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

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Gives Indian words for a variety of English terms.
- Explains significance of dance cycles.

John: I don't think I was the first one born in that old
(name) Hospital there, the so-called (name) Hospital, it used
to be. But I believe I was the first Indian baby that was born
there. I believe, I'm not sure.

David: Oh yeah. What year would that have been?

John: September 1917.

David: Your mother and father were working at the cannery
then?

John: I wouldn't know. (laughs) No, my father was
traditionally a logger. To say this that I didn't really know
him, I just recollect, that's all.

David: Yeah. Was he very old when you were born already?

John: Who?

David: Your father, was he very old then?

John: Oh yeah. I run into his tombstone up in the old graveyard and the tombstone says he's only thirty-four years old. He died in 1925 so I didn't know him. I just saw an old guy a year ago and he told me, "I remember him well. I remember when he died." He was an old-timer from Rivers Inlet, white man.

David: Oh yeah. So he was a logger was he?

John: Traditionally a logger, hand logger what you call it them days. Used to live in a float house.

David: Oh yeah. Did he make a good living at hand logging?

John: Well, nobody made a good living in the hungry '30s, you know.

David: Yeah.

John: That was the so-called hungry '30s.

David: Yeah. Whereabouts, when you were a child, whereabouts did you live then?

John: Didn't live in any particular place, I think we lived in a float house. When we finished the claim we got to move.

David: Was this up in the lake?

John: No. The main inlet there.

David: I see.

John: What I remember a little bit about is Moses Inlet, West Island. And his logging partners were the Starrs from Bella Bella, old Sam Starr, old man (inaudible). They were his main logging partners. I think from Draney's, Draney's Inlet.

David: Were there lots of people hand logging then?

John: Well, there were a lot of hand loggers. The inlet used to be dotted with float houses all over.

David: Is that right. Where did they sell their logs to?

John: Well, I wouldn't know. I think Ocean Falls, I guess, it was mostly, you know. They just go to Ocean Falls, I

understand, to fix a contract and they said... Well, this was in the fall, like (inaudible). Come back around Christmas with a tug and they had to have their booms logged out, there was no

way of communication. And when the tug came in the booms got to be ready for towing. That's, you know, that's what they tell me. Like I don't quite remember, I just recollect it, that's all. I didn't know what was going on.

David: Yeah. So it was an operation that was in fall to December?

John: I think (inaudible) always all year around process.

David: Oh, I see. Did he do any commercial fishing?

John: Not that I know of. I used to be jealous of the other kids when they'd go out fishing, you know. (laughs) I don't think so. Well, see, they always quit logging when the salmon season started and yet I don't remember him going fishing. Don't recollect that -- I shouldn't remember -- I don't recollect him going fishing.

David: Did you still do lots of food fishing though, drying your own salmon and smoking it?

John: Well, I guess if it wasn't for the smoked salmon we wouldn't have survived that...

David: Yeah?

John: You know, those hungry '30s. That was all I remember when I was a kid, just poling them canoes and go up there and get them beachwood, you know, collect them and smoke them. (laughs)

David: Yeah. Did you ever spend much time up the lake?

John: Well, I remember when I was a kid I... Before I went to school I used to go trapping with my uncles, you know, which is maybe when I was nine years old, nine or ten, eleven. I know I was twelve when I went to school.

David: What were your uncles's names?

John: Jack Johnson, Alfred Thompson, big Mathew -- he was a great big fat guy. Old grandpa, old Captain Johnson. We used to live... the trapping camp those days, in my kid days, was (name) they call it. They pronounce it (name) today but it's... I can't even say it in...

David: (Name)?

John: ...Oowekeeno way of saying it. (Name) I think, (name).

David: (Name), yeah.

John: Yeah, (name). I'm not familiar with my own language no more. I speak Bella Bella.

David: Oh, you do, eh?

John: Yeah. I speak, but it's very... almost the same only the sound is different (inaudible). I always say they sound like a Scotchman and an Englishman talking together, you know, by talking Bella Bella and my native tongue. But we understand each other, mostly. (laughs) It was like I say, Bella Bella says, (Indian) -- right out of your tongue. "Where you going?" And far as I can remember Oowekeeno says (Indian).

David: Oh, way back in the throat.

John: Way back, and Bella Bella's right, like, say the tip of your tongue and it's easier to talk. (laughs) Well, for me now.

David: Did most... Most of your uncles did some trapping then, did they?

John: Trapping, hand logging. In 1936 -- that's when I left for school there and that's the time I really remember being up the lake -- '36, '37, '38. I don't know when I went back after that -- I don't remember if I went back.

David: Were there many families living up the lake then?

John: Well, pretty near the whole village used to go up trapping, you know. See, I think they used to be finished by October, middle of October, and then we'd all go up the lake then, set up our camps up there. Well each, like, family had camping grounds, you know, for traplines, you know.

David: Yeah, right. What I was wondering is, could you tell me which family was at each river or creek? I'm trying to figure out, like, where each of the families used to go.

John: The Wesleys and the Chamberlains were at (name), and in Indian is (Indian). And (name), that was our camp.

David: That was for the Thompsons, was it?

John: The Thompsons and my step-dad, Bernard, and the Hanuses. More or less that was my step-dad's family -- the Hanuses. And (name) that's (name), that's the Johnsons, more or less. Well, whoever... If they haven't got enough crew there, you know, they take other different families in, you know. It all depends on how big a shack they had, you know. But at (name) they had a shack then they had a community house there too, you know, one of them big wooden shake houses, you know.

David: Oh yeah, sort of like a longhouse?

John: Longhouse, yeah, it was actually a longhouse. But it was on posts, I remember, because the lakes used to come over the bank there, so it was on posts. And they take on more

family, you know, outside of the family, for the simple reason that they had more room, you know. And...

David: Was there a family at (name)?

John: (Name), that was Walkers, Simon Walker and (name) -- that was Danny's grandfather. And old Chief Albert Harry, you know. They all had, well, I think it was (name) that had the rights to the place. But those two, Simon and Chief Albert Harry, married into his family. Therefore they were there, you know. I don't actually know who had (name).

David: How about (name)?

John: (Name). Well, that was more or less the Johnsons all along there up to... Well, I don't know. I remember the place we used to call the Alder Point (inaudible), you know, Alder

Point. That was the dividing line from our trapline and the Johnsons' more or less, you know, like no man's land there, you know.

David: What was the name of that in Oowekeeno?

John: Eh?

David: What was the name of that point, the Alder Point? Can you say it in Oowekeeno? I would like to get as many of the names in the original as possible.

John: I can't think of it right now. Alder Point is around here somewhere. The second narrows -- there's the first narrows where the bluff is -- and the real narrows south of, west of (name)... And the second narrows, that's more or less the boundary for that (name) trapping. And ask them, the guys in Sheemahant, it's (Indian), that's (Indian). From there on up to the flats where them little, where the flats -- where you have to go through the little narrow channels there up to the last narrows; it's very narrow too. And then after that it's all... What is the name here again?

David: Whose territory was that, then, above the third narrows?

John: Well, we was there in '38, I think. We were very fortunate -- that had something to do with, I don't know whether it was my mother and father had something to do with that country, you know. So we more or less we had two camps to go to, you know. So we had (Indian). And before it gets -- it freezes in pretty early, the first place. As soon as the... Well, the old man and mother knew the signs, like when it was going to get cold. We'd pack out of there and out to (name) then continue on trapping, you know.

David: Oh, I see. What was your mother's name?

John: Maggie.

David: Maggie.

John: Still trying to think of that name of...

David: Oh, it will come to you.

John: They used to... I they used to call it the Indian River (inaudible).

David: Yeah, that's by the, it's sort of in English...

John: Indian River.

David: So where did most of the family spend their spring and summer?

John: Well, they... After, after trapping season they all went to the reserve, you know, for the winter months, you know.

David: Where was the reserve at that time?

John: Well, when I came back it was at the same place. Now they just started it then, you know.

David: I see, yeah. Do you have any memory of the houses on Katit, the island?

John: Yeah, I remember the Katit reserve there.

David: Were the houses on that? There were houses on the island, eh?

John: Yeah. Big community houses where they have this, a big timber in a hole in the...

David: House post.

John: House post, yeah. There were about four foot three or three foot three in there, just round. All hand hewed.

David: Yeah. Were they decorated at all, the houses?

John: No, no, there was no, there was no totem poles or anything. They just had big, round... well, the posts were -- they weren't round, you know, oval shaped, I guess.

David: Oh yeah, yeah. About how many houses were there?

John: Well, there was old man Johnson's. There was one there, I don't remember who it was, next to us. Oh, they were huge things, you know. And then the Chamberlain's, then the Louis' -- they've gone out of existence, the Louis. But that's where Danny -- his mother's side was the Louis.

David: Louis?

John: Louis.

David: Oh yeah.

John: Old man Louis.

David: Did he have another name besides that as well?

John: I don't remember. I just remember him as... I remember they never called him anything but Indian name before, but I knew it was Louis. Then there was the Walkers right in the top ends. I think there was six buildings there, big, huge buildings.

David: Did they have names for each building other than the family name?

John: No, not that I know of. I don't remember. They might have had, but I don't know. But, you know, them Indian dances.

David: Oh yeah.

John: If they hadn't burned up them old masks would have been worth a fortune, you know, because I remember that.

David: You do, eh?

John: I remember. Well, maybe I was around ten, twelve, eleven, you know. That's before I went to school, you know. And the only reason why, the reason why I couldn't get to school -- in them days your parents had to be classed as destitute. Well, I didn't know what destitute meant, you know. Had to be destitute and they didn't class my mother as a destitute, because she used to work in the net loft, you know, at R.I.C., you know, work from April, May, June, July, August, September and maybe till October. And Kitty Hanuse she was -- that's the Hanuse's -- I think Roy Hanuse was fifteen when he went to school.

David: Whereabouts did you go to school?

John: St. Michael's. You had to go farther than now. You had to walk all the way to Rupert then and down again.

David: To get there?

John: Yeah. Walked up there and we stand around and talk, he says -- jabbering away -- he says, "I think that's the one. The big brick building there, you know. It ought to be, you know, if it's going to hold so many kids it's got to be a big building." (laughs)

David: How did you like going to school?

John: Oh, there was no other choice. My mother told me, she says, "You got to go to school," you know. She was very strong on going to school, for us to go to school. And looking back it's one of the carefree, happy days of my life. We were taught, tell what to do, you had to obey it.

David: Did you have any problems with the language?

John: Oh yes, we had problems. We weren't allowed to speak our language. We were slapped across the face if we did. The only ones that got away with that was the (Indian). They were... I'd say about over fifty percent of them were (Indian) and you couldn't stop them.

David: They got away with it, did they?

John: Yeah, they got away mostly because there's so many of them that you can't go and slap everyone of them, you know. Well, the vice-principal would be sore hand.

David: Well, how did you feel about not being able to speak your language?

John: Well, I didn't feel too bad, but now today it makes me mad to hear them -- maybe I shouldn't say it -- you'll have to excuse me. When I hear them French-Canadians say, "We're going to lose our culture and lose our language." I've already lost my culture and language, and I'm proud that I can speak English, you know, get by with it. It makes me awfully, you know...

David: Yeah.

John: To hear that, when they...

David: So how many years did you spend there?

John: Six.

David: Six years, eh.

John: I think it was 1929 to '35. And I never knew about the hungry '30s. I thought that was just the way we lived, you know. My mother used to get maybe half dozen oranges for us. I just beat up my sister -- she threw the peelings away. We used to have a little can, jam can, fill them with water and put the orange peel in there and go out and play. Leave it there all day, then come back and drink it -- that was our pop.

David: Oh yeah. Did it taste good?

John: Well, it's natural citric juice I hear now. Somehow -- maybe I saw somebody, maybe somebody tell me, I don't know.

David: What did you do after you left school then?

John: Well, I went trapping, fishing. We used to get piles for the canneries in the inlet there, you know. It was no big money but it was living, you know.

David: Yeah.

John: I remember in '34 and '35 when the first (inaudible) they used to, what you call, get a \$5 coupon, \$5 coupons. And you get about \$3.20, or \$3.80 of groceries, and that was a big box.

David: Yeah, that was a lot of groceries.

John: And then I had \$1.20, \$1.80 for spending money and that was... Of course there was no radio, no entertainment, just the store, that's all.

David: You went gill netting, did you, in fishing season?

John: Yeah, gill netting.

David: What cannery did you work for?

John: The old R.I.C. -- Rivers Inlet Cannery -- right up at the head there.

David: Did most of the people, the Oowekeenos, did they fish mostly for R.I.C.?

John: Yeah, mostly, and the Kiltala over there.

David: And Kiltala.

John: I know Dan Groves, I think he was (inaudible) old timer, you know. And they'd tell me become a manager in those canneries in those days the only qualification would be to talk Chinook. To converse with the Indians, you had to talk Chinook to become a manager. The only qualification you had to become a manager, and of course pull I guess, you know, like anything else. That was the main qualification, you had to learn how to talk Chinook, you know, converse with the natives.

David: Were there lots of white fishermen fishing for R.I.C. as well?

John: Not too many in those days, not too many. It was mostly Point Grey natives, you know, that used to go up there. All the Point boys -- that's from Point Grey -- I know them. I know all of them that they used to work. I don't know the young fellows but I know the ones about my age, they used to go up there. And Kitimat...

David: And did the women work in the canneries, in the cannery at R.I.C.?

John: Well, yeah. They used to be at the cannery there. But in the later years, in '35, there was no cannery then.

David: Oh, I see.

John: That's the best... Now I know that was the best shakeup when H.R. took over, you know. He start closing canneries down. He was the one that start this centerizing these canneries, you know.

David: Right. How did that effect the people in the village?

John: Well, it's just like I say. I think it was '32 when the last cannery... I believe it was in '32 -- I didn't know too much then but I guess it effected everybody, you know, especially the women workers, you know, cannery workers.

David: They lost their jobs then?

John: Lost their jobs. Now, I understand, I found out now it was H.R. was put in to...

David: H.R. McMillan?

John: Yeah.

David: Well, did most of the men continue gill netting then into the '30s and '40s?

John: Yeah.

David: Well, what happened to the gill net fleet then? Like, it doesn't exist today in Oowekeeno. What's happened to it?

John: Well...

David: What happened in your case, for instance? Why did you not continue gill netting?

John: I lost my wife in '62 and I had kids here, you know, and I had to quit going out. I asked for, asked for a steel worker's job in order to stay home with the kids.

David: Oh, I see.

John: That's why I... Took me about two, three years to get it out of my system. (laughs)

David: Oh yeah. So you did gill net for quite a few years then?

John: Oh yeah, right from 1934 until I, well, '60s, you know.

David: Did you make good money at it?

John: I made a good living, not good money, but I made a...

David: Good living.

John: Yeah. I wasn't a real highline fisherman like some people I know. They always get fish regardless whether it's going to be a good season or not, they always get their fish, you know. I made good when there was a good season and if it was a poor season I would work like a (inaudible), you know.

David: Were there any highliners from the village?

John: Oh yeah. Old Uncle Alfred, during the height of the season, he was almost sunk sometimes -- the old skiff, you know. Loaded down and put his... even where he was sleeping quarters, you know, the bow of the skiff, you know.

David: Were most of the men using gas engines when you started gill netting?

John: No, most of them would sail. Why, I had a sailboat for two years.

David: Hard working a sailboat, eh?

John: I realize it now -- I don't think I can do it.
(laughs) I don't think I could row those sailboats no more, you know, against the wind. (laughs)

David: Oh you did then, eh?

John: Yeah. Oh yes, that's the way we lived. Never thought of an outboard or anything, it was just muscle. The most (inaudible).

David: Did you get towed out and then...

John: Towed out in the boat. Some packets, they'd tow us out. I remember watching them, Jim (name), I forgot to (inaudible). These two towed us out from R.I.C.. There was one semi, one semi-diesel, Japanese diesel. You could have rowed faster but it was, you know... And it was quite tricky to get off the tow line when some of them collectors start to put it in, high-powered engines, you know, power engines, and it was pretty tricky. But (inaudible), it's no trouble, it was slowly, eh.

David: Where would you get towed to?

John: Well, each packet had this certain place to go, and if you wanted to go on the south side of the inlet you get the packet that was going south side of the inlet. If you want to go to the north side of the inlet you go to the towboat that was going out to the north side of the inlet. You know, like, what do you call, used to call it (inaudible). Some people

call it Grassy Bay -- right across Kiltala, there. Some boats, some of them small ones, they used to go that far. And one goes to Kiltala, tie up for the night, that goes back to... And the more powerful collectors, I guess they went further down, like.

David: Did you ever fish out at the mouth of the inlet very much or did you stay up in the middle?

John: No. Each, well, what I can remember was McTavish, R.I.C., Kiltala all fished along that area. And Brunswick fishermen they more or less fished their own. Well, around Brunswick there, you know.

David: Yeah.

John: And Good Hope, around Good Hope, you know, Wadhams, around by... They...

David: They all stayed in their own area?

John: Their own area because there was no power, you know. I mean, you rowed, you know. (laughs)

David: Well, how many boats would be at each cannery, coming out from each cannery? I'm trying to get some idea...

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

John: ... you know, just flap up and down on the hinges, you know.

David: Was it very comfortable?

John: Well, it was comfortable to me -- that's the only way we went. Didn't know any, you know... It was very few gas boats that had... If you're a highline fisherman, if you had a \$300 boat that was, that's a tremendous amount of money those days, if you can afford a \$300 boat.

David: What did you cook on?

John: Oh, little primer stove the first year. I think I got it from the old man; little coal oil primer stove. You'd pump it up and it made a lot of noise, you know.

David: Yeah.

John: Well, they wouldn't... I guess times just change, that's all. They stopped logging, you know. Well I wouldn't know why.

David: Was there better money logging or...?

John: I never logged.

David: You never logged.

John: That's something I don't know anything about. I hear them guys talking about the old steam pot, what is it, steam pot. Punching, (inaudible) engineer. I imagine them going around punching it. (laughs) So that's how much I know about logging. (laughs) And another thing, in '35, '34, the gimmicks the company put out.

David: Gimmicks?

John: Well, I call it a gimmick. They tell us there's a company year rent free. That's what they call it, but they call it a company year and that was rent free. You don't rent nothing. And there's another one they called independent -- you rent it. They didn't say rent it -- independent. I used to like that word independent when I go fishing. I want to be independent I don't want to be... And later years I found out the company made more money than I did for the simple reason that it was rent free.

David: I see.

John: I don't know what was, I don't know how much, \$115 for skiff and everything, all the equipment to go with it. But you -- I forgot, it was -- you got five or two cents more fish, you know. That's just a little bit, you know. So, you know, if I made \$300 and the next man, that's this company, they make \$300. You cleared that \$300 and I had to pay rent out of mine.

David: You had a choice, did you?

John: You had a choice, but like they never said, "rent."

David: Right, they said, "independent."

John: Independent. They never said rent free, you know, you got to be company gear. So I guess a lot of guys were misled and says... Maybe a little proud like me -- I think maybe I was a little proud, I wanted to be independent.
(laughs)

David: How did those coupons work? You were talking about coupons before.

John: Eh?

David: How did the coupons work?

John: Oh, they work in the company stores, you know.

David: They gave you so much coupons for your fish?

John: No, we'd go in the office... Well, it's just like drawing our cash, you know. But it isn't cash, they gave us coupons so we can spend it in the company store. They still use company store coupons, yeah.

David: They do, eh?

John: Their face value was \$5 if you had \$5.

David: I was wondering if I could... You mentioned masks and dancing and so on. When you went back to Oowekeeno, to the village, were they still doing the winter dances?

John: No. For the simple reason the churches say it was not a Christian way of living. Well, I don't believe anybody called themselves Christian up there, but they obeyed that. Anything done was behind, you'd say, locked doors, you know. So they didn't do it very often after that, you know.

David: I see. How did the people feel about that -- the law against it?

John: Well, a lot of people was against it. Like my old man said he had a mild argument with the minister there. He

says, "That was our religion." A man, if he had to put up, what you call, potlatch, he maybe worked two, three years and work hard and be a good man, he had no time to be bad. You know, to gather up what he's going to use for a potlatch, you know. He had no time to be bad. And the old man said, "That's our religion. And when you put a stop to that he got soft, and no nothing to work for," you know. That's, oh I don't know, there's no potlatch then. Some work four, five years to gather up the stuff what they want for the big potlatch. And he says, "That's our religion, that is our tradition." He says, "King George VI," he asked him, "how many million dollars did that cost? That cost nine million at that time. That's the white man's tradition -- nine million dollars -- and the chief at the most he dispersed \$500 amongst his people. That didn't go outside -- he dispersed it among on his people. And you stop us from doing that and here's your nine million dollar coronation." He says, "There's something obviously wrong." I was sitting there listening to the old man. He was pretty well-educated, you know...

David: Good speaker, eh?

John: Yeah, good speaker and well-educated for them days. What you call, entrance class, grade nine and ten, he went that far. He went overseas during the Second World War.

David: Oh, I see.

John: Because he was a halfbreed and you couldn't see no Indian in him but he was all Indian at heart. (laughs)

David: When they had a potlatch they also gave names, did they?

John: Gave names.

David: How important were the names, the name giving?

John: Like the chief, he gets a boy, you know. He starts working right away gather up what he's going to give. And some Indian dances used to be four years in a row. You had to, and you had to work hard to gather the stuff, what you going to, you know. Four years in a row to... Four was the lucky number for the Indians up there -- four, forty, four years, four was the lucky number. I call it a lucky number. I don't know if it was a lucky number, but I mean that's what they went by -- four.

David: Yeah, it's a basic number because there's four seasons.

John: Yeah, four seasons.

David: And everything.

John: Four days, four seasons.

David: Did you get a name at a potlatch?

John: Oh yes.

David: What is your name? What are your names?

John: That's a good question. (laughs)

David: I'm interested in tracing the names, because we have an account of some of the early names and I'm just wondering, like, how they were handed down, you know.

John: (Indian).

David: (Indian).

John: (Indian), that's one. I think it's at least the sixth one, I think.

David: Does it have a, what was its significance? What did it mean? Did it have a story with it?

John: Yeah. Every name had a background -- where you come from, where your original, you know, like if you're Oowekeeno, (Indian), you know, some different places. You had names if you had the family come from there, you know, because there was all kinds of different tribes up there years ago. As they diminished they just merged, you know.

David: Can you recall the story that goes with your name?

John: No, I don't recall.

David: But it would be associated with a place too, eh?

John: Yeah. Some place like if it was a river, or a mountain, or something like that, certain place. Yeah, where you come from. I know... I don't know anything about this, but (Indian). You come from certain mountain, that's where your originals, you come from somewhere. That's where you become, well, just like Adam and Eve, I think.

David: Is that another name that you have?

John: No, I don't, this is not... I don't know what mine is associated with. But every name is significant in its own way. Like I know I have a half dozen names, but that's the only one I can remember. (laughs)

David: Have you ever given any of your names to your children?

John: Oh yes. Paul, every one of them has got a name, but only my late mother know. And I...

David: Would anybody else know?

John: Pete would know, I think. But I got hard time remembering my own, I can't remember my kids' names. (laughs) Every one of them's got a name, you know.

David: Did you give a potlatch to give the names? Did you give them at a feast?

John: Well, a little bit of money was dispersed, you know. Well, it might have been equal to a big potlatch.

David: When would that be?

John: Wasn't as elaborate as those olden days, you know.

David: Yeah. When was that?

John: Well, around the '40s and the '50s, you know.

David: Where did this take place?

John: On Oowekeeno there. There wasn't too much dancing or anything, they just give a feast, a banquet, like.

David: Yeah.

John: I don't think anybody could, you know, very few people could Indian dance up there.

David: Really? How about Jack Johnson and Mary and Lucy?

John: Mary and Edie and Simon they, you know, they knew it all. But they were the last bunch, like, you know, the last of the old...

David: Did you dance at all? Did you do any dances?

John: I guess they used to try to make me dance, but they tell me I was too damn stubborn. (laughs) Didn't know how to dance. (laughs) And then they had to get somebody else to dance for me, you know, pay him so much. I just forgot what you call, how these... I think, what you call them acting, supporting actor, you know, in a film, you know.

David: Yeah. Is there a word for him in Oowekeeno?

John: Eh?

David: Is there a name for him in Oowekeeno?

John: Might have been. But it was more or less every chief had a dancer of his own, you know, that will do those things.

David: That will dance, do his dances for him?

John: Yeah. Dance for, oh, any of the kids, you know. If they're too small to dance they... I believe each chief had his own dancer.

David: Right. And he would dance, like, for a young child in the event of the child being given a name?

John: Yeah, I'm pretty sure of that.

David: You never did get into the dance series?

John: Little Bobby Beans, he used to be called, you know. He used to do our dance. I think he was the last of us, you know. Well, he was small...

David: What was his name again?

John: Bobby Beans.

David: Beans?

John: Yeah, Bobby Beans.

David: Well, where did he come from?

John: Well, he was a half Bella Coola and half Rivers Inlet. And I don't think he's got a family who lived in the Rivers.

David: Was he the last? Did you say he's one of the last

ones who...?

John: One of the last ones I remember. He was a small child like that and he was dancing for everybody, eh.

David: Oh, I see.

John: That's the way I remember, I might be mistaken.
(laughs) (inaudible) Olson.

David: And he was, I think he spent most of his time with David Bernard.

John: That's right. David was the interpreter.

David: That's right, yeah. So most of the information we have now about the Oowekeeno comes from Olson Bernard about the old ways.

John: Yeah, I remember Olson. I was around thirty-five.

(Break in tape)

David: Say that again.

John: Totem pole, is it totem pole?

David: It was a story. It might have been a totem pole as well, yeah.

John: Well, how do you say it?

David: (Indian).

John: I think it's (Indian), I think so. If it's that one I'm thinking of, what he... There used to be a totem pole in

the entrance, you know, the causeway going into, from the Bayshore Inn going to Stanley Park. There was a totem pole there.

David: Right.

John: And there's an Oowekeeno story about it, I think it's (Indian).

David: (Indian)

John: And I saw it, you know, went there and said, "Where the heck does that thing come from anyway?" The guy went and read it and I couldn't pronounce it, couldn't pronounce that. I don't know what language, foreign language is that, you know. I didn't know it was in my own native tongue! (laughs) I happened to mention it to him and he says, "Well, that's my spelling. It's (Indian)." (Indian) means when the Indians went fishing -- that's years back, you know -- they go and get this,

I think it's willow, willow trees. And they get a big hook in the end and they chop it off. And they put the... what Simon, he gets it through the gills out the mouth, and that's what they call (Indian) is put it on, you put it on this stick. (Indian) You thread it. And that's how this the (Indian), you know, story came. I'm pretty sure it's (Indian), because if he hadn't told me I wouldn't know -- I think I pronounced it the way you... (laughs) And that's all I remember, but it used to be in a sawmill, what you call, sawmills, at the right hand side there. There was two there.

David: There were two poles there, eh?

John: Two poles there.

David: Do you know the name of the other pole?

John: No, there was only one that I know of. I don't know, the other one is somewhere are that Park. I don't know if they are there because they were getting pretty old when they took them out.

David: Did they both go to Stanley Park?

John: Yeah, I think they both went to Stanley Park, yeah. It was Jack Johnson, and Simon, and Roy Hanuse, they took it down, you know.

David: They did, eh? Why did they sell it? Why wouldn't you want to keep that totem pole?

John: Well, I don't know too much about that, you know. I mean sometimes now I think that I should have been a little more aggressive and find out, you know. But I was, well, you might say I was brain-washed, you know. I was told not to talk my language. Funny thing is the (Indian)... when I left school I never spoke a word of (Indian) but I learned their language. When I left school I can speak it just like if I was a native from there, just through hearing it.

David: Just picking it up.

John: Yeah. Through hearing, but I never spoke it. But dang it, after I left I found out I can speak it. Well, hearing it every day.

David: Yeah.

(Break in tape)

John: I call it a legend, you know, Indian legend.

David: Yeah, yeah.

John: No, I... No, this is... No, I don't originate from some source, you know, and that's, you know, sometimes it comes

from that, the legend, you know. So and so, how you, big Indian of your family, how they came to...

David: Do you have this story though or legend that explains your beginnings?

John: No, I wouldn't remember, I don't know. (laughs) Mom used to try and tell me but...

David: Yeah.

John: (Inaudible) you can hear a drop on the other (inaudible). My reason was moving away from it, I couldn't get the kids to school, you know. And when they started a school here I stayed here, you know. I've been over here, when I first moved here, I think I moved in '47.

David: To Namu? And there was a school here then?

John: Well, shortly after that. And that's, well, when you first integrate...

David: Yeah, right.

John: You should hear the squabble over there.

David: Over integrating the Indians with the whites?

John: Yeah. Only not, only until recent years they've been relaxed on, you know.

David: Really? How big a school is there here?

John: Well, this building that's on the end here.

David: Oh, I see.

(Tape stops)

John: (Inaudible) kids here.

David: Ninety?

John: Ninety. And he was Santa Claus that first year. He said he was tired out carrying every -- ninety kids on his lap, you know. There was ninety preschool and school kids.

(Tape stops)

David: And steady...

John: Steady, I mean it was more or less steady. We had, like salmon, and I used to go on a herring. And spring I go on a halibut, then I started getting the shore after that, you know. My first four kids, they only know me as John. They never call me dad, because I was out so much, you know.

David: Oh, I see. How many children do you have in all now?

John: Nine.

David: Nine.

John: Everybody says, "You sure got a lot of kids." Well, you used to hear this -- the Indians are a vanishing race -- you can't blame me. That's the answer. If they get sarcastic about it, you know, I'll tell them.

David: Yeah.

John: I guess that's the main reason why they sort of abandoned Rivers Inlet is... I don't know what happened to the fishing. Maybe when they were what you call marginal fishermen, you know. Like before this license limitation I see the statistic is, I think there was 11,000 Indian workers, 11,000 licensed Indians and I think it's less than half now.

David: So they've been sort of dropped out of the industry, have they?

John: Yeah.

David: Why? Because they couldn't keep up with the modern tech...? The boats and the equipment and so on?

John: Yeah, when Jack Davies used to get his license limitation that escalate the price of boats.

David: Yeah.

John: A lot of guys, when they seen an old boat, they don't want an old boat -- they want a license. And they pay twice as much, three times as much as what the boat is actually worth to get the license.

David: Oh, I see.

John: So that's the only thing this license limitation did was to escalate the price of a boat. (Break in tape) Well, I used to but not recently, because my job here is at the height

of the oolachan run. It's... I'm working here, I work in the powerhouse. It's a shift work and I can't get off then.

David: Yeah. So you used to go back regularly for oolachans and sockeye, eh?

John: Yeah, I used to go regularly and go back and see the people. But not in recent years because I've been eight years in the power plant and then I couldn't get away because that's herring season. That used to be the end of the herring season and beginning of the roach season (inaudible) and I have to be here because... (Break in tape) Well, from what I hear -- hearsay -- the old people never liked it, as far as I know of.

David: Did they oppose the setting up of the reserves, did they?

John: Yeah. Like a story I hear about the old guy fishing the inlet all his life, and when they first had this fishing patrol, you know, fisher (inaudible). The old guy he couldn't understand why he couldn't fish traditionally, like the way he fished before. He couldn't understand why the boundary was there. The old guy he... every time he'd take a salmon off he throw it towards the fishery boat, "There you can have it! I don't know why but you can have it. Why did you," you know, talking Indian of course, "why am I not allowed to fish in my traditional fishing ground?"

David: So he just didn't understand then.

John: No, didn't understand, you know, didn't understand what the fishery was.

David: Was this statement, that feeling, common to most people?

John: Well, like I say, you know, it's just a hearsay what I... they're all opposed to that, you know. Because traditionally they were nomads to certain areas, caught in seasonal food. See, as far as I know Namu, the way I understand it, was no man's land -- I'd call it no man's land. Bella Bella's traditional hunting ground was from Walker Point to Nalos.

David: Nalos?

John: Nalos. That's Nalos.

David: And that was the end of their territory?

John: More of less, more or less.

David: Everybody understood that, eh?

John: Everybody understood it. And the Bella Coolas, their traditional hunting ground was out to Noeick, that river up here on the right hand side going up.

David: Right.

John: And Oowekeeno traditional ground was Quay.

David: That was the limit of their boundary, at Quay?

John: You know...

David: Did it include Calvert Island as well?

John: Yes, from there, you know.

David: I see.

John: I don't know how far it went to the mouth of the inlet, I imagine they're just south of Cape (inaudible).

David: And everybody understood that that was...

John: More or less. It was traditionally the hunting ground, you know, of different tribes. That's what I understand, that this was no man's land. I call it no man's land. They say anybody could camp here, you know, it was... And the little house used to be right above here where this thick torn down bunk house and that that's where that little shack was.

David: Oh yeah.

John: And when they were digging this out, digging the furnace out for this bunk house, there's sometimes three feet of clams, two and a half feet of clams. That's seasonal, I guess, there were so many people here, you know, and so many going by digging clams. And there's a layer of black mussels, you know. And sometimes it was just a little layer of earth, maybe nobody is here for maybe a couple of years, you know, and there's a little thin layer of earth, you know. Just tell the story, you know, you go dig there and just, you know, when the clam season or the black mussel season. (laughs)

David: Yeah. So lots of people used this site then?

John: Yeah.

David: Not just Bella Bella?

John: Not just Bella Bella, Bella Coola. Anybody going by, they camp here, you know. That's what I understand, I don't know.

David: Yeah.

John: I hear the Bella Bellas got this claim when they, you know, when they start putting reservations on there.

David: Oh, I see. They claimed it, did they?

John: They claimed it, yeah. Yeah, that's what I understand was it actually didn't belong to nobody, you know, this area.

(END OF SIDE B)

(END OF TAPE)

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