Interview Tape 32: ~~Side 1 & 2~~
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MARINE

Capt. E.C. Flewin
817 Pigott Rd., Richmond.

Interviewed: June 21, 1973.

The smallest tugs are known as "boom" boats, around 10 - 12 feet long. The largest vessels would be the size of the Sudbury, originally a navy corvette, steam powered. The Superior was 210 feet long, had a 38 foot beam, and a draught of 16 feet. Had a 1500 h.p. engine and a wooden hull - built for harbour defense. She towed the Ontario to Japan for scrap. Medium-sized tugs, around 70 to 80 feet, are used on the inside passages to tow scows, oil barges, etc.

Capt. Flewin once had to pull a deep-water freighter off Steveston jetty with a tug. He used medium-sized tugs on the North Arm.

There is no limit to the size of vessel going up the South Arm to New Westminster. All large vessels require a pilot to take them from the mouth of the river all the way to New Westminster. Dredges work constantly to keep main channel free. Sand bars build up across the main channel. Near St. Mungo cannery, the river takes a very sharp turn and sand bars quickly build up.

The Steveston jetty is rock filled. Prior to that a sand bar protected the river entrance. The lightship was off the end of that jetty, now there is a light at the end of the jetty.

The first tugboats had wooden hulls; they are mostly of steel now.

Capt. Flewin's father owned a steamboat called The Native; remembers it when he was 6 years old. It was built locally. Some of the first tugs built in the Vancouver area were for the Hastings Mill, designed specifically to handle their logs. Capt.

Flewin recalls that the skeleton of The Native lay on the North Arm shore for many years. Capt. Flewin's father was a Government Agent, stationed at Simpson. All his travelling was done in canoes.

Story of lost schooner - woman's dream - discovery of wreckage.

The weight of a barge and its shape will dictate its manoeuvre-ability in an emergency. To stop a barge, you shut off power in the tug, and take in the towline or let the tow line touch bottom and drag (North Arm particularly good for "dragging" method), until the "way" is off the barge.

From the Sea Island Road bridge to airport, looking north there used to be an island. Dredging operations joined it to the main island. The Middle Arm is only used for logs, and by small boats, and as a landing spot for seaplanes.

At the south end of No. 3 Road, there was a small jetty used by fishing vessels. It went out of use 10 to 15 years ago, and has since fallen into disrepair.

His nephew, a Steveston fisherman, spent two years in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland training crews for seine boats.

Seaspan, whose tug boats take scow loads of chips to Vancouver Island pulp mills, were originally Island Tug and Vancouver Tug. Island Tug was started by Harold Ellsworthy, with money from the Foss Company in Seattle. Straits and Island Tug joined forces for a time but split up in the early 1950s.

A barge is usually modelled after a ship. In fact, barges have often been made from ships. C.P.R. turned their older boats into barges, for towing concentrates.

In 1918, Capt. Flewin joined the Beatrice as a deck hand. He was on this ship only a few days and then joined the Princess Mary, which was eventually converted to a barge, the furnishing and fittings being incorporated into the Princess Mary Restaurant in Victoria. Capt. Flewin towed the Princess Mary after her conversion to a barge.

The Princess Mary ran the Skagway route. When the Sophia was wrecked in the inlet coming out of Skagway, the Princess Mary picked up bodies; three months work involved. Over 300 passengers and crew died. The sole survivors were a freight clerk and a dog. They swam 2 miles to the beach. This tragedy took place in late 1918 involving the last shipload of passengers out of White Pass, Yukon. Capt. Flewin believes the tragedy could have been avoided. There were vessels available in the area, but the orders given to Captain Lock by the C.P.R. were to sit tight and wait for the relief ship. The Sophia was sitting on a rock pile, a blow came up, and she sank - in wintry weather. Capt. Lock obeyed his orders, but Capt. Flewin says he should have known better.

Pilotage authorities dictate what goes upriver. All large vessels require a pilot. Tugboat captains need a thorough knowledge of the river and experience of it before a company would employ them.

Although there are narrow spots here and there, the river generally speaking is pretty wide and Capt. Flewin never experienced difficulties due to heavy traffic.

B.C. pilots and river pilots functioned separately at one time, but are now administered together. Prior to this union an "outside" pilot brought a ship to the mouth of the river, and then a "river" pilot took over.

Pilots are members of the Mates & Masters Guild, to which certificated engineers now belong also.

Tug making and repairs are done on the North Arm, under the Oak Street bridge, on both sides - also in Steveston, small boats only. Burrard and Straits make the larger vessels. B.C. Marine mostly does repair work.

Capt. Flewin was a gill netter collector with J.H. Todd in River Inlet for three years. A count was taken of number and kind of fish, in transferring from fishing boat to tender. From the collector's tender, fish were put on a conveyor belt at the cannery, sorted and counted. Canneries no longer have ice - collector's boats have ice water in holds, fish thrown in, are then packed and sent to central cannery. The collector tender went out immediately, fishing commenced, loaded up, dumped fish at cannery, then went out again. Each collector covered a specific area.

Capt. Flewin first saw a Pilchard in 1916. An abundance of them at one time - they don't come anymore. Pilchards are difficult to handle. When seining herring, 200 to 300 tons easily handled in net. Same weight of pilchards is a different matter, they can dive for the bottom and break the net.

Gill netters use nylon nets now. Used to have linen and cotton nets.

Sometimes fishermen sleep a little when drifting - known as the "lazy man's drift". Told story of a fisherman who woke up with 30

fathoms of his net left, the rest cut off. Another woke up to find his net being hauled in by another fisherman, who explained he was afraid it would get tangled.

The packer's boats (collector tenders) have net guards on them - a bunch of steel ribs up from the hull - to keep nets from being entangled in propellor. Some gill netters are equipped with them. A method of clearing nets is to approach at full speed, then put engine full astern. The boats way takes her over, and the wash throws the net down, clear of propellor.

Talked about fishing in Johnson Straits, in the Gulf, and in the Fraser River mouth. Told story of Italian "poaching" beyond limits.

Had his first boat when 10 years old, 27 feet long, 5 h.p. Adams engine. Subsequently, bought a boat called the Taplow from his brother.

Talked about Ocean Falls experiences, breaking up rafts. He took the Taplow's 20 h.p. Vivian and put it on a floating camp at Ocean Falls. The camp was wrecked in a blow but the engine survived intact.

He worked for British Columbia Packers in the 30s, for three years part season, and for Canadian Fish part season. He was seining, and operated under company licences. Gill netter licences are individually owned. The authorities are gradually reducing the number of licences, as fishermen retire and boats go for wrecking.

Capt. Flewin says "there are fishermen and fishermen. The high-line fisherman is every year making a good living".

Lots of gill netters also have trolling poles. When rock cod are brought up from deep water, their wind bag comes out.

Alex Moir