William Barraclough
Nanaimo Historical Society. Mrs. Emily Kneen as president. An address by Mayor Frank Ney. This tape recording was made at Nanaimo Historical Society meeting, Tuesday, February the 20th, 1973. Previous to Mr. Ney's address, two recordings were played as living memory of their observations during their residence at Nanaimo. First, by Mrs. Martha A. Kenny, who arrived at Nanaimo April 1876. Her voice was recorded March the 14th, 1962. And she died at Nanaimo the same year, December 21st, 1962, aged 91. Secondly, by Mr. Joseph Kneen, who arrived at Nanaimo August 1907. His voice recorded during 1967. And he died at Nanaimo the same year, November the 5th, 1967, aged 84.

His Worship, Frank Ney, mayor of Nanaimo, entered the hall with a fanfare of recorded trumpets. Mr. Ney presented his forecast on the future of Nanaimo, after consulting his crystal ball.

01:24
[trumpets]

[unidentified woman]
And now, the Nanaimo Historical Society makes welcome, His Worship, Mayor Frank Ney, Knight of the Bathtub, Holder of the Golden Plunger, and Member of the Order of the Silver Plug. He will look into his crystal ball and tell us what he sees in Nanaimo's future.

Frank Ney
Mrs. Norcross and Mrs. Kneen, and ladies and gentlemen of the Nanaimo Historical Society, this evening, I bring you greetings from Nanaimo, je wel of the west, sun porch of Canada, and the bathtub capital of the world. But actually, this is going to be a little off-key talk for me this evening, because coming down here and talking to you, when I heard Mr. Kneen talk this evening, and Mrs. Kenny, I remember Mrs. Kenny used to write letters to the editor in the old days. A woman with a very keen mind. And I talked to Phil Piper over there about Beban Park, and you heard what Joe did for us in the old days, and you know, I guess that's really what history's all about. It gives us a chance to recognize the people that made our country and our province and our city. And, of course, from history we learn lessons for the future as well. But, it was the vision of people that we had in the past that has given us so many fine things in our city today. And, I think it's just a wonderful thing that you're keeping track of history in Nanaimo. Because, it's not just kept track of in the big national books.

I know, just as a matter of interest, this year at our inaugural banquet, I wanted to make it kind of a motif in preparation for our big 100th birthday next year. Our centennial is coming up in 1974, and incidentally, I hope your historical society will take a leading part in it. Because that is when the knowledge you have is going to be such great benefit to so many organizations in our city.

But, Howard pulled out the first minutes of the first meeting, where Mark Bate attended. And I know some of you folks knew Mark Bate. And it was all written in lovely handwriting.

And I said to Howard, "Who wrote that?"
He said, "It wasn't Mark Bate." And so, we looked, and he said, "A man called Young was the city clerk then."

I said, "Who was he?"

He said, "I don't know."

Well, I said, "Sure, you don't mean to tell me you don't know who the first city clerk was?"

He said, "We don't have any information on that at all."

And then there tonight, Mrs. Kenny told us who he was, and now I know why it was in such good handwriting, because he was a school teacher. And, it's in beautiful script, and if I'd of known that you were going to talk about him tonight, I would have brought down the copy of the first meeting minutes. So I thought I would just say that.

But I'm not going to talk about history to you folks tonight, because you're the experts. And I just love listening to it. And I just hope that more and more of this will be recorded. And Bill, I must compliment you. I remember in the old days, you used to run off and tape different people. I think you got Billy Lewis too. And, all of this is going to be very valuable to us in the time to come.

And I want to say this too, that if you have any problems in your society where you feel the city should help, come and see them. Because if there's any organization in the city that merits, cause you're not a money making organization, you're just dedicated to history. And I think this is something that is kind of a motherhood thing, the city can never afford to ignore your pleas, within reason.

But you want me to talk about the future tonight. And I know, when I first came to Nanaimo, I think it was seven or eight thousand people then, and it's certainly grown along a lot during those years. I think it's about 40,000 people tonight. And by, in seven years, it will be close to 60,000 people. And before the end of the century, it will be up around 100,000 people. It will be becoming a big city.

05:47

One thing that kind of, you may not like that, but unless you're going to lock all the bedrooms of Canada, we can't keep things down very easily. Unless you're going to put a gate across our harbour. And maybe a lot of people'd like to do that too, I know that. But I want to say this too, one of the reasons we're here is because this was a port city from its earliest conception. Coal was here of course, but finally this became a city rather than Ladysmith because we have the best port and all the boats were coming in here. And I think this is something. Because you asked me to gaze into my crystal ball tonight, and the only thing I can see in my crystal ball that right now, at this moment, if you ever at the crossroads we are now, because we're fighting now about port development, where the BC Ferries are to go. And I do feel this, I was thinking this as I came down tonight, are we going continue to be a terminus city? Because if we're not, then our whole character could change quite a bit in the years to come.

But, you see, if the BC Ferries does go to Gabriola, or if they protested and it goes further south, all of a sudden another area could become the terminus area. And that's why I think every citizen should be concerned whether or not they phase the BC Ferries completely out of Nanaimo. And, I'm hoping that if they do go to Gabriola, it'll simply be a third crossing.
I'm speaking tomorrow night on the ferries, at an open forum. And at that particular time, you know, when they're going to spend 40 million dollars, that's a lot of money. And it occurred to me, today, that you could probably take that land right down by the Assembly wharf where they are having another fight on whether that should be a harbour or not, or moved out. And the city council's position has been as long as it's not going to damage the environment we feel we that we should go ahead there. Because we're worried about our tax base, ever rising taxes, jobs for our people, and the fact they've got many millions of dollars already tied up there. Mind you, if it's going to hurt the environment, we're quite content to see it go ahead.

But, you know, you could take that land, and not quite as far as the original plan, and go ahead and buy the Indian reserve. Or lease it from them. You know, there's only about 50 homes on the Indian reserve. You could give every Indian family a $40,000 home, as well as another $40,000 a piece, and you're talking about less than four million dollars. Well, to own the Indian reserve. And when you're talking about 40 million, what's four million?

And, once you had that, then you could move the whole land mass back, you could still have your deep sea harbour, and the BC Ferries could go from there. And, see, they only have 15 acres down at the Brechin terminal now. You could double up and have your 30 acres right down there, and then this would forever be the terminus city. Where you could have your buses come in, and people wouldn't have to take the bus to the ferry, because the bus would be right at the ferry. Your railway would be here, your hovercraft could come in there, your boats would come in there, you could even have a [stowed?] port one day.

Now, listen, all I'm saying is, these are all things that should be studied before we go ahead. Maybe the Gabriola Island thing is the best. Maybe they'll go south of Gabriola. Or, whatever they do, I'll just say that it's so important to the future Nanaimo, that every idea should be given very serious consideration, because we are at the crossroads today. Now, I say this, that the terminus that we have here is very important as to the future character and the economy of our city.

09:30

Now, we're going to continue to have inflation, I hate to tell you this, but the taxes of Nanaimo are going to double in the next ten years. But they're going to double in nearly every other city in Canada. Because there's nothing that you can do about it. And within the next ten years, your quart of milk will probably cost you 52 cents, your whiskey is going to cost you $11 or $12 a bottle. And all across the board, probably the budget of the city will go from seven million up to 15 million. And it will be the people on the fixed income that will be continued to be hurt. We're having more inflation now than we've ever had before. And this is, if you want to go a few more years on beyond, you just have to escalate over and over again. Because we have a continual pattern of inflation. Not just in Canada, which has led the western world in the inflation fighting league until the past year, when the United States was ahead of us. If you just think about it, many of the countries in South America last year had 20-25% inflation. In fact, Chile had 164% inflation! And they're having more inflation in Japan and Germany than we are too. So, we're just going to continue to have more inflation. The national debt keeps going up, they keep printing more paper, and the people on fixed income get hurt more and more. So, that's one thing I definitely see, more and more inflation.

The other thing is that we talk about dress, and Mrs. McGirr and the ladies, and Mr. Whalley with his top hat, you know. I got an idea that in ten years, they say there's nothing new under the sun. It wouldn't surprise me if in ten years, the dress is even more old fashioned than it is today. Cause we just think back ten years ago, the way these girls are going around today, you would think they
are ready for the, to send over across the pond there. But that's why they're dressing. They're dressing now like they did 100 years ago, and the men are dressing the same way, and the beards are coming back. And everything is coming back, the same way. They're making tuxedos now, with the old fashioned way, the way they used to wear in the old days. And the bowler hat certainly hasn't gone out. I was in London last year, and... So, I think that's something you might see more and more. And of course, the old fashioned dresses, like our ladies are wearing that are certainly in style now. And the very youngest of girls are wearing them. And I think you may see more accent on the... That's just a little guess I have.

Talking about the, I've told you about the population, probably up to 100,000 by the end of the century. But, the thing I would wonder tonight, is whether Nanaimo will become a bedroom city, or a tourist city, or a city of industry and commercial. But, I say this, the one thing that we should watch in the next few years because the thing that's bringing people to Vancouver Island is the beautiful trees and the forest and the lakes and the ocean. And we're going to have to spend special attention to our environment. But always remember this, that 95% of the Island is under perpetual forest lease. So, we're very lucky in that respect when you talk about greenbelts. But, a lot of people unfortunately look on industry as a nasty word. I say “unfortunately” because young people are coming up, they need jobs, a lot of our older people need jobs, and if you don't have productivity, you're not going to have a standard of living that you're going to like. So we still have to produce.

And I believe that industry and environment can live in harmony. And that we shouldn't run away from industry, at the same time face up to our responsibilities as far as the environment's concerned. And, if you ask me for my guess tonight, I would say that's what will evolve in the end. Because the dedicated people who are completely sold on the environment, and I have the greatest respect in the world for them, in the end, I think they will realize that we also have to have jobs and work for our people.

And we are a resource orientated island, and the world is going to need our lumber more and more in the years to come, because the population of the world is increasing so much. And, when you consider, I think it's more than half of the world goes to bed starving every night, and that we're certainly living in the upper crust as far as the standard of living is concerned in the world. The value of those natural resources will become more and more apparent as the years go on. And Nanaimo, in that particular position, stands in a very enviable spot, because we all have good climate, we're not too big, we don't have too many people, and we have some pollution, but we're never going to have the pollution of the extremely crowded areas of other countries. And England is not the most crowded country in the world, and yet it has a population, oh, it would be about 60 times more than Vancouver Island. Even more than that, because we have 350,000 people, they have about 50 million. So it's way, way more than that. And, even they aren't overcrowded compared with Holland.

So, you can see that we've got a lot going for us. We have a good, we have an economy that's guaranteed as long as we're going to be alive, or our children, children, children, right down the line. We have, I was down in San Francisco, when I went skiing last month, and they're now, the problem with water down there, they're paying 45 cents a gallon for it in the stores. And just working girls, who work in stores, when they go home at night, they stop in and get a gallon of water, in throw away bottles.

And when I was in Spain a couple years ago, I noticed that the water costs more than the wine did. And, of course, we just take the water out of our tap and think nothing of it, but when you're travelling, there are very few countries in the world where you can turn the tap on and drink it. In
Niagara Falls they say, the water in those taps, it's been through nine kidneys before it comes out of the taps, and that's just in our own country. So, we have that going for us. We get the whiff of the pulp mill once in a while, but, in comparatively speaking, we have pretty dog gone good air.

15:40

Now, remember one thing, the population of British Columbia is going to double in the next ten or 15 years, and the number of automobiles they figure will double in the next 12. I think there's just over a million automobiles in B.C. You're going to have two million in the next 10 years. And presumably, you're going to have double the number of cars on the Island the same time. And these are all the sort of things that are going to hurt our environment.

But, you ask me one more little thing I'd add? And, all the scientists now say today that the gas and fuel oils are running out. So, there again, the day may come where we're riding on horseback up and down the highway again. But, I can certainly see that though we're probably reaching the peak as far automobile traffic goes, the day is not far, when the country, and the nations of the world will be compelled to use mass transit, and get away with the terrible waste of one person travelling in one car. Because, as I said, the fuels are running out, and the men that know say that it's just around the corner when we're going to have to have a new style of transportation.

All in all though, I think that Nanaimo's a very great city. And one thing you do learn out of history, and a historical society, is that it's the people that make the city. Now, I'm not going to talk what makes the world, but I guess it's the same thing all around, in every city of the world.

But you heard tonight quite a few little things that had happened, and the people that made it happen. And that's just a small part of our history. There's all the other wonderful people, and it's just too bad that we can't have a great big plaque, and put down all the wonderful things that all the people have ever done to bring Nanaimo to what it is today.

And I have the greatest respect in the world for you, because you have that interest, and the appreciation, to recognize those people of the past. And, my thought, that should always be a great priority in the running of this city. Because I've learned that as mayor, in the short time I've been there. You know what, when I got in there, I thought I was interested in roads, and sidewalks, and all the things, I thought, and getting promenades going. But I don't think I was really aware of all the hard work and the ingenuity, and the poverty, and the sweat, and the toil that had gone ahead to bring the town to where, to give us a chance to push ahead a little more.

And, you know, it's easy when you've got prosperity and lots of money around to make things work. But when you think back to the old pioneers, and what they had to work with, and the mud trails, and the typhoid wells, and the filth, and disease, and everything else, and that they, down in the mines there, it took a lot of guts to come through the way they did. And that's all part of our history.

So, that's what I see tonight.

[applause]

[unidentified woman]
Mayor Ney, I'd like to thank you on behalf of all the members of the historical society. It's very kind of you to come here this evening and tell us what you think the future's going to be like. And,
I guess what we can all hope is that in the future, there's a chief executive in this city who will still have time to come out and visit with the citizens at night. Thank you.

[applause]

18:51

Frank Ney

The one message I want to get across tonight is that next year is our 100th birthday. And, we're really going to have to depend on you 100%, and I know you'll come through.

19:05

[tape stops and restarts]

William Barraclough

This is a further recording the voice of His Worship, Mayor Frank Ney of Nanaimo, as living memory for Nanaimo Historical Society. Made Tuesday, May the 8th, 1973. The interview is being conducted at the mayor's office, City Hall.

Mr. Ney, will you kindly relate some items concerning important events in your life?

Frank Ney

Well, Mr. Barraclough, I would like today to say how much we on the city council appreciate your very magnificent efforts in recording for posterity, so many of the interesting facets of our community life, in the past, and in the present. And I'm quite confident, in years to come, your recordings are going to be most appreciated by future generations in our city.

First, you said this is May the 8th, and our Empire Days celebrations are just a week or so away now, and Nanaimo still has the honour of holding the longest consecutively celebrated Empire Days celebrations in Canada. And I do think, here today in Nanaimo, we still have a very strong loyalty and affection for the British Commonwealth. And I frankly hope that it always stays that way. I guess I could never be any way else. I was born in London originally, like so many of the people in this community. And, that was during the last war, when my father went over in the armed forces, that's the 1914-1918 war, I should say.

And I was brought up, educated in Winnipeg, and then, during the Depression, in 1936, I went back to Britain, to take a short service commission in the RAF. Unfortunately, I was cashiered for low flying over South Hampton harbour. And subsequently started playing professional hockey in Europe. And when the war broke out, I got out of Poland just a few days before the war. And came back, and once again joined the RAF, and finished the war in, that's the 1939-1946 war, the last war.

And having done that, came back to Canada after the war and went into the real estate and insurance business here in Nanaimo. And, of course, at that time, the coal mines were just closing down. People were talking about grass growing in the streets of Nanaimo. We'd had 20 years of government where people were holding the line, there'd been very few civic improvements because the people just didn't have the money. You had a depression, and very few jobs, and it was tough going for everyone.
However, the forest industry started to come into its own, because of the tremendous appetite the people in this growing world have for lumber. And now, of course, today, Nanaimo has the 13th highest wages of all the cities in Canada. And a growth rate well over twice the provincial average, and almost four times the national average. In fact, Nanaimo's quadrupled its population since 1946.

And, I remember even as long ago as 1949, I got stuck in my car driving down to Departure Bay on that old mud road. And today, here, in 1973, Nanaimo has never had better educational facilities, better recreational facilities, better medical facilities, and so many other things that people only have in large cities normally. Today, we have one of the most beautiful cities in Canada, with coloured sidewalks accenting the waterfront personality of our harbour. There's no sewage in our inner harbour, we have a clean harbour, sandy swimming beaches, and we're not only one of the great industrial centres of British Columbia, we're rapidly becoming a retailing, a major retailing centre, a financial centre, and a place where tourists like to linger.

I've enjoyed my many years in Nanaimo. I married a Miss Floyer from Victoria, and we have 11 children.

William Barraclough

11 children?

Frank Ney

11 children, though my youngest boy is adopted and a very fine boy he is, in fact, he is the only one that looks like me. A young, Indian boy from the Yukon. And Nanaimo's been good to me, and I've enjoyed all the years that I've had here.

We have a lot going for us in Canada, because we have political stability, and we have economic stability, and we have the great heritage given to us by our pioneer people. And today, that the proudness that we have from their great efforts carries on, and I'm quite sure it will, to future generations.

William Barraclough

Mr. Mayor, what do you do in your spare time? With 11 children...and mayor of the city as well?

Frank Ney

Well, I do a lot of figure skating. And I do comedy acts on figure skates. I ski all winter, and I love boating, and swimming. And I keep very active with my children, yachting, I keep very active with my children on the waterfront in the summer. And high in the mountains on the ski slopes in the wintertime. And of course, I do a lot of travelling. I just came back from Australia, where I started their bathtub race this past year. All expenses paid, first class too, very nice, courtesy of Canadian Pacific Airlines.

And, I travel around the world pretty extensively. As a matter of fact, I'm going back to Eastern Canada and Iceland shortly. I want to see where the volcanoes just went off in Iceland. I want to go back and see how things are back there, and then come back through Greenland and Baffin Island, back through Alaska.

Canada is just on the verge of its greatest prosperity and growth it's ever had. Because the world population, which is four billion people now, will probably be seven billion in the next 35 years, and the natural resources of this country are going to continue to make this one of the greatest and richest countries in all the world.
William Barraclough
Mr. Ney, you haven't mentioned in your talk here about being elected as mayor of Nanaimo, and how many times? And also elected as a member of the British Columbia legislature.

Frank Ney
Well, Mr. Barraclough, I was first elected as mayor of Nanaimo in 1967. That was the year that I was centennial chairman. The late Mayor Pete Maffeo put me on the centennial committee when we were celebrating our 100th birthday in Canada. And subsequent to that, I've been elected on two more occasions. And I have now served as mayor of Nanaimo for six years. And during that period, at the end of my first term, just moving into the second term, I was also elected to the Legislative Assembly in Victoria. And, for three years I was mayor and MLA as well. And I found this, being a member of the government, it helped me in my civic duties. I had closer communication and cooperation from the provincial government. A very interesting experience. And then the New Democratic Party swung the polls right over, a switch over during the last election in 1972. And I was defeated for the legislature, but I’m still mayor of the City of Nanaimo. Amalgamation of the outside areas is now in the wind, and at the end of this year, we could have elections for a much greater area than we do at this moment.

The town is changing very rapidly, the attitudes, the complexion of our city. And these are very, very interesting years we’re living in at this particular moment. Before I was in the political sphere, I was also chairman of the Empire Day committee for many years and chairman of the Salvation Army red shield drive.

William Barraclough
Thank you, Mr. Ney for this interview. We appreciate the time you have taken in giving it, and this record will be filed away in our archives. Thank you again, Mr. Ney.

[tape recording ends]