An interview with Martha Kenny and Hiram Gough
Transcribed by Jennifer Bolstler & Dalys Barney, Vancouver Island University – August 24, 2015.

William Barraclough: This is a recording of the voice of Mrs. Martha A. Kenny as living memory for Nanaimo Historical Society, of which she is a member. Made this 14th day of March, 1962, by William Barraclough.

Mrs. Kenny was lying in bed during the recording, she being 90 years of age. It was with some difficulty that she bravely spoke from her notes, being anxious to relate earlier accounts of Nanaimo's history. We have preserved her written notes. Mr. Hiram Gough, her nephew, assisted with the microphone.

The next voice you'll hear will be that of Mrs. Martha A. Kenny.

[recording is of poor quality]

Martha Kenny: [unintelligible] and was born at St. William's, Norfolk County, Ontario, and first arrived at Nanaimo in April, 1876, with my parents Mr. and Mrs. Caleb Woodward, and two sisters and a brother. I might add incidentally, that a year and a half later, my elder sister Elizabeth became the wife of the late Samuel Gough, City Clerk and Comptroller for over 45 years. He was something of a pioneer, having arrived in 1854 aboard the Princess Royal, at the age of about five years.

Nanaimo has a romantic past all her own. Its ever decreasing little handful of old-timers dearly love to get together and talk over. The first available picture of the site upon which our city is built is a rough sketch by a Hudson's Bay Company surveyor in October 1853.

Mount Benson, known at that time only by its Indian name Wak-siah [Wakesiah] meaning in Chinook "not very far" or "nearby", rises in the far background, while a few of the original miner's cabins are shown along the west side of what is now known as Front Street. These cabins must have been built previous for 1853, as the ship Harpooner arrived in 1849 and the Cowlitz in 1850, each with its quota of miners and their families. And by the way, Mount Benson was named after Dr. Alfred Benson, the surgeon clerk on the Harpooner.

2:44
The Hudson's Bay Fort is also shown in this sketch of 1853, on its original and more elevated site on the corner just across the street from where it now stands. Records show that the Fort was built by two French Canadian axe-men - Leon Labine and Jean Baptiste Fortier - under direction of Joseph W. McKay.

Work was commenced on the Fort in 1852 and completed June 1853. It is the only original Hudson's Bay Fort in North America. The original foundation was laid by William Isbister, who also built the first stone structure on the upper side of Front Street. I will refer to this later.

The whole waterfront, from Departure Bay along the town to the south end of Nanaimo, was first known as Snuneymuxw, meaning "an ending" in Indian. The meaning in Chinook, "the drumming place for tribes" or "a great strong people".

In 1791 the Spanish commander Eliza was in charge of an expedition to solve the mysteries of Strait of Juan de Fuca. He spent several days along the- our harbour, charting the location as Winthuysen, spelled various ways in different documents. And by the way, Governor Douglas had his own trouble with this word, and it says that in his writings he usually, almost always, had to correct the word.
Governor Douglas, in a letter to George McKay, dated August the 24th, 1852, ordered him to proceed at once to Winthuysen to take charge of the coal discoveries. The name Colvilletown was given to the little community after Andrew Colville, Hudson's Bay official. This name was retained until the 8th of March, 1853, when Joseph McKay adopted the name "Nanaimo" from the Indian name Snuneymuxw.

5:08

Early sketches show a row of miner's cabins extending from [a lane?] at the north of the Fort to the corner of Comox road. And by the way, we recall that the cabin at the extreme corner of Comox Road and Front Street was occupied by the late Jesse Sage and family. One of the very early coal mines were opening, surrounded by a fence - a barricade - as shown close to the beach near the present site of the Malaspina Hotel.

In late 1858, our little community had become quite modern and had its photograph taken.

Nanaimo's first trading post, or store, was owned and operated by the Hudson's Bay Company and was in charge of Chief Factor Adam Grant Horne, who came here in 1852. Mr. Horne was the first white man to cross the Island to Alberni. Mrs. A. G. Horne was a sister of Mark Bate, Nanaimo's first mayor...

[long pause]

...Nanaimo's first mayor, who was elected January the 20th, 1875. The first home of mayor and Mrs. Mark Bate is at the southwest corner of Bastion and Commercial Streets.

And Nanaimo's first privately owned store was owned and operated by Mr. Alex Mayer, and was known as the Red House. It was situated at the northeast corner of Bastion and Commercial Streets. T’was painted a real, honest to goodness wagon red, and their ads in early issues of Free Press advised the public to "Visit the Red House, and inspect their latest consignment of goods, direct from San Francisco."

I loved that old store, chiefly I think because of a wonderful sale of ribbons they once put on at 10 cents per yard, regardless of width. The next day I hurried downtown with my dime clutched tightly in my hand and made known my wish to buy a yard of ribbon. There were only three colours left, but I chose the very widest regardless of colour, well-knowing that the width of one’s hair ribbon had much to do with our prestige of our school mates.

The [dates?] of building of Entrance Island lighthouse is not at the present available, but the fact that it is build by Mr. George Frost Sr. may be of local interest. I believe some of his family are still with us.

In the very early days, a little log building at the corner of Commercial and Skinner Streets was used as a school house, and it is of interest to know that Nanaimo's very first religious service was held in that same little log building when Mr. Cornelius Bryant was authorized by Mr. Creedge, later Bishop Creedge, to read the service from the Anglican prayer book each Sunday.

Mr. Bryant was also Nanaimo's first postmaster. Mr. Creedge, in his capacity of superintendent of education, also instructed him to open a school for the pioneer's children. Mr. Bryant was a cousin of Mayor Mark Bate. The first government school was on Crace Street under the supervision of Mr. C. N. Young, who later became Nanaimo's first City Clerk. His salary as school teacher was $900 per year, paid by the government.

9:06
Mr. Young's wife and Young's son are buried in the old cemetery on Wallace Street.

In the 1870s, Mr. J. P. Planta became principal of the school. His duties included the control and instruction of some 70-80 boys of all ages. Mrs. Young, wife of Nanaimo's first City Clerk, was lady principal, and later with the increase in number of the scholars, Miss Katie McGregor, later Mrs. Glaholm, was employed as her assistant.

It was Mr. Planta who organized the first May Day celebration in 1876. The pupils paraded to the Green, often referred to as the Peninsula, where Miss Eliza Randle was crowned Queen of the May.

Nanaimo's first church was built in 1860, and records yield the information that the site upon which it was built, down on Front Street facing the harbour, was conveyed by trustee to the Wesleyan Methodist Mission by Alex G. Dallas on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company, hence the name Dallas Square in the near vicinity. The church was dedicated November the 27th, 1860.

Another building on Front Street of more than ordinary interest was the courthouse, situated a little north of the first church. It was constructed of stone, plastered on the outside with mortar made from lime from the vicinity of the biological station. This building was a veritable aristocrat amongst its humbler neighbours.

It was originally constructed as a residence for Captain Charles Stuart of the Hudson's Bay Company. It was taken over for use as the courthouse, and later served as our City Hall until 1886 when the Literary Institute was purchased by the City.

It was in 1863 that Governor Arthur Kennedy laid the cornerstone for the Mechanic's Literary Institute at the corner of Bastion and Skinner Streets. It was used as a community centre until taken over for use as City Hall, and was utilized as such up to the time that the local powers that be moved into the new City Hall on Wallace Street.

11:40
Nanaimo's first hospital is situated on the brink of the ravine on the west side of Chapel Street. It was not an imposing and it was by any means consisting of long, low buildings forming an L, thus enclosing two sides of the Square. Just here we will recall the fact that the two sections of the L were not connected, as a narrow opening had been left in order that tenants could reach the steep, rocky shale leading down into the ravine, where the water supply was dipped up from its spring and carried up that same rocky trail.

But just here we will remember that even though authentic, an old-timer's reminiscences can become exceedingly wearisome to the listener, so farewell for the present and thanks for listening. This is Mrs. Martha Kenny speaking, March the 14th, 1962.

Hiram Gough: This is Hiram Gough speaking. I have just assisted in the recording of my aunt's voice, that of Mrs. Martha Kenny, this 14th day of March 1962.

I was born on Skinner Street, Nanaimo, July the 3rd, 1884. The part of the house were I was born was pulled down recently, but I have one of the cleared fir plank as a souvenir. At 18 inches wide, it was presented to me by Mr. William Barraclough.
My father, Sam Gough, arrived with his parents, Edwin and Elizabeth Gough, aboard the barque *Princess Royal*, November 27th, 1854. My father was a small child who dropped his shoe while being lifted up the bank of what is now known as Pioneer Rock. My father visited this rock every anniversary of the Nanaimo *Princess Royal* passengers.

I attended with my father first at five years of age, and have kept the custom up since. Now, my children and my grandchildren meet at this historic place on the anniversary of the landing. It is a remarkable coincidence that the sun breaks through the clouds practically every anniversary at 11:00 a.m., the time of the arrival. It was said that the day of the arrival was cloudy, but the break-through of the sun occurred at that time.

I would like to remember a dear old friend, Joe Muir, who has been custodian of the Bastion for many years. My father was City Clerk and I can remember one day playing in the window of the stone building on Front Street, first used as a City Hall. I would be just over two years of age.

Some years later, while ringing the bell for morning service at the church on Front Street, I noticed many people skating on the harbour. Also saw a load of hay being hauled across the harbour drawn by two horses.

As a boy I lived in the old house on Skinner Street and remember many times going down to the inlet where Terminal Avenue now exists and catching many fish during the hours of high tide.

I now wish to extend my thanks to the members of the Nanaimo Branch of the B.C. Historical Society, of which I am a member. [unintelligible - perhaps indigenous phrase?]

Barracough: Adding a post script to the foregone recording, a brief history of Mrs. Martha A. Kenny and items concerning her family.

Mrs. Kenny was born on Monday the 6th of November, 1871, at St. William's, Norfolk County, Ontario, the daughter of Caleb and Harriet Woodward. They had three daughters and one son. The family moved to New Westminster from Chilliwack in 1873, then settled at Nanaimo in April 1876.

Mrs. Kenny died at Nanaimo the 12th of December, 1962, being 91 years of age.

Mrs. Kenny's eldest sister, Elizabeth, became the wife of Samuel Gough, who was City Clerk for over 45 years. Mr. Samuel Gough came with his parents from England to Victoria in the *Princess Royal* as a small boy, arriving at Nanaimo Monday, November 27th, 1854.

Mr. Hiram Gough died at Nanaimo June the 18th, 1971. He was aged 87 years.

17:03

[End of recording]