We are recording the voice of Mr. Joseph E.A. Muir of Nanaimo this 15th day of May 1963. A living memory for Nanaimo Historical Society.

Being interviewed by William Barraclough within the walls of the old Hudson's Bay Company Bastion. Mr. Muir, popularly known as the keeper of the Bastion. Introducing Mr. Muir.

WB: Mr. Muir, may we first ask where and when were you born?

JM: I was born in Nanaimo on Albert Street in 1875, where the doctor's office is located now.

WB: Mr. Muir, tell me about your father Archibald Muir leaving Scotland for Vancouver's Island.

JM: My father when 18 years of age was employed in Scotland by the Hudson's Bay Company to accompany John Muir Sr. his uncle and their family to Vancouver Island to open coal mines. They left Scotland in 1848 on the barque "Harpooner". They arrived in Victoria on June the first 1849 and left directly to where they opened the coal mine named the Muir shaft.

WB: Mr. Muir, who else was aboard the "Harpooner"?

JM: Dr. Benson who was employed by the HBC as doctor and clerk also was Captain Grant who came out to Victoria to make a fortune but he couldn't find any land near Victoria, it was all taken up so he had to go to Sooke 22 miles away and he took up 1000 acres. In the meantime, Captain Grant went on to the '49 gold strike in California, but he returned back disgusted so he sold his 1000 acres to the Muirs and he left for Scotland.

WB: About that year, 1849, another important person came out to Vancouver's Island. Tell us about that.

JM: That was Governor Blanchard. Vancouver Island was the first crown colony west of the Great Lakes and Governor Blanchard was the Governor. He only stayed a couple of years, 1851 and on his return to England, he took back a petition from the settlers asking for a legislative council. On that petition there were 15 names, there were 6 Muirs signed it.

WB: And the first meeting?

JM: The first meeting was held in 1856, at Victoria, B.C. And Vancouver Island had a legislative assembly.

WB: Mr. Muir, when your family came here first I understand they went to Fort Rupert to open the coal mines for the Hudson's Bay Company.

JM: When they arrived in Victoria on June 1st, the first thing they done was go direct to Fort Rupert to open coal mines. They opened
the Muir shaft there in 1848 but the coal did not prove out so good but when their time was up, they returned to Victoria and in the meantime bought out Captain Grant's 1000 acres at Sooke.

WB: About Coal Tyee, Joe.
JM: An Indian named Coal Tyee went to Victoria to have his gun repaired. While watchin' the blacksmith burnin' coal he said he knew where there was lots of black rock so that Hudson's Bay went to Nanaimo to investigate. They found coal there so they sent John Muir up with Robert Muir and my father Archibald. They opened the Muir shaft right where the bank of Commerce stands today.

WB: There was another seam of coal discovered in Nanaimo.
JM: The seam of coal was named Douglas after Governor Douglas and The Douglas mine, my father was employed by contract to mine out the coal for the company. He hired 2 boys, one named Billy Wall and one named Joe Malpass as trapper boys to trap doors and they were paid 50 cents a day.

WB: About 1853, after they found good coal, the HBC changed their plan of importing miners, Joe.
JM: Yes, Governor Douglas changed his policy. Instead of hirin' single men from Scotland and Orkney Island, he decided to hire, engage married men to colonize the country. So he brought out 21 married men, their wives and 42 children on the barque "Princess Royal". The "Princess Royal" left England on a 6 months' voyage and landed in Esquimalt, then and the passengers were transferred to the "Beaver" and the "Recovery", they landed in Nanaimo on the 27th of November 1854 and among the passengers were Mr. and Mrs. Joseph L. Bevilockway and two days later a daughter was born named Julia and that is my mother.

WB: Mr. Muir, tell us something about the Bastion.
JM: The Bastion was erected in 1853 and is built of square timbers and the builders were two French Canadians by the name of Lavine (?) and Lafortune. The building consists of 3 stories and a basement. The top story is twice the size of the bottom story. It was also built by the HBC to protect the white people against the Indians and also these Indians against the northern Indians.

WB: That would be the Haidas.
JM: Can you remember seeing any of these northern Indians? in the Nanaimo harbour?
JM: Not so many as I, no, but I've heard my mother say that they came down in canoes, 50 of those big canoes. And they would howl out in the bay all night.

WB: Joe, the Bastion has been moved from it's original site.

JM: Yes, when John Hilbert became mayor, the city borrowed $50,000 to repair the streets in Nanaimo. Of course among the streets Bastion Street had a lot of rock in it so they had to move that 'cause you couldn't get by it. So they decided to pull the Bastion down. Only the Chief of Police Stewart he refused to let 'em tear it down so Mayor Hilbert had $175 voted by the city to pay for movin' the Bastion. It was moved to the opposite corner where it stands now about 25 feet away. And later Chief Stewart used th Bastion for a lock-up.

WB: You have many valuable items in the Bastion. Museum pieces. But I understand the most valuable of all is the Hepburn stone. Will you tell us about that? The Hepburn stone was located on Hepburn's place on Nanaimo river. And while digging a well 22 feet deep, they discovered this stone.

WB: This Hepburn stone is several times larger than the human head,

JM: The Hepburn stone has human features and weighs 85 pounds and resembles the same period as the petroglyphs.

WB: Sometime later, the Native Sons acquired the Bastion.

JM: Yes, in 1900 the Native Sons Post was formed, the Native Sons of British Columbia, in the meantime they had stopped using the Bastion for a lock-up so we purchased the Bastion in 1906 and now it's a meeting place for Native Sons and a museum.

WB: While I was in the Bastion today Joe, you showed me a very famous picture. The picture of the Fort in 1882 with all the guns projectin' out of the portholes. It was a dangerous place for the natives in those days.

WB: In the summer time now you seem to have a lot of visitors.

JM: Oh yes and I'm the most particular one cause taking photos, I have my photo taken a dozen times a day in the summer time so I'm photographed all over the world today.

WB: When we held the 100 years celebration of the landing of the passengers of the Princess Royal, that would be in 1954, I noticed Mrs. Muir wearing a beaver hat. That is something very, very rare. Can you tell us about that Mr. Muir?

JM: It was a ceremonial hat. In the Hudson's Bay in the old days,
it was very, very rare.

WB: The first houses the Muirs built in Nanaimo, Joe.

JM: The first houses built in Nanaimo by the Muirs were built of logs and the roofs were made of bark and they were situated near the Bastion now.

WB: But that was before the Bastion.

JM: Oh yes of course there was no Bastion there when the Muirs came.

WB: Nanaimo was famous for building sailing ships in the early days, there was one very famous ship built here, the barque "Nanaimo". It was the largest sea-going vessel built in what is now B.C. I will give you a few statistics of it. The length was 155 feet, the beam was 34 feet, built of Douglas fir, and registered as 450 tons. It was capable of carrying 800 tons of coal or lumber from Nanaimo. It was launched in Oct. 31st 1882 at 6 p.m. Now Joe, I understand you were aboard that barque Nanaimo the day it was launched.

JM: Yes I was aboard that with other boys, three or four times but we were off it when she was launched and I was sorry I didn't stay aboard.

WB: Who built the barque?

JM: The barque was built by Mr. Carpenter. He owned Nanaimo mill at the time. And she was built right at the mouth of the Millstone river. Captain Dodd was the second officer aboard the famous "Beaver" the first steam boat around cape Horn and landed in Fort Vancouver in 1835.

WB: I notice you have a very fine painting in the Bastion of this barque "Nanaimo".

JM: Yes we have a painting of the barque that was painted in Hong Kong, in full sail and was presented to us by Mrs. H.L. Horn of Wallace Street.

WB: When did you first attend school in Nanaimo Joe?

JM: On Crace Street and the teacher was Mrs. McDougal. Afterwards Mrs. Haslam.

WB: Part of the building is still standing.

JM: It's all there only they built a little more on to it.

WB: You were saying the townsite was surveyed out before the city of Nanaimo.

JM: Yes, Newcastle Townsite was a townsite before the city of Nanaimo. I myself remember when the townsite was occupied with a Ucletah Indians.
WB: Now Joe, a very historic building is the Franklin House.
JM: Yes, I remember the Franklin House, it was where the city Hall now stands and in fact they owned all that property up there and it extended down to the waterfront. It was waterfront property. The house was built of red brick from England and redwood from California.
WB: Mr. Muir, what fraternal orders have you belonged to?
JM: I belonged to the Masonic order which I joined in 1900, and Billy Lewis, he will celebrate his 100 years next July, was the Master of the Lodge when I joined.
WB: And you've been a member ever since?
JM: I've been a regular member ever since. And besides that I belong to the Ancient Order of Foresters which I belonged and at present I'm in the chair.
WB: In 1900 when the Native Sons was formed here you were elected Chief Factor and again?
JM: Yes, I was really the organizer of the post NO. 3 in Nanaimo and I was elected Chief Factor at the beginnin' in 1900 and now I'm chief factor again in 1962.
WB: Now Joe one of the most amazing things you've told me about is workin' over the famous Chilcox Pass, packin' supplies on your back to the summit. Now can you tell us about that?
JM: I packed on the Chilcoot Pass in 1898 when I was young and strong and enjoyed every minute I was on the trail.
WB: And what was the weight of a pack?
JM: Generally 100 pounds.
WB: That would be 2 sacks of flour. And how many trips a day would you make? Sometimes a half a dozen if you got the packs.
JM: Sometimes a half a dozen if you got the packs.
WB: Now you were saying on the way up about chopping steps out in the ice.
JM: Travelling up the Chilcoot Pass is straight up and down. See, and there was always two men employed to cut steps so we could walk up. And one day they'd be workin' on the side not used and you'd use the side the next day.
WB: Well who paid these fellas choppin' the steps?
JM: All those that used the trail.
WB: How many would there be?
JM: Over 800 in a day.
WB: And how much would they pay them?
JM: 10 cents, ya give 'em.

WB: 10 cents each a day. That was quite a revenue for 'em. Now tell us about the bad slide where so many lives were lost.

JM: That was uh, you see in the springtime, when the second snow comes, on the top of the first snow, that's the snow that slides. Well this day there was a slide there and there was about 17 feet of snow when they got down to the bottom. And there were a number of men, 60 or 70 of them workin' on a tramway and they were comin' down. They all had a hold of a rope so they wouldn't loose one another but the snow slide caught 'em and they were all buried there.

WB: How many were there?

JM: About 60 or 70.

WB: 60 or 70 men. And you saw the slide.

JM: Yes. I saw the slide.

WB: About the signs.

JM: Well the signs came from all places, undertakers.

WB: Now another story about is the dead horse gulch, have you a story on that?

JM: Well you see when a horse, they worked them as hard as they could. When he dropped they just let him lay there they didn't move 'em. Goin' through Sheep's camp (?) below you you walked on dead horses.

WB: Any idea how many horses?

JM: Oh at the time there was lots of horses there. They just packed 'em all they could you know and they dropped there and probably not enough to eat too.

WB: Mr. Muir do you remember the Robert Dunsmuir's?

JM: Yes, I met, used to see Mrs. Dunsmuir lots of times. She used to drive a pony and a go-cart and I lived just above them on Albert Street. Dunsmuir Street, that's where he kept his horses and stables. And the house now is moved up to Selby Street. I think it's still there but it's all boarded up I think.

WB: Any other Dunsmuir's?

JM: Well Alex Dunsmuir was the first white boy born in Nanaimo.

WB: Whereabouts?

JM: He was born on Bastion Street in 1853.

WB: You also knew James Dunsmuir.

JM: Yes, I knew James Dunsmuir. His daughter was in the Bastion not so long ago and she told me that house in Departure Bay was built for where she was to be born in.

WB: Yes, yesterday I saw this house and there's not very much of it
left standing.

WB: How about sailing ships in the early days in Nanaimo?
JM: In the early days in Nanaimo between here and Departure Bay taking coal and sandstone to California. We supplied California with all their coal until they had the oil you know. The sandstone was used to build the mint in San Francisco.

WB: And ships returnin' ...
JM: Brought with them ballast and from foreign countries they brought ballast and amongst the ballast would be shells and resin and pinch and other things like that and when we were boys in the school every day we ran down to the dump and dug up shell and pinch and if I could get a good two bit coal-oil can full of resin I could get two bits for it. We sold it.

WB: You were mentioning stone from Nanaimo going down to San Francisco. Where did it come from?
JM: Newcastle Island.

WB: How about sailing ships returning from San Francisco to Nanaimo.
JM: The ships from San Francisco returned with rock balast and the ballast was taken from Telegraph Hill and dumped here on the beach. And when people come from San Francisco I always tell 'em that they can walk on Telegraph Hill in Nanaimo so you've got Los Angeles beat for its distance.

WB: Oh Joe you didn't tell me who you married.
JM: Well I was married in 1901 to Agnes Patterson from Cranberry district. She lived there all her life from 1880, farmed out there, her father did. She lived where the airport is now.

WB: That was their farm? Joe, let us go back to the Chilcot Pass. Just how you came down and the men walkin up.
JM: When packin' up the Chilcot Pass you packed up on steps and when you put your foot out the step a man behind you put his in and that was carried out all day until you reached the top when you cached your pack. Then on returning you slid down the Peterson which was straight up and down. You sat down and slid down to the bottom.

WB: Mr. Muir you remember the Oscar blowing up.
JM: Well I guess I do. I was in a logging camp when it happened and when the Oscar blew up I thought it was the powder works. We have the fittings from the Oscar and recently we received the anchor which was brought up through a tow line off one of these tug boats when they were towing a scow.
WB: Can you remember any very famous people who visited you in the Bastion?
JM: There's one or two I can remember, there's General Pearkes, Victoria Cross, now Lieutenant-Governor of B.C.
WB: And you were tellin' me here about the Governor of the HBC from London visiting you here on October 22, 1961. W.S. Kiswick(?) Esq. and he was accompanied by Mr. Faulkner, M.B.E. a director of the company. Could you enlarge on that Joe?
JM: Yes, they were here, of course they came in and they said nothing to me and I tried to tell them about The HBC and big guns for furs with the Indians and he showed me his card, his was the Governor of the HBC. He said to me, he had a good joke on me and so at the finish he invited me to London to have dinner with him at the Hudson Bay house in London. The HBC are very good to the Bastion. They always supplied the flag, the Union Jack for the past 30 years and the present one we have is 4 feet by 9 feet.
WB: Joe, coming in I notice a few cannon still poking around the Bastion. Now will you enlarge what they were used for.
JM: The cannons of the Bastion were used for a special purpose.
WB: Mr. Muir, you remember that occasion do you?
JM: Yes I do. I remember it was on August 13, 1886 because I was up there when they were fired.
WB: Joe, did you ever take any prominent part in sports in Nanaimo?
JM: Not very much but I did on the 24th of May. We sponsored 24th of May twice for the Native Sons. Also the Labour Day tournament, we sponsored that for 25 years. I always looked after the gate receipts and the cash.
WB: You told me the other day that you didn't have much time for sports you were always working.
JM: Well in the camps I was working 7 days a week and half the nights. Worried about what I was going to do the next day.
Mr. Barraclough I wish to thank you most sincerely for this interview and the recording of my voice in livin' memory.

WB: And thank you Mr. Muir and now Mr. Muir may we convey to you and Mrs. Muir our sincere respects and best wishes to you for a pleasant 88th birthday this coming June 20, 1963. We are recording the voice of Mr. Joseph Muir within the walls of the historic Hudson Bay Company's fort, The Bastion in Nanaimo. As a final note Mr. Muir about this bell.

JM: Well this bell was cast in London in 1862 and is a nice big bell. And it was used for all purposes, especially to warn the people in the town of approaching Haida Indians and northern Indians.

WB: And now Mr. Muir will give a few strokes upon this famous bell. Clang, clang, clang, etc.