

DOCUMENT NAME/INFORMANT: SOLOMON WILSON #2  
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: MAUDE ISLAND VILLAGE  
BRITISH COLUMBIA  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: MAUDE ISLAND VILLAGE  
BRITISH COLUMBIA  
TRIBE/NATION: HAIDA  
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 1969  
INTERVIEWER: IMBERT ORCHARD  
INTERPRETER:  
TRANSCRIBER: HEATHER YAWORSKI  
SOURCE: CBC IMBERT ORCHARD  
COLLECTION  
TAPE NUMBER: #IH-BC.68  
DISK: TRANSCRIPT DISC #182  
PAGES: 20  
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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Discusses a battle between the Haida and an unspecified  
tribe.  
- Mentions the first contact with non-Indians.  
Solomon: Yeah, Mr. Reed, the fishery officer, used to be in  
Rupert, you know, where they had their headquarters. And Mr.  
Richardson used to work under him. He was the overseer over  
here, Eric was. So he was at his funeral and when I went into  
his house to get this stuff here he said to me, he says,  
"You're just in time for supper," he says to me. Well I said,  
"Now, Ken, I can't do it because there's a bunch of people  
waiting for me in the car, like, and I couldn't stop." Well he  
says, "You can have a drink." So I said, "Yeah, I'll have a  
drink." So we had a drink together. And then Mr. Reed said to  
me, he says, "Mr. Wilson, do the people, the native people,  
believe in here and after?" So I said, "Yes, they believe in  
here and after ever since I guess the island existed." I said,  
"Religion is nothing new to my people. They believe in this  
unseen power that made this universe and therefore this  
religion is nothing new to us. But the only thing that the

Indians didn't know is they didn't capitalize on it like you white people do." Ken Richardson, he had this glass up to his mouth and he laughed out, he splashed the liquor all over the place. (laughs) Then he says to me, he says, "Well, what do you mean?" "Well, look. Look at when Pope Pius got to New York. People there, thousands of people there to worship him. And then you people say, 'Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.' And here a man, just the same as you and I, got there and people worship him. And look at all the thousands of dollars it cost for him to get there. And look at some of these evangelists. First thing they talk about is when they get into a big stadium is what it costs. And they're getting thousands of dollars every year. What do you call that? Isn't that capitalizing on religion?" So Ken, he laughed. Well he says, Mr. Reed says, "I got no arguments." So I says, "We'll leave it at that." So I took the vegetables and I walked.

Imbert: What about this, how did the Haida people feel about the...? There's so much stories in the old days about the Haida that used to go down south and raid the other Indians, and carry them off as slaves. You know, you get quite a lot of this, partially from the other Indians and partially in the history books. I wonder, you know, what is the truth. They were a very strong people -- the Haida people -- and they were very well organized, you know. You get that impression and very... As human beings they were very well developed in this sort of things, you know what I mean. I just wondered what the... the feeling that people were frightened of them. And I heard the same thing, of course, about the Cape Mudge Indians. The Cape Mudge Indians would say, "Oh, the Haida people never licked us." And then the other people say, "Well, we're frightened of the Cape Mudge Indians too." I just wondered about this. Did the Haida used to travel so much?

Solomon: I don't think... Well, it worked both ways, you know. From the stories that I used to hear it worked both ways. But the only thing was that the people from the islands here never hit first. Because even when I was a little boy, you know, I was taught not to hit first. But he says, "When you hit back, hit with all your might." Well, that was the way that the people here was trained, trained their people. That's why they called them the hardest fighters, you see.

Well, down here this story, they were telling each other about this story... Right here when I'm sitting on a log, you know, and they were talking about it. They were telling about people who went to Victoria from here. And they were down there for quite a while and on their way back they stop at the place

where the airport is now -- at the north end of Vancouver Island, Port Hardy. The Hudson's Bay people had a trading post there, you see. In fact I hear the old man himself that was in that trouble. He, they stop there to buy some "native" food, you see -- dried salmon and things like that at the trading post. And those people at Port Hardy, those native people at Port Hardy, they dance all night, you know, with these people, having a great time.

In the meantime they send out people to different little villages around there to come and clean up on the Haidas, you see. So the morning came and I guess this guy he was going to cook something to eat. He goes to the creek. He had a bucket and he, he had bucket to get water. So when he got there he see something moving in the woods. So he looked and there was some guys there with war paint on, with guns, and a whole bunch of them watching. So he pretend he didn't see them at all, you see. He dipped the water with the bucket and he walks back to the people that...

So he says, he says to them, he says to his people, "They're going to clean up on us. I see some fellows at the creek there with war paint on and they got guns and everything, and they're sneaking around there." So that was... and then they gave orders to get all the old people to go down to the canoes and let the young fellows stay around the trading post. So when all the old people got aboard they all rushed to the canoes, you see. And when they rushed to the canoes, of course, these people start to fire at them and want to clean up on them.

So this three guys, three of them, they got left. Of course they had their guns. Then they always be on guard, you see. That was Louis Collison's -- our chief's grandfather -- he was

one of them. So he... when the canoes pulled out, you see, they start to go towards the end of... So they follow along the beach. And this gang, a whole bunch of them, start to chase them and they was shooting at them but they never... So they said, "Now we'll..." They load their guns and they stop behind them and, "Let them come close enough so we can get two or three of them." So as they come right along, as soon as they're within the range of their guns they knock down three. They loaded their guns and then they beat it again. Keep on like that and he said, this old man said, "Pretty soon there was only few of them left," he says. "And yet they were still chasing us." So when they got to a little bay, there was their canoes that they come, you see, to... from the other villages. So he told them, he says, "You fellows pick up a rock and knock holes into those canoes as we go along and save one so we can row out." So they did.

And how he come to tell the story was he couldn't chew anything -- teeth were gone, you see. And when they pick up this canoe and they started to walk with it he said there was a line just the size of his small finger, you know, tighten up. And he said he grabbed that thing and he bite that thing off as though he cut it with a sharp knife. That's why he was telling about this, on account of his teeth.

Well, those people, the Haidas killed so many different fellows from the different villages, you see, well, they start to blame one another and they start to fight amongst themselves. That's why there was so many, or so few people around there, those Port Rupert people, you know. What do you call that place there, Alert Bay? You see all those people. And they hated

the people from the islands all... Even now some of them fellows would say, "On account of you Haidas there's only few of us left." Well, that was their own fault. And the people from the islands here didn't kill many of them. They started to fight amongst themselves and they killed each other off.

Why that they couldn't shoot these fellows that was going ahead... You see, mainland people, all the mainland people there, they carry they bullet in their mouth, you see. And they pour the powder -- they carry their powder keg, you know -- and they put in there and then they dropped the bullet and they spit on the bullet so it will roll up in the powder, you see. And when they hit the side of the gun, the flintlock -- there's a little hole in the side of the gun and it fills up this little pocket and there was no penetration at all in the bullet, you see. But the people from the islands here they have a... I've seen my grandfather's when I was a kid, you know, they have a block about that long and about that wide.

Imbert: How long would you say that is?

Solomon: Oh, it's somewhere around seven or eight inches, you know. And leather covering with a flap over it to keep it dry, you see. A bullet in one end and the powder in one end rolled up in paper. And when the... and when they're in the trouble like that they bite the end of the -- where the powder is -- and pour the powder in and this bullet that's in there, you see, wrapped up with the paper. And they rammed the ramrod in there hard. And it gives a better penetration, you see. The bullet carries further and better penetration than this loose thing that the mainland people use. That's why they always say that the Haidas were the best fighters, you see, on account of that.

Imbert: They also were pretty well trained as fighters, and pretty brave, a lot of courage too.

Solomon: Oh yes. That is one of the greatest things. Like the old English people, the Lords and all those big brave fellows. (laughs) Well, people here were trained to be a brave, you know, but they were taught not to strike first.

Imbert: Life in those days it was pretty risky...

Solomon: And our people in the islands here respected their women. They wouldn't let them gather wood or anything like that, or go out fishing. The women was to be in the house and look after the home and the food, same as the wife do nowadays, you see. And the clothes and things like that. That's nothing new to the Haida people, you see.

So therefore, this turnover is a big turnover as far as health and things like that go when the white people came, you see. To go from our own ways, early days, and go into what we call civilized life today, that was the only trouble that they had. Now I don't know whether you've been to many homes here now.

Our people believe in their homes. It's the home that they, to live in a nice home. Even in the early days these big buildings that you see of my grandfather's place there. Those have cedar on the floor there, great big thick cedar and it's... They use adze to straighten the thing. It was just as straight as this floor and the seams... Of course, a certain amount of dirt fill in the seams, you see. And they were nice and clean and just a little hole there where the fire that they've got, that's all. And all that gravel that they had there, they changed that maybe once or twice a week, because they prepare their food in the fire, you see. They bake their potatoes and turnips and anything like that, you know. They bury that right into the sand to cook. They bury them there and...

Imbert: This was the kind of house that you spent your early days in, was it?

Solomon: Yeah. Of course today this changeover is...

Imbert: But still there's the family here?

Solomon: Oh, they still have their own crests in the families, you know. Of course that's dying out fast, that's dying out fast. You can't wear somebody else's crest. No. But now that's even all mixed, see. Like I said the other day in the wedding here...

Imbert: Tell me about that on the tape.

Solomon: They ask me to get up and speak, you know, and so I address the toastmaster, the bride and groom and the ladies and gentlemen. And I said another few words and then I told them, I says, "Now with this weddings that's on now there's nothing much I can add to it. It's nice and everything is very nice and up-to-date. But I had visitors from Victoria Museum just the other day and the first thing they ask me was, 'Where are all the totem poles?' So I told them, I says, 'Now you white people have taken everything away from us just the same as... and totem poles were taken away. The church came along and told us it was a sin to have those things.' And they said, 'If you hang onto those things, your dancing gear and all that, and if you believe you're going to die, if you die devils going to come around with a pitch fork and throw you in the fire. Great big fork going to throw you in the fire and they throw you into a big lake where you going to grind your teeth in coal. And

then they'll throw you into a lake of fire, and if you cry your cheeks going to crack! They put all that fear into them and they told the people to cut them down. And some of it they take away and... but when their dancing gear all this fancy dancing gear that they used to use for entertaining their people, when they give it to them -- the church people -- they grab it with both hands. And they sell it to you people where you come from into the museum, and they build churches with that money. It was wrong for the people that owned them before that to have them, but it is all right for the church to have

it because the church wouldn't go to hell for selling them.'" Now I said this in this wedding, you know, and I says, "Now they ask me where all the totem poles and..." So I told them about it and... Now today with this wedding that's going on now, in the next generations they'll be asking, "Where are all the Haida girls? Where are all the Haida girls?" And I guess the people at that time will say the same things as I said, "You white people have taken them all away." Which is true now. Even between here and Queen Charlotte there's over sixty youngsters that should have been under the Indian Act on the reserve. What is it, all through the country here, from ocean to ocean?

Imbert: They change an awful lot, I suppose, even more, the direction that things are going (inaudible).

Solomon: The Haida language is disappearing fast. Lots of those youngsters, you talk to them in Haida they don't know... Now I got a granddaughter here, she doesn't know one word of Haida. And my great-grandchildren -- I got fifteen of them now -- and they don't know one word of Haida. And they never will because there's no Haida words spoken out in the place like that. When I was a young fellow there wasn't one English word

spoken in the gathering, in the weddings and things like that, or in the feast with, and like that. All in our own language. And now you hear nothing but English. And if I say any word in Haida people look at me, you see. Therefore that Haida language is dying fast. Same thing up in Masset. Two villages here. And therefore I don't know. There will be no Haida language on the islands in the next generation.

Imbert: As you say, there will be more and more people who are partly Haida.

Solomon: Oh yes.

Imbert: It will all disappear almost, in a sense, I suppose. Well, of course, people can still be proud of their ancestors. They can still be proud of their Haida tradition even if they're only part Haida.

Solomon: Well, I don't know. Now, even the ones during my time, if there's any white people around if we talk Haida to each other the other, some of them used to ashamed of speak their own language. Now more so as the time goes on. Why, I don't know. I always feel proud to be in my own native land. I don't have to go outside of Canada to make a living. I don't have to be a foreigner because I... This country was always in the early days and, as the songs says, (laughs) this land was made for us.

Imbert: Tell me, do you remember ever being told of how it was when the first white people came to these shores? Was there any story, any memory of what it seemed like at that time?

Solomon: Well, I can tell you about one. See, I couldn't tell you just exactly place, exact place where this thing happened, you see. It was on the west coast of the islands here. People used to have this sea otter. Sea otter was plentiful on the islands. Some people said in the early days some of them died and drift ashore around here, you know. And the people take them and take their hide and use them. They used to use that for clothes, bear skins for blankets, and marten skins for clothes, you know. And they'd make them more so with the sea otter because it had such a nice fur, you know. In the early days and...

On the west coast here, I can't tell you, I don't know where it is. Anyway, on the west coast of the island here, one day they see something on the horizon coming up, you know. It got bigger and bigger and the people got panicky. They thought it was some big unseen power that's coming to really clean them up and all that. And they dance and they keep on waving to push from them, to try to keep them off. But it came and came and finally they must have seen the smoke of this little place, I guess, this village, wherever it was. And they drop anchor there and so the people there didn't want to go out -- they were scared to go out. They didn't want to go and... So I don't know how many guys -- anyway there was some fellows went out. They were brave to go out so they went out. And when they got out there, they got close, they hollered ashore and they say, "This thing that's here, this thing that's here and the people that's on here is just the same people, same features as we are, only they're lighter color. They're lighter color." So they went and they hollered back and they went out there. When they got close to it this people motioned them to come to them. So they went out and they went close and one guy got aboard, got on the canoe and he grabbed this fellow's clothes, you see, this fellow's clothes made out of

hides of skins and he grab his. See, he made motions and he change with their clothes, you see. Well, anyway, it was all right. And the people had this fur, they got blankets and shirts and things like that, you see, that they had at that time. There was no money changed hands those days, it was all clothes, you see. That's the first story of the ship that came in on the west coast here that I've heard. Maybe there was one before that some other place, but this was the story that I heard of one place, you see.

Imbert: They were fur traders, really.

Solomon: Yeah. I guess they were Spaniards those days, you see, in the early days.

Imbert: What did they see? What did they think of the ship that came in? What did it look like?

Solomon: Well, I don't know. That's the only thing that never... So when they got aboard -- the bosun told them to get aboard and look around, I guess, and they find... And there was somebody come out from the stern end of it and he had long

stick. And there were some birds around the place there and he aimed to it and this thing go off with a big bang and a smoke and birds, he killed the birds, you see. Well, that was the first muzzle loader I guess they got. And this fellow he walked, many start to go over, and one of them go to the bow of the boat. And he looked into this place there, this store there, and he look in and there was a big box sitting there with a pot on top of it and the water was boiling, on this big box here. He looking at it and finally he looked a little ways and there was a great big black bear with curly hair (laughs) standing there and he... And that was a nigger that was a cook

on there, you see. They thought it was a bear. (laughs) Well, the ship start to come when the people... I guess they got firearms from them and they hunt for them and finally it stopped too. All these ships don't come anymore. But I guess that was the changeover between the Spaniards and the Russians then, you see. And then the things got pretty hard again, the clothes and things. They had to go back to their own clothes and... Well, that was the story of the first ship that I heard.

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

Imbert: Has it been a happy relationship or not so happy one, or how has it worked out?

Solomon: Well, I'm going to tell you this. You see, if there was a relationship here... Now, see this wedding here, well there's invitations go out for the reception and the wedding ceremony, you see. No different from the white people. Their friends, they invited their friends, and before this thing come on the women folks here put on a big shower for the girl, you know. And the Queen Charlotte women come here, and they all bring something and give this people a shower. Some of the girls gets married up there. When they put on a shower the people from here goes there. And the wedding ceremony is that church up there is plumb full. Many white people came there and the reception and the dance, anybody from the whole island... You should be here at New Year's Eve, that's when you see it.

Imbert: Perhaps I'll come New Year's Eve some day. That's a big celebration?

Solomon: You come here New Year's Eve there's no room in that hall. They dance just like that. And they have a great... This last New Year, this last two New Years I never go there because no room for an old man like me.

Imbert: This is the big hall up on the...

Solomon: They don't use that for dancing.

Imbert: No.

Solomon: Have you been in that hall?

Imbert: No, I haven't.

Solomon: Well, you better go there and see it. You've been down this one?

Imbert: No, I haven't.

Solomon: Well, you better go and see them.

Imbert: There's a lot of things I have to see.

Solomon: They don't use this hall way up here for anything, like dancing or any wedding ceremonies or anything like that. They got that for recreation hall, you see, for basketball and... In fact somebody here now teaching the young fellows basketball -- that's from States somewhere, I don't know. I

don't know half of what's going on here. As far as the relationship goes there's no difference. But it's up to you. If you're trying to be tough you get it too. (laughs) So our people...

Imbert: I understand that the school here at Charlotte was the, pretty well the first fully integrated school in the country. Somebody said that. Now the principal was telling me that. He said he wasn't quite sure how true it was, somebody had said that and he understood that it was first fully integrated school.

Solomon: Yeah, that's the first integrated school, I think it was. Masset too, you know, Masset was the same thing. And there's a first native woman in the whole of the Dominion in the school board up here. Mrs. Arnold Pearson up here. She's the first woman in the school board in the whole of Dominion.

Imbert: Oh goodness, there should be lot more of them. It shouldn't only be one.

Solomon: But you see native, native... They had a big school meeting here when this was integrated, you know, and somebody wanted to know if they going to have some people from here in the school board. And the principal at the time he says, "It's too bad," he says, "It's too bad we can't have a native in the school board unless he owns property at Queen Charlotte." So when the man that was in charge of the meeting he gets up and he says, "Well sir," he says, "well, ladies and gentlemen, the way is that people have to sell an Indian his own land to be in the school board." (chuckles) It seems funny, isn't it. People that owned the country before has to buy land to be in the school board. But this Mrs. Pearson up here she has property and her children going to school, and I guess...

Imbert: Is that actually still the way it is?

Solomon: Sure, it still stands. And that's applied to you too. You can't go into that school board unless you own property there.

Imbert: Yes, but the people here in the village, really they own their property in the village. They may own it collectively, or however the ownership is, it's their property.

Solomon: Oh yeah.

Imbert: When they own property in what should be a school district. I mean this should be a school district and that -- it all should be one and the same school district. You see what I'm getting at? I mean, in a sense, all right, this is distinct -- this is Indian, legally Indian land here as opposed to the... But the point is that I can't see, I can't see. That's not integrated in the truest sense.

Solomon: Well, you can say (laughs)...

Imbert: I know these things keep on coming up and I can... They're very strange and they hit you likethis and you wonder, "What the dickens!"

Solomon: Yeah, people wondered why the Indians want to write their own Indian Act.

Imbert: That's right. (laughs) I know why. Yeah, sure. But this, of course, should have happened a long time ago, but still this is something anyway.

Solomon: Well, in the first July it's a hospital day up here too, you know. And the people from here they all go there to help the hospital. And in the evening the dancers here, the hospital dancers here. And they dress from Masset, Port Clements, Juskatla, Sandspit, Moresby -- people used to come from Jedway to dance here. For that hospital there.

Imbert: Do you think that T.V. is going to, is making a big difference in the life of the people here in the village? It's come only in the last two or three years...

Solomon: Oh yes. But let me tell you one thing. There's two or three things that I don't like. All, this bank robbers, all this big gang, the syndicates in United States -- all that the youngsters learn right in that T.V. All the robberies, and in every little thing that goes on, like in the home or anything like that, the first thing that hits that table is a bottle and a glass.

Imbert: On T.V.?

Solomon: On T.V. And all that immoral stuff -- making love. It's a wonder that the world didn't explode with population years ago.

Imbert: Yes, this is...

Solomon: Of course that's nature, in a way, but it used to take time for that, you see. But now the little, even the little babies watches T.V. and they see what's going on. I always liked to see the T.V. as a thing that, like the manufacturing and stuff. Like these big factories that's working and all these different things that's produced, all this raw material that's turned into different things. And...

Imbert: Information programs.

Solomon: And all that kind of stuff, you know, and it always leads to drinking and making love. Of course those people in Hollywood, they don't give a rap who gets hurt over it as long as they make their millions.

Imbert: Are the islands in this sense, sense of T.V. and planes and everything else, really ceasing to be islands?

Solomon: Well it, there's lots of things to learn from besides that too, you know. From T.V. they see what's going on in the world. Now we get it alive now. But it used to be on the tape all the time and now they give it live.

Imbert: Happening right now.

Solomon: Happening right now.

Imbert: You see, that part of the world is no longer water and time between you and the mainland. That's abolished. You go in the air, plane can come right across. It seems that there's no more islands any more.

Solomon: Well, as the time goes on anything that, anything that comes on new and things like that, everybody just takes it for granted, think nothing of it. When I was a little boy, you know, even you get a cross-cut saw, people used to be so thankful and handle that with care. And now a thing like that people just kick it to the side. I always say to some of those young fellows, "Your grandfathers wake up now and see the way that things are they'll go back to their graves." (laughs) Yeah.

Imbert: I suppose you remember the days when they made the big canoes, do you?

Solomon: Oh yes. They used to make them over at Sandspit. I was there when they were hewing them right out of the trees, you know. I was just a little kid then. And when they'd take them out of the woods, you see, and they'd bring them over here. And when they were finishing them off, you know, and they used the adze. And it sounded just like the shipyards that had those riveters running, you know. (laughs) And get up early in the morning to use that adze.

Imbert: They were hammering it, of course, weren't they?

Solomon: No, no, no, no. They had adze, you know.

Imbert: ...and all those little chopping sounds that they made...

Solomon: Yeah, sawing on the wood, you know. And when they cut it down to the size of the thickness, you see, they had all measured out and that was handed down from way back, you see. And those measures everybody know just the exact that -- they had no tape measure or squares or anything like that. They wrote on their fingers and they fathom, the stretch of your hand.

Imbert: There was quite a noise. There would be several canoes be made at once, I suppose, would there be?

Solomon: What's that?

Imbert: There'd be several canoes made at once so there was quite a noise.

Solomon: Oh, there was dozens of them right here. You see the people make them and then they go over to the mainland and the mainland people buy them. They buy them and they used to use those canoes to go up Skeena. That's why the Hudson's Bay people, before the river boats, carted their stuff up and down through up Skeena and up north, you see.

Imbert: You made them in Sandspit rather than here?

Solomon: Well, they go over there and they go to where there's lots of big cedar...(tape is shut off)

(END OF SIDE B)

(END OF TAPE)

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