis Marine Terminal.

Section 01:00:18 – 01:04:26

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks about longshoremen from the perspective of the Harbour Commission. The commission decided early on to not be involved in the hiring of longshoremen at the various terminals, which he views as a smart move as they were therefore not responsible for them. He talks about the local 500 and 502 union halls, the change to the dispatch system of longshoremen, and the social element of the longshoremen halls.

Section 01:04:27 – 01:10:41

In this section, Domaas talks about the good working relationship between Fraser Surrey Docks, through the Harbour Commission, and the city of Surrey. He describes how the relationship was not developed before the 1980s, and was influenced by a decision to establish service agreements

regarding access to roads and water. Domaas states that the benefit of being a Harbour Commission was that you did not need to pay tax to the city.

Section 01:10:42 – 01:13:29

In this portion of the interview, Domaas explains the office of the Harbour Commission remained in downtown New Westminster, despite the decline in activity. He says that this was because New Westminster is midway between Maple Ridge and Delta. The commission wanted the office to be accessible by public transport. After the amalgamation of the port authorities into Port Metro Vancouver in 2008, all the employees were moved to downtown Vancouver.

Section 01:13:30 – 01:25:23

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks about his involvement with the establishment of the Canada Marine Act, and the creation of the Fraser River Port Authority in 1998. The major changes from the Marine Act were the payments in lieu of taxes for the Harbour Commissions, as well as discontinuation of Fraser River dredging by Public Works Canada. Both elements led to loss of revenue, and set the stage for the amalgamation of Port Authorities that started in 2006.

Section 01:25:24 – 01:35:49

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks about the development of the Richmond properties that belonged to the Fraser River Harbour Commission, which were a result of a land swap between the City of Richmond, mills in New Westminster, and the Harbour Commission. As property supervisor, Domaas was in charge of developing the sites for commercial use and this had its own challenges. He states that the “commission had a great vision, but they ended up picking up loose ends.”

Section 01:35:50 – 01:46:35

In this portion of the interview, Domaas talks about tenant and public perceptions of the port. When he joined the commission in the late 1970s, it was a political organization. After 1998, decisions were made to become more of a business entity and less political. He realized that negative perceptions were due to poor communication, and through initiatives within the organization they were able to bring the Port Authority out of the office and into the public sphere.

Section 01:46:36 – 01:49:03

In this portion of the interview, Domaas returns to talk about longshoremen, and asserts that nobody has done a good job in communicating that longshoring is a high-tech and well-paying job. The old negative perceptions remain, and he claims that fewer than 10% of current longshoremen’s children would consider it as a career.

Section 1:49:04 – 01:54:01

In this section, Domaas returns to talk about the Port Authority interactions with the community. One of the challenges has been to communicate with the various municipalities, and they had to learn the language of the city officials to communicate effectively. He argues for social license of the people of the city, and the necessity of integrating the city with its water roots.