William Barraclough
The following recorded interview, made this 29th day of November 1963, between William Barraclough, and His Worship, Mr. Peter Maffeo, at his city hall office as living memory for Nanaimo Historical Society.

Good afternoon, Your Worship. May we first ask, where were you born?

Pete Maffeo
Mr. Barraclough, I was born in the city of Nanaimo, in the year 1897.

William Barraclough
And about your family?

Pete Maffeo
Well, there were six of us in the family. There were four girls and two boys. The two girls and the boy, my brother, died at a very tender age. The girls were twins, and my young brother died at the age of three. My sisters are: one in Turin, Italy; one in South Wellington, Mrs. Schivardi; and I are the only three that are left. My sister that’s in Italy is teaching English at the airport, and as I stated, we were all born in the city of Nanaimo.

William Barraclough
Where did you first go to school?

Pete Maffeo
The first school that I attended was the old North Ward School that is now torn down, and replaced by the Pauline Haarer School. I only went to school a short time because my mother had died at a very tender age. I was seven years old when she died. I then went to Ladysmith with my dad and my two sisters, and attended school in Ladysmith. And when I was nine years old, my dad died. So, I had two years of schooling in Ladysmith, and then finished my schooling at Extension, when I was taken over by my auntie and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Fontana, when we were left orphans.

William Barraclough
And where did you first work?

Pete Maffeo
Well, that is quite a long story. Those days, why, we just didn't take holidays. So, at the age of 11, I attended the mines with my uncle, during the holidays when I was 11 and
12. Then, when I was 13, I felt that we were a burden, with Mr. Fontana having a family of his own. And I then went to work in the mine steady as a miner at the age of 13.

William Barraclough
And where would this be?

Pete Maffeo
This would be at Extension. At the Extension coal mine.

William Barraclough
And what type of work did you follow after that?

Pete Maffeo
Well, Mr. Barraclough, you can understand that from that time to today, I've had many, many jobs. I had to go out and get my experience out in the world by doing various jobs, doing various work, meeting various people. I can just think back now and try to record off memory as to sequence of works that I attended. Went to Vancouver and worked in a sawmill. From the sawmill, I think I went to a drug store to see if I could learn the drug business. I felt that that wasn't my line. I went then to, and learnt the plumbing trade, which I did learn. In fact, the only trade that I really did learn was the plumbing trade. Then I went into bricklaying. Waited table in the old Vancouver Hotel. Went working on a donkey. Then, I went, travelled then through the States, doing various jobs, I even worked in the ore mines, in the States. Worked at plumbing. And at that time I was working in the ore mines in Butte, Montana, when war broke out.

William Barraclough
About your war services, Mr. Maffeo?

Pete Maffeo
In the States, when the war broke out, I felt that I would like to go overseas with the Canadian Forces, so I left Butte, Montana, where I was at the time. I came back to British Columbia. So I joined the 6th Field Canadian Engineers and went overseas with that unit.

William Barraclough
And how long were you overseas?

Pete Maffeo
About little over two years. And on my return, I decided to come back to Nanaimo. It was quite a decision to make, as I had travelled to many, many places that I'd liked, but I felt that Nanaimo was the place that I would like to settle, so I came back to Nanaimo.

William Barraclough
And then you were married? And a family?
Pete Maffeo
Yes, I married Vera Akenhead, and we had one daughter, Joyce. Joyce now lives in Toronto, married, and has two boys.

William Barraclough
Your part in activities and sports in Nanaimo is so well known, just give us a brief outline of some of them.

Pete Maffeo
Well, that could be a long tape within itself, and I'm very proud of my athletic and sporting connections, that I participated in athletics myself. I just found out what good it was for a youth. So I thought I would continue and carry on my experience in athletics and pass that knowledge on to other boys and girls, which I've done. Before I came Nanaimo, in fact, I participated as an athletic instructor in the army. And I carried on that work when I came back to Nanaimo, up to this date. I feel that I have given a lot of boys and girls an opportunity to get the experience that I had in athletics, and that could go on for a long, long period.

William Barraclough
So true, so true. For I have never seen an athletic event in Nanaimo without yourself being right up front. What clubs have you belonged to, Mr. Maffeo?

Pete Maffeo
I belong to the Gyro Club, I've been a member of the Gyro Club since 1922. I belong to Masonic Lodge, Doric No. 18. And I'm awfully proud to be a member of Post No. 3 Native Sons.

William Barraclough
I recall you being director of civil defence during the war.

Pete Maffeo
Yes, I took over the responsibility of civil defence director during the Second World War, and I feel that that was a task that certainly gave me a lot of experience and I feel that... [tape skips] ...did not serve in the forces during the Second World War, but I did serve in the defence at home.

William Barraclough
I remember the headquarters you had. Could you tell us where they were?

Pete Maffeo
We had the only civil defence headquarters underground in Canada. That was down on Machleary Street, and it was certainly a credit to the civil defence organization that I was a part of, and many, many others were. And we have a man in the office here now that played an important part in that civil defence organization. The man that I refer to, that's sitting in the office making this recording, is Alan Burdock.
Alan Burdock was one of my key captains. He was in charge of the most responsible portion of the city, at that time was, Section B. And I’m proud to think that a man like Alan Burdock is assisting now to make this historic recording, and being a part of a team with me and many, many others in the work of civil defence.

William Barraclough
And the decoration you’ll receive for that, Mr. Maffeo?

Pete Maffeo
Yes, I was honoured from his Majesty, the Order of the British Empire, known as the O.B.E.

William Barraclough
And you were also awarded another honour with the City of Nanaimo?

Peter Maffeo
Yes, I’m quite proud of that honour. The school children at that time put on a display in 1944, October the 4th, in the Civic Arena. Unknown to me, I was ushered in by Jeep, and that evening before a capacity crowd in the arena, I was made the Good Citizen of Nanaimo. That I certainly feel that the children at that time gave me probably one of the highest honours that I could hope to receive.

09:39

William Barraclough
We know, Mr. Maffeo, that you have headed so many of the campaigns for the benefit of Nanaimo and civil projects. Would you just run through a few of them, please?

Pete Maffeo
Yes, that will be a pleasure, and it’s not going to be too easy to refresh my memory. But I can think back when the campaign, chaired the campaign for the Franklyn Street gym. I can think of the Gyro playgrounds that I fathered and chaired for many, many years. I can think of the Civic Arena. The first school bylaw, there was three schools and the city hall that I campaigned. The second bylaw for schools was a $1,700,000 worth of schools. At that time, that was a lot of money.

I can think of the health centre that I was very, very proud of. I can think of the senior citizen housing that’s in use today. Then, of course, I can think of campaigns such as the War Savings Certificates, Red Cross drives, Red [Shield] drives, Empire Days. One of the things that I will wind up with in my campaigns is the concert series during the war, when I campaigned, bringing in such singers, such as Paul Robeson, Mona Paulee, and various artists of that type. That is something that was supposed to be out of my line, yet, I got a tremendous amount of enjoyment out of making that possible for those that enjoyed it.
William Barraclough
Tell me Mr. Mayor, how did you find time to do all these things, besides your business?

Pete Maffeo
Well, I do operate a factory on the property where I was born, as I mentioned before, it’s adjacent to where I live now, being in the manufacturing of ice cream and ice.

William Barraclough
Ha! And well I remember, when they constructed the playground on Machleary Street, how you came there in the hot sun with gallon after gallon of ice cream for the men [so] working and the children so interested watching it.

Pete Maffeo
That was all volunteer work, Mr. Barraclough. I was a part of it.

William Barraclough
Looking through the guest book in your office here, we have many notables. Would you kindly refer to some of them?

Pete Maffeo
Yes, in 1951, when the city hall was built, that first year, the lord mayor of London. And in 1951, that same year, Her Majesty at that time with Prince Philip, as Princess, signed the guestbook. In 1955, Princess Mary signed this guest book. In 1958, Princess Margaret, the year that she cut with a sword the largest cake in the world. In 1958, the lord mayor of London at that time, Sir Denis Truscott, signed the guest book. And in 1959, Her Majesty and Prince Philip, as Her Majesty, signed our guest book. We're tremendously proud of our guest book in the city hall, Mr. Barraclough, and Mr. Burdock.

William Barraclough
Mr. Alan Burdock assisted with this tape recording with Mr. Maffeo

13:18

[tape stops and restarts]

William Barraclough
Mr. Peter Maffeo, mayor of Nanaimo, accidentally fell during a curling game held at Courtenay, Sunday, the 27th of March 1966, causing severe head injuries. On Thursday night, December the 7th, 1967, at a dinner held at the Tally-Ho Travelodge, sponsored by 185 leading citizens, a special tribute was presented to Mr. Maffeo, for his outstanding public activities for the welfare of Nanaimo over the many years. Mr. Alan Emmott, reeve of Burnaby, presented the feature address, as recorded here.

Alan Emmott
You know gentlemen, this is an extremely important occasion, for you, and for me. This morning, I didn’t regard the call from Ron Biggs as an imposition at all. I think that any
other engagement would have had to have been pretty compelling for me not to have broken that engagement. Because I don’t consider this an imposition at all, I consider this a great honour.

When 200 people get together to recognize the contribution made over a long period of time, over a very wide variety of human endeavours, that is a testimonial that, you know, you just can’t fake, can you? That’s an important thing.

See, this man, this man has been a thoroughly good citizen, a thoroughly good citizen. Because what’s been important to him has been the welfare of his community. I’m sure that the number of hours that Pete has contributed in worry and in effort, in order to ensure that the direction that his city was taking would be a surer one, would be so great in number, that it would be beyond calculation.

I have never met a person yet who has said a derogatory word about Mayor Maffeo. That doesn’t happen about many people. Evenings like tonight – spontaneous – this doesn’t happen because somebody figures, “Well, we might as well do it for somebody.” I tell you, it isn’t happening that way. One can tell just by the response to each of the toasts, that you’re recognizing a person who has been a good citizen throughout his life; that he’s the same, according to Larry Giovando, as he was when they knew each other years ago as boys: a person who is interested in his fellow human beings.

I suppose a mayor, a reeve, an alderman, a councillor, an MLA, an MP, takes a great deal of guff. I know that this happens. And yet, there isn’t any experience, that anyone can have, and I know that Pete would substantiate, that it is quite so rewarding in the final analysis, as serving as a representative of one’s city, or one’s constituency, in one respect or another. To feel that I’m representing those people.

Now, there’s a lot said about politicians. The word “politician” tends to have rather an unfortunate connotation. And may I tell this story? You know, if there were a war declared, most of us, most citizens, would have no compunction about donning a uniform, and by so doing, perhaps suffer the loss of remuneration, family dislocation, loneliness, a good deal of emotional tension, injury, permanent maiming, and possibly even death.

After it’s all over, somebody says, “You know, have you ever thought of going into politics?”

So often the response is: “Wouldn’t touch it with a 40 foot pole, it’s dirty, you know.”

What they’re really saying, gentlemen, when they say that, is that the country’s worth dying for, but it isn’t worth living for. The democracy that we have results from many, many generations of conscious concern of many, many people, to ensure that the rights of the least of these, my brethren, might be recognized and upheld. And it is not a self-perpetuating institution. That’s why it’s incumbent upon you, and it’s incumbent upon all of us, to ensure that these democratic institutions remain vibrant. You’re going to do this
on Saturday, by ensuring that there is perhaps the largest turnout of voters in Nanaimo in its history; however they may make their choice.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, nothing has pleased me more in the 10 years that I have served as the reeve of the municipality of Burnaby than participating in this testimonial dinner to a person who has obviously made a most indelible mark in the history of Nanaimo.

19:11

tape stops and restarts

William Barraclough
Mr. Maffeo died June the 7th, 1968, aged 72 years. *Nanaimo Free Press* for Saturday, June the 8th, and Thursday, June 13th, 1968, report special feature articles, concerning the life of Mr. Maffeo. Funeral services for Mr. Maffeo were held at St. Paul’s Church, Friday, June the 14th, 1968 at 2 p.m. He was buried in Nanaimo Cemetery, range 13, plot 135N. Eulogies by many persons were given over CHUB Radio, expressing their admiration for Mr. Maffeo.

19:59

tape stops and restarts

music

unidentified male radio announcer
Pete, as he was affectionately known by all, was born in 1897, on the site where his ice cream plant stands today. He attended school in Nanaimo, Ladysmith, and Extension, and was orphaned at the age of 9.

unidentified male radio announcer
He married the former Vera Akenhead on December 15, 1923. They had one daughter, Joyce, now Mrs. Joyce Huff, of Toronto, Ontario.

unidentified male radio announcer
During World War I, Mr. Maffeo served with the 6th Field Canadian Engineers. He returned from overseas in July of 1919, and opened the Davenport Cafe, a spot which turned out to be the haven for sports-minded youth. He later expanded his business into the manufacturing of ice and ice cream.

unidentified male radio announcer
His philosophy of life was “teamwork”. Dawson Gordon of Nanaimo, the recently retired civic defence chief for the area, was a part of the local civil defence organization which was set up by Pete during the Second World War.
Dawson Gordon
My association with Pete Maffeo goes back over 20 years. Mostly with matters concerning the development of Nanaimo and the welfare of its people. I worked with him primarily on developing and maintaining a civil defence organization after the war period. Pete’s theme was always teamwork on matters vital to the community. He sponsored and encouraged many teams at great personal sacrifice, time, and money, for love of this community of Nanaimo and its people.

Men with Pete’s outlook on life, to give without thought of personal gain, are few and far between. This was the policy that gained support for his various projects. He will be sadly missed by all of his team members, and those he personally helped in many ways.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
It was for his civil defence efforts that Mr. Maffeo was awarded the O.B.E. – the Order of the British Empire.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
His teamwork theme stretched from civil defence into sincere public service and recreation. Former alderman, Bill McGregor, who is now chairman of the Civic Properties and Recreation Commission, voiced this tribute to Pete:

Bill McGregor
On behalf of the Civic Properties and Recreation Commission, I want to express my deepest sympathy to Vera Maffeo and her daughter, Joyce. At this time, I think, citizens of Nanaimo are going to miss one of the most outstanding men for recreation that we ever had. I myself have known Pete for 45 years. And he was always very encouraging, to me and others that have taken part in sport. So at this, ladies and gentlemen, I must say that we are going to miss a man that devoted his time, for everything, for the city of Nanaimo. Thank you.

22:50

[unidentified male radio announcer]
Mr. McGregor also saw Pete spearhead drives to put playgrounds in the city of Nanaimo.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
He became a charter member of the Nanaimo Gyro Club in 1922. And immediately became chairman of the club’s playground committee. Today, there stands many city playgrounds which were developed by the Gyros under the direction of their untiring member.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
Nanaimo’s Civic Arena was born in Depression years, and again, Pete Maffeo led the drive for the youth of the community. New schools, including the one for retarded children, also came under his leadership.
Nanaimo's new city hall replaced a ramshackle Skinner Street building due to his efforts. And he was instrumental in seeing the health centre and senior citizens’ housing development reach fruition.

Mr. Maffeo was an untiring worker, both outside and within city hall. Former alderman Haig Burns served under Pete on city council.

Haig Burns
It has left me with a great sadness to hear of the passing of Nanaimo’s Pete Maffeo. Pete was known not only in Nanaimo, but throughout B.C., as a man that could project to all who associated with him, his great enthusiasm for getting a job done. He was a man who gave his time, his energy, and his thoughts to the betterment and health of his community. He gave of himself unselfishly, and without question, many times to the detriment of his own health and business affairs.

Pete Maffeo lived to help others. He carried these attributes with him into the city council. And with his great ability to organize and create enthusiasm, he managed to get the city on a real progressive program. His office door was always open to all who wished to confer with him or seek his help. He was a tireless worker as mayor of Nanaimo. And spent hundreds of hours at his desk, beyond the call of his duty.

Former alderman John Cook said Pete was a self-sacrificing man:

By the death of Peter Maffeo, Nanaimo has lost a man who over the years has served his fellow man, his beloved city of Nanaimo, his province, and his Canada, to his fullest capacity. I have known Pete for over 50 years. And of many of his endless deeds of kindness, far beyond the knowledge of most in Nanaimo, can be attributed to his generous and kindly nature. As mayor of Nanaimo for 11 years, he applied all his energy and resourcefulness for the benefit of this city.

The next speaker is Mr. John Parker.

... [outstanding] quality was humility.

I worked with Mr. Maffeo on the council for nine years, and during this time I developed a great respect for many of his qualities. I think his most outstanding quality was probably humility. And the fact that he always gave credit to others for their share in the work. I think his interest in children was outstanding. He could never pass a group of children
without stopping to speak to them. To me, these are great qualities in a man, and we shall certainly miss him.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
Former alderman Bus MacDonald, now Nanaimo Water Commissioner, said Pete spent a lifetime of service to others without thought for himself.

Bus MacDonald
It was with deep regret that I heard of the passing on Friday of Pete Maffeo. While serving on a council, you become very good friends, and come to know the personalities and thoughts of your colleagues. Peter Maffeo was a friend to all, young and old, and knew no class distinction. He dedicated his life to the goodwill of others, and never worried about personal gains to himself. This was the life he desired, and he must have received great personal satisfaction from the efforts he put forth. We’ve all lost a good friend, and I sincerely hope his family will receive comfort from the fact that their husband and father has made a tremendous contribution to humanity during his lifetime.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
One of Pete’s last presentations was a sports awards last year, where he told the 1967 tennis team that the losers’ efforts give true value to any award. When Pete played, he observed his own philosophy.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
Tragedy first struck the Maffeo family when in March of 1966, during a challenge bonspiel in Courtenay, Pete slipped and fracturing his skull on the ice. Transferred to Nanaimo Hospital, his condition worsened until he was rushed to Victoria, where he underwent two brain operations. His lifelong friend, Dr. Larry Giovando, accompanied him in the ambulance, almost forcing Pete to live.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
Dr. Giovando said Pete was the best friend he ever had, a first-class person, the type of man who would always help others.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
Helping others knew no bounds for race, creed, or colour. The Harlem Globetrotters, perhaps the most significant example, but not the only one. The Globetrotters, in a battered Model A Ford, found refuge in the Maffeo household when prejudice denied them accommodation. This spring, the Globetrotters honoured their three decade friendship with a silver award, and once again, in his home, Pete made and served the spaghetti, their first common meal, many years ago.

[unidentified male radio announcer]
Pete recovered sufficiently to carry on in the mayor’s chair until last December, when he announced his retirement.
I was very much saddened to learn of the death of Pete Maffeo, a man for whom I deemed a great affection over the 11 years that I’d known him. And I have considered it to be a truly great honour to have been chosen to be the guest speaker at Pete Maffeo Night in Nanaimo late last fall. From the stories that I heard from many people who have been close to Pete Maffeo over a long period of time, I gained the distinct impression that this was a very beloved man, a man who liked people, and who in turn, was deeply liked by people. And I know that all the people in Nanaimo, and all the people who knew him, will certainly be saddened by his death.

Nanaimo mayor Frank Ney, as well as being Pete’s successor, was also his friend. His personal feelings echo the sentiments of all citizens:

This is a sad weekend for Nanaimo. The hearts of the people of our city are expressed by sorrow and anguish in the passing of Peter Maffeo. He dedicated his life to community service for Nanaimo. Young and old alike, he loved our city, and will be recorded in history as one of Nanaimo’s great citizens. Service to humanity is the greatest work in life. In the catalogue of human endeavours, Peter Maffeo’s many contributions to our community have won a quality of respect and esteem that cannot be excelled. We are going to miss Pete.

And missed he will be. His ten-gallon Stetson has been laid aside, it won’t bob in the crowds anymore. It won’t stoop to children as they play, and its band will not collect the sweat of public endeavour, but it will be remembered on the plaque of the Maffeo Auditorium, and its brim will cast a shadow over Nanaimo for years to come.

...to rest this afternoon. St. Paul’s Anglican Church was filled to capacity while loudspeakers carried the service to many others outside. Canon Harry Greenhaigh described Mr. Maffeo as “a tower of strength to the community”. “No other man has made such an impact on the community,” Mr. Greenhaigh said. To those who did not know him are the poorer for it. He described Mr. Maffeo as, “A good citizen, a good Canadian, and a good and fine man”.

Frank Ney
Persons from all walks of life were in attendance. Provincial secretary Lawrie Wallace represented the provincial government. Members of the Nanaimo Fire Department, representing 156 years of service to the city, acted as pallbearers. Some 40 students from Nanaimo district schools lined the cemetery roadway, and four scarlet coated RCMP officers formed an honour guard.

31:50

[recording ends]