

This recording is an interview with Don McIntosh, a retired longshoreman and foreman in New Westminster, and later for Westshore Terminals. The major themes in the interview are his history as a longshoreman, the various jobs he held and the changes he observed working at the New Westminster waterfront.

Interviewer: Dean Johnson

Date: 12 November 2013

Date range: 1950s-present

Sound Recording Length: 55:10

Don McIntosh is a member of a multi-generation longshore family; he father was a longshoreman and later first aid specialist, and Don's son is now a member of the union. Don was attracted to the longshoring occupation after having worked a summer at Bjornson Construction and saw how much money he could make as a longshoreman. He worked out of the union hall in New Westminster for many years before he became a foreman at Westshore Terminals. In his time, he has handled everything from the flour ships to India, to lumber from Fraser Mills, to boxes with 400 pound of frozen fish. Companies mentioned that he has worked for are Pacific Coast Terminals, Fraser Surrey Docks, Fraser Mill as well as Westshore Terminals.

In some portions of this interview, there are longer stories from the interviewer, as well as discussions of their perspectives of the waterfront. This is marked in the relevant sections.

Section 00:00 – 05:35

- In this portion of the interview, McIntosh talks about his first shift in longshore as a young boy. His father was a longshoreman, and called him down to the dock to loading lumber. He worked for Bjornson Construction for one summer, but once he got his longshore registration number, reports that he prefer longshoring as the pay was better.

Section 05:36 – 11:34

- In this portion of the interview, McIntosh describes how they would load flour, lead bars, and pulp. He describes how if you knew the technique of throwing lumber perfectly, you could work very fast. McIntosh talks about the first forklift that was brought to the docks, and how he gained skills as a driver. The interviewer and McIntosh discuss loading flour at the old elevator at what is now Fraser Surrey Docks.

Section 11:35 – 15:21

- McIntosh talks about handling general cargo, as well as working as a “checker” in Vancouver. He did not do that for long, as mathematics was not his strongest skill. He describes “deckloads” and the job of “siderunner.” He reports that at the time, a gang had 12 members, and he lists the various positions. The siderunner set the pace for the entire gang. McIntosh talks about the quality of the New Westminster longshoremen, and how they wanted to teach the younger boys that came in.

Section 15:22 – 18:13

- In this portion of the interview, McIntosh talks about how things were not perfect at the longshoreman hall. In the beginning it was hard, and you would see fights, men smoking and uncertainty around work. He talks about how it took his son 10 years to attain union membership.

Section 18:14 – 21:51

- McIntosh talks about how his brother joined the waterfront labour force. He was a foreman in Squamish, and later a business agent for the New Westminster local. He subsequently decided that he did not like longshoring, and started his own trucking company. The two men talk about how longshoring is not for everyone, but they enjoyed the freedom of the occupation. Subsequently, they compliment the management of Westshore Terminal, and Johnson explains how he made his way down to Westshore after he became a Christian.

Section 22:52 – 27:06

- In this portion of the interview, McIntosh talks about how there are all “walks of life” on the waterfront. Johnson talks about how he started at Westshore Terminals in 1975, but continued to go back to hall, but McIntosh never went back to the hall after he began working at Westshore. They discuss an acquaintance who received full compensation pension after being injured.

Section 27:07 -- 33:09

- In this portion of the interview, McIntosh talks about the changes he has observed on the waterfront. One of the largest changes he experienced was the extension of the work week to the weekends. The machinery became more sophisticated, and he talks about how some of the manual skills that used to be a part of the longshore trade are now lost.

Section 33:10 -- 40:57

- McIntosh notes that he was never hurt on the job, but has had problems with his back. He did not experience any accidents, but his father was a First Aid man after he could not work as a longshoreman anymore, and he experienced multiple accidents. The two men share stories about men who died at the New Westminster waterfront. McIntosh talks about how you would learn quickly about where to stand on the job to stay safe.

Section 40:58 -- 43:55

- In this portion of the interview, McIntosh states how his first eight years of work was “hand stow physical work”, and Johnston talks about how he was a part of the last “hand stow” job on the New Westminster dock. The two men discuss the unpleasantness of working with sulphur.

Section 43:56 – 48:00

- McIntosh talks about the challenges at Westshore Terminals, and how they would “level the hatch, fill the wings, and troubleshoot the dumper.” He talks about how the longshoreman work would result in higher wages than the sawmills, but not everyone could sustain the physicality of the job.

Section 48:01 – 51:05

- In this portion of the interview, McIntosh talks about how he did not have a trainer or mentor, but someone in the gang would come up to show you how to do the task. He later completed training for operating the crane, and that was a more enjoyable work. He talks about cranes and the evolution of the equipment on the dock. He closes the section by talking about manually unloading car ships.

Section 51:06 -- 55:10

- In this portion of the interview, the two men discuss the closure of the New Westminster docks. McIntosh states that there has been a shift in the industry from the small ships to the larger ships one sees at Westshore Terminals today. He closes the interview by talking about how there were no women at the time of his work, and how you did not want a pigskin apron for protection, but rather the leather one as all the lumber was wet.