

This recording is from an interview with Archie Miller, a local historian and former curator of the New Westminster Museum and Archives. Miller has lived and worked in the city most of his life. The main themes in the interview are his family's history in the area, his involvement in the community, and his perspectives on the changes within the city.

Interviewer: Bailey Garden

Interview Date: 4 March 2014

Date range: 1940 – present

Recording time: 02:37:54

Archie Miller was born in 1946 and is a New Westminster native. His family were commercial fishers, and Miller reports that would have ended up in the fishing industry if he had not, serendipitously, applied for the curator job in New Westminster after graduating from Simon Fraser University. Since retiring from the museum in 1999, he and his wife, Dale, operate a small business conducting local historical research. Throughout his working life, he has been involved with numerous waterfront and community events, and continues to support the display of and education about the city's working history.

The events and projects that Miller mentions that he has been a part of is restoration of the *Samson V*, Paddlewheeler Cruises, Fraser River Discovery Center, *Royal City Star* Casino Boat, River Fest (formerly known as Fraser Fest), River Market, Anniversary of *Eastward Ho* (fishing vessel) Voyage, Expo 1986, Eulachons Festival, Simon Fraser's Birthday, and a reenactment of Simon Fraser's arrival on the river.

The interview was conducted as part of History 461 – Oral History Practicum at Simon Fraser University

Section 00:00 – 10:09

In this portion of the interview, Miller introduces himself and talks about his family history in the city. His family worked for B.C. Packers out of Steveston, and fished mostly salmon and herring. Miller talks about the marine knowledge held by his family members that was lost with their passing. His father was the first Federal Fisheries Inspection Officer with the Protection Branch, and worked in Prince Rupert for 3 years. Miller states that he had life changing experiences during these years, and talks about his love for being down by the water.

Section 10:10 – 16:20

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the role of women in the fishing industry, using the examples of his grandmother and his aunt known in the fishing industry for their Scotch cure, a way of preserving herring. It was common for women to have specialized knowledge and power in the fishing industry, which Miller connects to the Hudson's Bay Company actively seeking out industry people overseas in the 19th century.

Section 16:21 – 24:57

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about how the waterfront was a "working industrial dock," closed off from the public. He claims that the businesses along Front St were the closest

you could get to the waterfront during his childhood. He comments on how people along Dyke Road in Queensborough lived close to the water due to fertile land, and notes the presence of the various ethnic groups who lived in the area. Miller explains the history of Maillardville and the French-Canadian population in the area.

#### Section 24:58 – 29:49

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about how the docks and boats have changed over the years. He states that individuals of non-European origin would arrive at the central waterfront to work, but did not necessarily live there. He talks about the different ethnic groups and the work they were known for, including First Nations.

#### Section 29:44 – 41:35

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the closing of the New Westminster terminals. He tells the story of how he distracted an industrial worker near the King Neptune Restaurant to get down to the industrial area for a photo. Miller talks about how there had been multiple plans to change the waterfront area, but nobody thought that it would happen before it was announced in the newspaper in the late 1970s and supported by government funding. Miller shares his perception that the public and waterfront workers have viewed the changes as mostly positive.

#### Section 41:36 – 46:30

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the history of canneries in New Westminster and the shift from many small canneries to fewer, large canneries. He considers the decline in the number of fishing boats from 1970 until today, and how there are small clusters of boats remaining. His family was not affected by the closing of the New Westminster waterfront, as his family docked in Steveston. He describes going to a cold storage plant near Pacific Coast Terminals with his father in the 1970s.

#### Section 46:31 – 50:43

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about his perception of the seamen from the ships during his childhood. He describes Westminster House and the Seaman's Mission, which were meeting places for seamen. The seamen were not interested in local sights, but searched for beer and some wanted female company.

#### Section 50:44 – 58:19

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the changes in the handling of cargo. The size of the equipment has changed with containerization, and Miller describes how you can see that there are fewer people involved on the docks now. He reports that a friend explained to him that there was a three-week turnaround for a ship during his working days, and today the same job can be done in 48 hours.

#### Section 58:20 – 01:15:44

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the close-knit community that has persisted in New Westminster. Miller states that after the redevelopment of the waterfront has allowed the city to grow, but that historic neighbourhood differences persist. He lists community/waterfront events he has been involved with through the years, and claims that the "sure-fire" way of getting New Westminster residents out to an event is with cake.

Section 01:15:45 – 01:25:00

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks specifically about his involvement with the *Royal City Star Casino* boat. A fraction of the profit from the boat was given back to the city, and was used to build the park at the waterfront and the Anvil Centre. Miller shares a long story about how the *Queen of New Orleans* became the *Royal City Star*, and the issues of operations that the casino faced. Miller wrote down the history of the boat as a paddlewheeler, as he had experience from doing similar work for the *MV Native* and the *Samson V*.

Section 01:25:01 – 01:29:11

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the great size of the car carriers and barges that operate on the Fraser River. He tells a story about a large car carrier that turned around right in front of the New Westminster quay, blocking the entire view to Surrey, which turned into a public show.

Section 01:29:12 – 01:38:09

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the *Samson V* and the process of developing it into a heritage display and museum. The boat was retired in 1980, and bought by the city of New Westminster for \$1.

Section 01:38:10 – 01:44:44

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the creation of Fraser Fest in the early 1990s, which is now known as River Fest and associated with World Rivers Day. He moves on to describe the workboat parade, “an enormous parade of the working river”. Miller talks about how the parade was discontinued because the organizers did not have enough volunteers nor marine contacts that could provide boats the parade.<sup>1</sup>

Section 01:44:45 – 01:50:01

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about how living in the community for an extended time has provided invaluable connections and helped him in his work for the New Westminster Historical Society. He talks about how he and his father would work together on historical questions, and how he lost sources and connections when his father passed away.

Section 01:50:02 – 02:01:49

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about different groups of labourers on the waterfront. Longshoring was considered a respected and dominant industry. In addition, individuals connected to vessels, such as captains, had power structures similar to that of longshoremen. Miller describes the Cooper family that owned Westminster Tugboats as “tugboat royalty.” He also discusses Heaps Engineering as a respected place of work during the Second World War, and how he thinks that the restaurant and retail industries that dominate the waterfront today are respected.

Section 02:01:50 – 02:13:47

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<sup>1</sup> A working boat parade has been part of recent RiverFest celebrations.

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about housing affordability in the city throughout time and changes to Columbia St after World War II. He explains it in relation to development of New Westminster as a “bedroom community,” coupled with the increased use of cars and the growth of shopping malls. Miller tells about the opening of Woodward’s Department store.

Section 02:13:48 – 02:21:04

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about how he liked spending time where the Brunette Creek meets the Fraser River, and on the docks by King Neptune Restaurant. He always appreciated old building like the old courthouse and Irving House due to his interest in history. Miller shares his perspective that historical research should connect with real people.

Section 02:21:05 – 02:27:31

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about the Seaman’s Mission and churches reaching out to the men from ships that docked in the city. He talks about how Japanese and Chinese sailors would visit Chinatown in Vancouver, but that there was not a large religious focus on the waterfront. Miller explains the development of the New Westminster Chinatown after the 1898 fire and the racism that existed, but states that Chinese people would move from Vancouver to New Westminster because it was considered safer. He reports that his grandmother shopped in the New Westminster’s Chinatown when she first arrived from Scotland.

Section 02:27:32 – 02:37:32

In this portion of the interview, Miller talks about how the waterfront’s main change has been a move towards public versus industrial access, and asserts that change will continue to take place, with a commercial and residential focus. He talks about what changes he would like to see. He mentions George the Sturgeon, a cast of a real sturgeon caught in the 1950s.