

This recording is an interview with Jack Fulton, a New Westminster native who worked for the New Westminster fire department for 36 years and continues to be involved in the community. The main themes of the interview are his work as a fire fighter, his involvement in community sports, especially lacrosse, , and changes to downtown New Westminster.

Interviewer: Baily Garden
Interview date: 1 March 2014
Date Range: 1940 - Present
Recording Time: 01:22:09

Jack Fulton joined the New Westminster fire department in 1950, and became a captain after 18 years. He was both Assistant Chief and Deputy Chief before he retired in 1986. Fulton worked at all the fire halls in the city, but spent most of his time at the #1 hall downtown. When he was not at work, Fulton managed the Salmonbellies, the New Westminster lacrosse team, who took the 1958, 1959, and 1962 Canadian Championship titles. He served as vice-president and president of the Canadian Lacrosse Association for several years, and continues to be involved in the New Westminster team. After having lived in New Westminster for over 80 years, Fulton is tightly connected to his community and appreciates the changes that he is seeing to the downtown area and the access to the waterfront. Fulton offers strong opinions about female and non-European descent fire fighters.

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

Section 00:01 – 04:04

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about how he has lived in New Westminster his entire life and was only away from 1943 to 1949 serving in the Merchant Navy. He had attended navigation school, and that became his “foot in the door” when he applied to the New Westminster Fire Department in 1950, as the department was planning on acquiring a fireboat. He talks about how he had friends working in the fire department, and how he started out as a “low man on the pole”. He tells the story of the 1954 fire at the old Army & Navy store on Columbia St.

Section 04:05 – 07:07

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about how firemen advance through the ranks. He explains how men were not taught to drive the truck for years, as the guys who drove rarely quit, and Fulton compares this to the winchmen on the waterfront. He describes his own career progress, and tells a story about the Gilley Brothers fertilizer fire as well as the 1945 Greenhill Park ship fire in downtown Vancouver.

Section 07:08 – 09:00

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about how he worked as a longshoreman for two days after returning from the navy, and was sent to Fraser Mills to load lumber. After two days of lifting 4 x 12s, he had lost the feelings in his arms, and never went back to the longshore hall. He also unloaded cargo in New Zealand while in the Merchant Navy.

Section 09:01 – 14:20

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about how the department would only hire individuals who had been in the military when he started, and explains the hiring process during his time as deputy chief. He did not look for fire experience, but rather the knowledge of a trade. Fulton describes his duties as Deputy Chief, and his experience with the firemen's union and making changes among the men. He talks about how a good chief needed to be able to "handle men" as well as be a great firefighter.

Section 14:21 – 17:38

In this portion of the interview, Fulton tells how he found the replacement for his own position when he retired. He shares his perspective on the people he would hire as firemen, and how he was looking for individuals with experiences from the world. Fulton talks about how the guys at the fire department got along with each other most of the time. He jokes about how firemen do not like change, referring to changes he made to the rules about switching shifts.

Section 17:39 – 20:43

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about the fires at Pacific Coast Terminals and the Alaska Pine mill. He was fishing in Northern BC during the PCT fire, but was involved in fighting the Alaska Pine fire. He states that it feels best to put out big fires that nobody hears about, because the men did "everything right".

Section 20:44 – 27:52

In this portion of the interview, Fulton shares his opinion on the working conditions and what his wife thought of him working as a firefighter. He tells a story of his youngest son visiting the fire hall. During the downtime, the firemen would play sports together or work out. He shares two stories about going out on the R&S Inhalator (medical calls), which was his least favourite part of the job, and the accidents involved.

Section 27:53 – 32:24

In this portion of the interview, Fulton discusses how equipment has changed over the years. He talks about how guys used to be judged by "how much smoke they could eat", and how the equipment is first class today. He talks about how he became close to his co-workers, and describes his last day in 1986, two months before his 60th birthday. Fulton describes how people today decide to retire as early as 55.

Section 32:25 – 41:23

In this portion of the interview, Fulton explains the different jobs at the fire hall. He tells a story about wet and dry standpipes and notes that there was rivalry among the various shifts. He talks about the fire department's involvement in parades, and his involvement with the Samonbellies lacrosse team starting in 1956 and continuing to this day. He is trying to gradually leave, but finding it hard to relinquish the responsibility.

Section 41:24 – 44:06

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about the three places in New Westminster he has lived during his life. Fulton talks about looking at the river in the morning and watching ships go

by. The conversation turns to the closing of the New Westminster terminals and the changes to the waterfront. Fulton states that the loss of the port did not affect the community too much and that change is natural.

Section 44:07 – 45:50

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about longshoremen in New Westminster. Attributes the move of Local 502 to Surrey to the large number of East Indian longshoremen. He talks about a New Westminster man who recently retired from the fire hall and now works as a “casual longshoreman.” Fulton’s in-laws who emigrated from Scotland were longshoremen, and he talks about the 1935 strike (Fulton says 1934), referencing stories of people burning crosses on front yards.

Section 45:51 – 56:26

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about the changing New Westminster downtown area, and mentions Columbia St, the River Market, residential developments and the boardwalk. He remembers buying his first suit at MacDonald & Callen for \$12.50 on the “Miracle Mile,” and attributes the decline of Columbia St to construction of the Lougheed Mall. He appreciates the changes and increased number of people moving to the area, and hopes that this will bring back some business activity. He expresses approval of the Pier Park development.

Section 56:27 – 01:00:08

In this section, Fulton talks about fishing for chum salmon at the waterfront during the fall. He tells of competing with “Asians” who want to fish in his spot. He disparages First Nations’ fishing rights and Native drinking, yet claims he likes the “Indian people.”

Section 01:00:09 – 01:04:06

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about women joining the fire department after his time. He explains that women were not hired during his time because they did not meet the physical qualifications. He shares his opinion that women should not work as fire fighters, and lists the problems he has heard about. Fulton names individuals of non-European origin working at the fire hall.

Section 01:04:07 – 01:09:37

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about his reduced involvement in the community in as he ages, the 50th anniversaries of the Canadian Championship wins of the lacrosse team, and the death of his oldest son from pancreatic cancer. He reflects on how New Westminster was a good community to raise children in and that it provided infrastructure for families. Fulton notes that he attended Trapp Tech High School, but did not finish grade 11 because he joined the Merchant Navy.

Section 01:09:38 – 01:15:43

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about the various fish he would catch as a child, such as eulachons, chum salmon and Jack Spring salmon. He refers to the Alaska Pine fire and the mill fire at Capilano, as exciting working times. Fulton talks about how he would go down to the ships as a child to ask for foreign coins to add to his collection. He states that he always had a connection to the river, and owned a boat for several years that he tied up down at the market.

Fulton remembers the beer parlours divided with one section for men, and one for ladies with escorts.

Section 01:15:44 – 01:22:09

In this portion of the interview, Fulton talks about how he found community in the fire department and in the lacrosse team. He talks about sports, and how the team aspect of sports compared to the “team business” of firefighting. He headed the table tennis portion of the Senior Games and worked for the Amateur Sports Fund for 25 years. Fulton says he was asked to run for city council when he retired from the fire department, but was not interested. He closes the interview by attributing his continued good health to his wife’s focus on healthy eating throughout their marriage.