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DIRECTOR, OOWEKEENO HISTORY PROJECT OR THE CHIEF COUNSELOR OF
THE OOWEKEENO BAND.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- General reminiscences of her life.

NOTE: The Oowekeeno band name has a variety of other spellings: Owikeno, Oweekeeno and Oweekano. For the sake of consistency, Oowekeeno has been used to designate the band and the language, while Owikeno refers to the lake found in British Columbia.

David: ...with Evelyn Windsor on September 1, 1976, and we're talking about totem poles and recalling a couple of the poles that Evelyn remembers. What were the names of those poles again?

Evelyn: (Indian) and then there was the (Indian) pole. And I'm not too sure but maybe the (Indian) is the one that they call the Talking Stick of (Indian). And that tells the story about (Indian) and her four sons.

David: (Indian), who is she?

Evelyn: She, or he, sometimes it's, you know, it's of a man... that name has been passed on to me. And in the story it's a man, he had four sons. And there's a story on it in the Totem Poles, is that what it's called?

David: By (name)?

Evelyn: Yeah.

David: Yes.

Evelyn: That one's in there and so is the (Indian) pole, and the (Indian) pole I'm sure comes from Quay, though.

David: Right.

Evelyn: That's the Johnson's. And people around here they have that same story.

David: That would be Captain Johnson then, eh?

Evelyn: Yeah.

David: And Jack Johnson would be his son?

Evelyn: Yeah. And that's about all I can remember about the poles.

David: This talking stick...

Evelyn: There was another pole and Danny came across it. And it used to stand at R.I.C., you know, on the island and it was (Indian).

David: (Indian).

Evelyn: (Indian). It's a pole with, it looks like little cages all around it, from top to bottom, or half way or something like that. And it's all an eagle with its wings, you know, folded and they're all sitting in these little doorways, sort of...

David: Oh, I see.

Evelyn: ... And right at the top is the same kind of an eagle.

David: What does (Indian) mean?

Evelyn: (Indian) has to do with, you know, feather downing. And it had to do with peace.

David: Peace.

Evelyn: Yeah. (Indian) is something that was used at a dance, you know. They put it on the inside of a hat and when they dance all this feather, white feather downing... And so when they danced these feathers came out and that was some kind of a peace dance.

David: I see. So this pole was at R.I.C. in the summer village then, that people would stay at. I vaguely recall a photograph of that village at R.I.C., and it seems to me that there were several poles at that site.

Evelyn: Yeah, there must have been, because there was another one with a great big wooden spoon on it. And I can't remember what the other figures were on that pole, but I remember this great big, almost man-size, you know, great big wooden spoon. It probably had to do with some kind of a feast.

David: Do you know anything more about those poles, like who owned them, or what happened to them?

Evelyn: No, I can't remember. That (Indian) had to do with, I'm not sure, with my aunt Victoria. I'm not too sure but it seems that's what I heard at one time. Either her or else it might have been another person that was in the family.

David: Was there a church at this R.I.C. village site when you were growing up there?

Evelyn: I don't know if there was any at the village site, but I know there was one over at the cannery.

David: There was a church at R.I.C. cannery?

Evelyn: Yeah.

David: I see. A Methodist Church then?

Evelyn: I think it was Catholic, I'm not sure.

David: Oh, that's the one you mentioned before?

Evelyn: Yeah. I think the Methodists tried to get in there too but they didn't last either, because the people just didn't want to have anything to do with, you know, some foreign religion or...

David: Right.

Evelyn: ... teaching.

David: So there was some resistance then to the missionaries that came in?

Evelyn: Yeah. Because they had their own belief and so why force another belief on a person that has no meaning, no ties.

David: Right, yeah.

Evelyn: Probably if, you know... I suppose if people could, you know, understand each other at that time maybe it could have, you know, a lot of things could have been saved, you know. Because even after going to school and having the Bible taught to you and, you know, all this religious stuff taught to you, you know, you come across this thing about Jesus Christ giving away and feasting. And that earthly stuff is, you know,

is something that you can't take with you to another world, so you just live the best you can on this world and give what you have, share what you have. And I guess maybe they didn't understand that so they just wanted to turn everything to... change everything.

David: I was wondering if I could ask you something about the reservation and the fact that at one point there was a reserve made and people moved into the present village site. When you were growing up was there any talk or feelings about the fact that land had been lost, or that they now had to live in reserves? How did the people take this?

Evelyn: They couldn't understand why should, you know, somebody come along and say that, "You can only live here and this is going to be where you can only live." And why, you know, they were feeling, "Why should they come along and do this to us when we've always owned all this. It's always been ours." And why should somebody come along and tell you where to live all of a sudden, and restrict you to, you know, getting or doing other things that you've always done. Remember my grandfather, Albert Harry, he was, you know, like he never had any schooling but he was a chief at that time and this was happening when they were putting people on the reserves, you know, giving them this little lot for your reserve. And they asked him, "Where would you like your reserve?" And he said, "I don't want to talk about it yet until I see somebody, and till I can talk to someone about, you know, what's really happening." And he went to a conference up north and I don't know who he talked to up in... there was a conference up in (name) or Rupert Island, somewhere up there...

David: This would be the allied tribes, would it?

Evelyn: Could have been, yeah. And he was told, "It would be best if you take both sides of the river."

David: Right.

Evelyn: Because a lot of people just took, you know, one side and so he asked around and the best they could do was, you

know, tell them that you want both sides of the river for reserve land. And then this way you can, you know, live on either side and have control.

David: Right.

Evelyn: So that's how it was, and it seems like the posts that were put up have been moved a long ways now. Those little islands down at R.I.C., they used to be Indian reserve. And there's an Indian reserve on the sawmill side, you know, by that creek on the lower end. And then there was that sawmill and after that was reserve land all up.

David: That land is in dispute now then, isn't it?

Evelyn: Yeah. It's, you know, that last time I saw a post it was below where Trailing's(?) house is now. And the next time somebody saw it, it had been moved further up the river from Trailing's(?) place, and now they don't even know where it is -- they say it's above that creek now. It's moving, you know, all the time for (inaudible).

David: So in the beginning there was sort of what, a resistance or a disbelief to moving into, onto the reserve?

Evelyn: They already had lived in those places but they felt like they owned all of that Inlet, and it's free to them to do whatever they want wherever they want. And then all of a sudden being restricted to do things, that really, you know, angered them and they couldn't understand why should somebody have come along from somewhere else and tell them where to live, and that was... They just couldn't understand why should they be told to...

David: So this whole business of being confined to certain reserves and so on, do the people still see it as something that has to be settled yet or have most people just accepted it and it's over and done with?

Evelyn: For me, I feel like, you know, it's not really over and done with because, you know... Like, we're just being pushed out all the time into, you know, what the fisheries wants us to do, what the logging companies want us to do. And you can't do this, you can't do that -- why can't we yet? We feel that, you know, like if you had a property and somebody wanted it they'd have to pay you for that property before they can take it.

David: Right.

Evelyn: And, you know, that's the same way we feel. But, you know, that's our land and we don't want it to all go to waste and be just plowed under by industry and logging, and not replace it with anything. You can see that in the Delta area. All the farm lands are going, being taken over by factories and... We're having to accept all this graded foods from all

over, you know, the States and fruit from the States and vegetables. And your farmer friend's vegetables not good enough to sell in the store, you know. That's something that,

you know, bothers a lot of people, you know, that really feel that the land is theirs and why can't we make use of it, and why can't we do with it what we like?

David: What is your understanding of the extent of the Oowekeeno tribal territory? Could you describe how far it goes?

Evelyn: I can't really explain that because there is a story... I think that's the one, it starts off with (Indian) and it tells you where he went, and how far out he went out here before he returned. And I can't remember, or I can't, I don't know this, the other side, like the south side.

David: I see.

Evelyn: But there is a story that I remember about, you know, the north side of the Inlet.

David: Would it go as far north as Quay though, would it? The Quay people were considered Oowekeeno?

Evelyn: Yeah. And out to...

David: Calvert Island?

Evelyn: Calvert Island, somewhere in the other half, you know, like it was the borderline. So it's somewhere from Quay and somewhere from Oowekeeno. And you could go there -- that was the borderline for your fishing and...

David: I see.

Evelyn: ... all kinds of hunting, and that's all I know about it.

David: Well, at one time there were quite a few canneries in Rivers Inlet. I guess in the last decade they've all gone; there aren't any now.

Evelyn: No.

David: What has been affected -- the closing down of these canneries -- on the people from the village?

Evelyn: They didn't... You know, at that time... There's all young people there now. They've just come out of school, so it hasn't, you know, really affected them that much, because when they got out of school they went right in to logging.

David: I see. I was wondering, like it seems to me that the population in the present Oowekeeno Village has gone down, has

moved away from the village.

Evelyn: Yeah.

David: And I was wondering is there any connection between the people leaving the village and the closing down of canneries?

Evelyn: A lot of them have talked about going back, but where are they going to go back to if they go back? Because there's not enough houses, and you can't even get houses through the Department any more.

David: Do you think the canneries closing down forced people to go elsewhere for work?

Evelyn: It did with a lot of people, yeah.

David: So they to Port Hardy and Bella Bella.

Evelyn: Yeah. And even the canneries now, they are so... There's none around that... There's only the few people that can get to the canneries to work there. And so the canneries did a lot of things that, you know, brought people together and then when they'd all disperse again and... I think it was mostly, it took away a lot of people. A lot of people married into, you know, other bands through meeting them during the summers.

David: You mentioned logging too. I was just wondering, like, how the logging has affected the people, like the R.I.C. now, and there's a camp in Kiltala. Logging now is pretty well the main occupation of the men in the village, is it?

Evelyn: Yeah. The logging is the main occupation. My dad and my brothers, they used to work for the fisheries, but then that wasn't hardly, that hardly even got them anywhere. But it, you know... At least they, you know, the fisheries felt that they know their rivers and they know their creeks, and so they used them to get all the information that they needed for how the runs, spawning areas and spawning grounds of the different species. And then, it seems to me, when they got all their information they just, "Okay, you've got no more job. We're putting in somebody else."

David: Oh, I see.

Evelyn: So you just used them until you got all the information you need and then you tell them they can go. And

that's the way I saw it. I know Fred, Fred has been in working with the fisheries here and I told him he should duplicate, make a duplicate of all his reports; one for the Culture Centre to be used in the school...

David: This is Fred...

Evelyn: Carpenter.

David: Carpenter.

Evelyn: Yeah. And another one that he has to send to the fisheries office, head office. Because it's, you know, you give out all this information and you get nothing in return. And so, you know, if you're going to do this you might as well just, you know, take and hang onto the information that you can get and keep it to be used among your people as well as by the fisheries. And I think that's about all I can... People did for their own benefit, and it wasn't to our benefit or, the way I saw it.

David: Do you think giving the Indians a vote, was that an important thing for them to have? Did they feel like they were actually gaining something?

Evelyn: Only if we can voice our needs and whoever we vote for then it's important that, you know, that we're recognized.

(END OF SIDE A)

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