

This recording is an interview with Ron Husberg, a retired longshoreman who worked at various docks in New Westminster. The main themes of the interview are his introduction to longshoring, his experience as a longshoreman, and the changes he has observed throughout his time as a longshoreman.

Interviewer (s): Dean Johnston

Date: May 26<sup>th</sup> 2013

Date Range: 1967-

Sound Recording Length: 1:01:04

Ron Husberg grew up in Surrey, and attended Queen Elizabeth High School. At the age of 16, he was still in school, but had his first shift unloading railcars at Pacific Coast Terminals. As his high school had burnt down that year (1967), he had class only in the mornings, and was able to take afternoon shifts. He got his “number” at 16, and remained a longshoreman for the rest of his working life.

Companies that he mentions having worked at include Searles Elevator in Surrey, Fraser Mills, Pacific Coast Terminals, Brackman & Ker, Overseas Transport and the rice mill.

Section 00:00 – 03:30

In this portion of the interview, Husberg describes his introduction to the longshoreman industry. The father of his friend Richard Lester was the dispatcher at the time at the longshoreman hall, and his friend’s father (Jerry “Bullfrog” Lester) thought that they would old enough to be working rather than hanging out. He was 16 and in grade 9. The money was good.

Section 03:31 – 07:45

Names some of the men he worked with—many were hired at the same time. One man was the son of a longshoreman who had died on the job and he got preference for jobs. He talks about how the union would give preference to the sons of longshoremen who were sick or had died on the job, so that the sons could provide for their families. When Husberg started longshoring, he already knew how to operate a forklift as he had run machinery at his grandfather’s farm, and this became advantageous to his career, but mainly stuck with guys her worked with. Describes the number of gangs. Husberg was on Red Bailey’s gang #19.

Section 07:46 – 12:08

In this portion of the interview, Husberg describes his typical day as a longshoreman. He lived in Surrey, and would have to leave early (before 6:30a) to get ahead of the traffic on the bridge. Describes difficulty of getting parking. They were often dispatched to Vancouver or Squamish, they would go on *Pacific Stageline* buses. Lists some of the cargoes he handled. He describes the roles within the 13-man crew, especially the job of the side-runner for loading lumber and for keeping different shippers’ cargoes separate. Hatch tender had authority for keeping the crew working.

Section 12:09 – 17:13

In this portion of the interview, Husberg talks about the equipment they used when he started. Most of the time, they worked with steam winches, and electric winches were rare. Husberg defines the terms “set in the gear” and the “lazyguy”, as well as the process of covering and uncovering the hatches. He closes this section by describing the various decks of the boats. Liberty ships had 3-4 decks, plus the main deck.

#### Section 17:14 – 22:31

Husberg talks about the various cargoes he would handle. He did lumber, rubber, sulphur, hides, and a rare luxury car from England. He describes the various sizes of lumber, as well as the danger involved in handling pulp. A bale of pulp weighed c. 300 pounds and was bound with wire that would cut the longshoremen. Hides were shipped to Italy. Everyone tried to avoid dispatches that involved handling hides. All the men on the dock had a leather apron, and a man on 1<sup>st</sup> St in New Westminster made these. Describes handling sulphur in Port Moody, front end loaders would catch on fire.

#### Section 22:32 – 30:54

Describes the docks of Pacific Coast Terminal and Overseas Transport. Frozen cargo came in by train, but mostly by truck. Ships were loaded from barge and dock at the same time, sometimes unloaded to a barge and loaded from dock at the same time. He talks about the variety of the work, and how important the boatman was in assisting the longshoremen. In his earlier days, there were short spells of “bleak times”, but also had as much work as he wanted. Describes the process of lashing cargo onto the deck.

#### Section 30:55 – 34:22

In this portion of the interview, Husberg talks about the gangs, and how they went from a 13-man gang to 6-man gang when he retired. Describes a tool called the “iron Chinaman” which made large gangs unnecessary. Pacific Coast Terminals had in his time five warehouses, a garage, a small restaurant and a railroad with a steam engine. The steam engine at Pacific Coast Terminals was eventually shipped to a museum on Vancouver Island.

#### Section 34:23 – 37:40

Describes learning the job from co-workers, especially learning how to set gear. In this portion of the interview, Husberg talks about accidents on the job, including an event when someone named Wilson was nearly cut in half by the winch cable. In another incident a forklift driver drowned.

#### Section 37:41 – 43:25

In this portion of the interview, Husberg returns to talking about Brackman & Ker, Buckerfields, the rice mills and King Neptune Restaurant. In terms of training, he would first practice on the job with low value cargo, but eventually received special training in Vancouver to operate large forklifts to move containers in the first years. At the rice mill they received rice from Texas as well as fresh and canned fruit. Due to the size of the dock at the rice mill, little cargo was shipped out of there.

#### Section 43:26 – 51:00

In this portion of the interview, Husberg talks about Annacis Island being the “car mecca”. Previously cars came in a PCT. As they built a dock designed to unload cars and redirected the rail there, it became the prime location at the time. Describes how Teamsters from Searles Elevator became longshore. At Fraser Mills, the International Woodworkers handled the cargo. He talks about the difficulty of getting through Pattullo Bridge to Fraser Mills. He tells the story of the three Norwegian ships with small gantries that could get through the gap at Pattullo Bridge. Describes a time when a gantry crane and operator fell of the ship into the water.

Section 51:01 – 1:00:35

In this portion of the interview, Husberg talks about the changes in technology especially with lumber and ship gears. Describes the “assassinator”, the introduction of containers, forklifts, the transition from wood to steel booms on ships, the “swinging stick”, and Norwegian and Japanese cranes. Husberg closes the interview by describing the PAD (Pacific Australia Direct) Ships –ro-ro ships with 2 cranes on the deck, claimed to be more seaworthy than others. .