William Barraclough: We are recording the voice of Mr. Joseph E. L. Muir of Nanaimo, this 15th day of May, 1963, as living memory for Nanaimo Historical Society. Being interviewed by William Barraclough within the walls of the old Hudson's Bay Company Bastion. Mr. Muir is popularly known as the keeper of the Bastion. Introducing Mr. Muir.

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

Joseph Muir: 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 families, to Vancouver Island to open coal mines. They left Scotland in 1848 on the barque Harpooner, and arrived in Victoria on June the 1st, 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 with the Hudson's Bay Company 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 take up - so he had to Sooke, 22 miles away, and he took up 1,000 acres. In the meantime, Captain Grant went down to the '49 gold strike in California, but he returned back disgusted, so he sold his 1,000 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: And that was Governor Blanshard. See, Vancouver Island was the first Crown colony west of the Great Lakes, and Governor Blanshard 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 six Muirs signed it.

WB: And the first meeting?

JM: The first meeting was held in 1856.
WB: For Vancouver's...?

JM: At Victoria, BC. And then Vancouver Island had a legislative assembly.

WB: Mr. Muir, when the Muir 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 the 1st, the first thing they done was go direct to Fort Rupert to open coal mine. They opened the Muir shaft there in 1849, but the coal did not prove out so good, but on the- when their time was up they returned to Victoria, and in the meantime bought out Captain Grant's 1,000 acres at Sooke.

3:53

WB: About, Coal Tyee, Joe?

JM: An Indian named Coal Tyee went to Victoria to have his gun repaired. While watching the blacksmith burning coal, he said he knew where there's lots of black rock. So the Hudson Bay went to Nanaimo to investigate, and they found coal there. So they send 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: Yes, and the seam of coal was named Douglas, after Governor Douglas. And at the Douglas mine, my father was employed by contract to mine out the coal for the Company, and he hired two 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 Hudson's Bay Company changed their plan of importing miners. Joe?

JM: Yes, Governor Douglas changed his policy. Instead of hiring single men from Scotland and Orkney Islands, he decided to hire engaged married men to colonise the country. So he brought out 21 married men, their wives, and 42 children on the barque Princess Royal. Princess Royal left England on a six months voyage and landed in Esquimalt, then the passengers were transferred to the [steamer] Beaver and the [brig] Recovery, and they landed in Nanaimo on the 27th of November, 1854. 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 squared timbers, and the builders were two French-Canadians by the name of [Leon] Labine and [Jean Baptiste] Fortier. The building consists of three storeys and a basement. The top storey is twice the size of the bottom storey. It was also built by the Hudson's Bay Company to protect the white people against the Indians, and also to protect these Indians against the northern Indians.

WB: And that would be the...?

JM: Haidas.

WB: Haidas

JM: And the northern Indians.

WB: And the northern Indians. Have you- Can you remember seeing many of these northern Indians in the Nanaimo Harbour?

JM: Well, not so many as [unintelligible], but I heard my mother say, though, that they came down in canoes - 50 of those big canoes - and they would howl out, and then bay all night.

WB: Joe, the Bastion has been moved from its original site...

JM: Yes. When John Hilbert became mayor the city borrowed up $50,000 to fix- to repair the streets in Nanaimo, and of course among the streets was- Bastion Street had a lot of rock there, so they had to move that 'cause you couldn't get by it. So they decided to pull the Bastion down. Only for 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 moving the Bastion, it was moved and moved to the opposite corner where it stands now, about 25 feet away. And later, Chief Stewart used the Bastion for lock-up.

8:16

WB: You have many valuable items in the Bastion, museum pieces, but I understand that the most valuable of all is the Hepburn stone. Will you tell us about that?

JM: The Hepburn stone was located on Hepburn's place at Nanaimo River, and while digging a well 22 feet deep they discovered a 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 a [petroglyph?]

WB: Some time later, the Native Sons acquired the Bastion as meeting [recording cuts off]

JM: Yes, in 1900, the Native Sons post was formed. Post #3, Native Sons of British Columbia. In the meantime, they'd stopped the Bastion for a lock-up, so we purchased the Bastion in 1906, and now it's a meeting place for Native Sons and the museum.

WB: While I was in the Bastion today, Joe, you showed me a very famous picture.

JM: The picture of the fort in 1882, with all the guns projected out of the portholes. She was a dangerous place for the natives those days. [Barraclough chuckles]

WB: In the summertime, now, you seem to have a lot of visitors.

JM: Oh yes, a lot of visitors. And I'm the most particular one, 'cause it was taken photos, I had my photo taken a dozen times a day in the summertime, so I'm photographed all over the world today.

10:03

WB: When we held the hundred-year celebration of the landing of the passengers of 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 of the Hudson's Bay in those days was very, very rare.

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

JM: The first houses that were built in Nanaimo by the Muirs was built of logs, and the roofs were made of bark, and they were situated where the Bastion- 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 British Columbia. I will give you a few statistics of it: the length was 155 feet, beam was 34 feet, built of Douglas fir, and registered as 450 tonnes. It was capable of carrying 800 tonnes of coal or lumber from Nanaimo. It was launched in October 31st, 1882, at 6
PM. Now, Joe, I understand you were aboard that-the barque *Nanaimo* the day it was launched?

JM: Yes, I was aboard with other boys; on board two or three or four times, but we were off her when she launched, and I'm sorry I didn't stay aboard.

WB: Who built the barque, Joe?

JM: The barque was built by Mr. Carpenter - he owned the Nanaimo Mill at the time - and she was built right at the mouth of the Mill Stone River. Captain [Charles] Dodd was the second officer aboard the famous *Beaver*; the first steamboat around Cape Horn, and landed in Fort Vancouver in 1835.

WB: I noticed you have a very fine painting, in the Bastion, of this barque *Nanaimo*.

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

WB: Where did you first attend school in Nanaimo, Joe?

JM: On Crace Street. And the teacher was Miss [McDougall?]. Afterwards, Mrs. [Haslam?].

WB: Part of the building is still standing...

JM: Oh, it's all there! They only built a little more onto it.

WB: You were saying the town site was surveyed out before the City of Nanaimo.

JM: Yes, Newcastle townsite was a townsite before this in Nanaimo. I myself remember when the townsite was occupied by the [Yukotole?] [Saysetsen? Clotsun? Snuneymuxw?] Indians.

13:20
WB: Joe, a very historic building - the Franklyn House.

JM: Yes, I remember the Franklyn House. It was built where the City Hall now stands. Well in fact, they owned all that property up there, and it extended down to the waterfront - it was waterfront property.

WB: And the House was...?

JM: The House was built of red brick from England, and...

WB: Redwood?
JM: Redwood, from California.

WB: Mr. Muir, what fraternal orders have you belonged to?

JM: [My brother and I?] belonged to the Masonic Order, which I joined in 1900. And Billy Lewis, who will celebrate his 100 years next July, was the Master Lodge when I joined.

WB: And you've been a member ever since?

JM: I've been a regular member ever since.

WB: And then...

JM: And besides that I'm a [unintelligible] Order of Foresters, to which I've belonged for the last 64, and at present I'm in the Chair.

WB: In 1900, when the Native Sons were formed here you were elected Chief Factor, and again?

JM: Yes, I was really the organizer at Post #3 in Nanaimo, and I was elected Chief Factor at the beginning, in 1900, and now I'm Chief Factor again in 1962.

WB: In 1962. Now Joe, one of the most amazing things you've told me about is working over the famous Chilkoot Pass, packing supplies on your back to the summit. Now, can you tell us about that?

JM: I hiked down the Chilkoot Pass in 1898, when I was young and strong...

WB: And enjoyed every minute of it?

JM: And enjoyed every minutes I was on the trail.

WB: And what was the weight of the pack?

JM: Generally 100 pounds.

WB: And that would be...

JM: Two sacks of flour.

WB: Two sacks of flour. And how many trips a day would you make?
JM: Well, sometimes a half a dozen if you got the packs.

WB: Now, you were saying about the- way up, chopping steps out in the ice.

JM: Well, you see the way- travelling up the Chilkoot Pass is straight up and down. And you- there was always two men employed to cut steps in there so we could walk up. And one day, they'd be working on the side not used and you'd use the side the next day.

WB: Well, who paid these fellows chopping the steps?

JM: All those that use the trail.

WB: How many would there be?

JM: Oh, 800 in a day.

WB: And how much would they pay them?

JM: Well, you'd give 'em at least 10 cents you'd give 'em.

WB: 10 cents each a day.

JM: Yeah.

WB: That would be quite a revenue for them.

JM: Yeah.

WB: Now, tell us about the bad slide where so many lives were lost.

JM: Oh that was- You see in the spring time- come spring time 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 you in there when it got down to the bottom, and there were a number of men - 60 or 70 - working on a tramway, and they were coming down. They all had a hold of a rope so they wouldn't lose one another, but the snow slide caught 'em and they were all buried there.

WB: How many were there?

JM: About 60-70.

WB: 60 or 70 men.
JM: Yeah.

WB: And you saw the slide?

JM: Yes, I saw the slide.

WB: About the signs.

JM: Oh, the signs came from all places. Undertakers [unintelligible]

WB: Now, another story about is the Dead Horse Gulch. Have you a story on that?

JM: Well they- You see when a horse- They worked 'em as hard as they could. When he dropped they just let 'em lay there, they didn't move 'em. And you walked on- Going through Sheep's Camp or lower, you walked on dead horses. In the middle of the streets.

WB: How many? Any idea how many horses?

JM: Lots of horses. They packed them all they could, you know, and they dropped there. There was probably not enough to eat, too.

WB: Mr. Muir, do you remember seeing Robert Dunsmuir?

17:48

JM: Yes, I met- I see Mr. Dunsmuir lots of times. He used to drive a pony and a goat cart, and I lived just above them on Albert Street. And on Dunsmuir Street, that's where he kept his horses and stable.

WB: And the house now is....

JM: The house now is moved up to Selby Street. I think it's still there, but it's all boarded up I think now.

WB: Any other Dunsmuiirs?

JM: Well, Alec [Alexander] Dunsmuir was the first white boy born in Nanaimo!

WB: Whereabouts?

JM: He was born on [Bachelor?] 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 told me that house in Departure Bay was built for when she were to be born in.

WB: Yes, yesterday I saw this house and there's not very much left of it standing. How about sailing ships in the early days in Nanaimo?

18:50
JM: Well in the early days in Nanaimo there were lots of sailing ships 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.

WB: Yes. And the sandstone?

JM: The sandstone they took away was used to built the mint in San Francisco.

WB: And the ships returning...

JM: Brought with them ballast, and from foreign companies they brought ballast, and amongst the ballast would be shell, and [lozam?], and pitch 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 pitch and all that stuff, and we'd get a good tin of coal out of the can full of [lozam?]- might get two bits for it if we sold it.

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

JM: Newcastle Island!

WB: Newcastle Island. Up on sailing ships returning from California to Nanaimo.

JM: Well, the ships from San Francisco returned with rock ballast. 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 you can walk on...

WB: Telegraph Hill?

JM: ...On Telegraph Hill in Nanaimo, so you've got [Los Alles?] beach for its distance.

WB: Oh, Joe, you didn't tell me who you married.

JM: Well I was married in 1901 to Agnes Patterson, who comes from Cranberry District. She lived there all her life from 1880. Farmed out there, her father did. Where they- she was- lived where the airport is now.
WB: That was their farm?

JM: Their farm, yeah.

WB: Joe, let us refer back to the Chilkoot Pass. Just how you came down, and the men walking up.

JM: When packing up the Chilkoot Pass, you packed up on steps, and when you put your foot out of the step, a man behind you put his foot in, and that was carried on all day until you reached the top, when you cached your pack. Then on returning, you slid down the Peterson [Stray?], which is straight up and down, and you sat down and slid down to the bottom.

WB: Mr. Muir, you remember these 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 [fins?] from the Oscar, and recently we received the anchor, which was brought up through a tow line of one of these tug boats when they were towing [a scull?].

WB: Joe, can you remember any very famous people that have visited you in the Bastion?

JM: Yes, a few, but I can't remember at present, but there's one or two I can remember is General [George] Pearkes, Victoria Cross, now Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia.

WB: And, you were telling me here about the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from London visiting you here in October 22nd, 1961. W. F. [i.e. W. J.] Keswick, Esquire, and he was accompanied by [Leo Faulkner?, MBE], a director of the Company. Would you enlarge on that Joe?

JM: Yes, they were here, and of course they came in and never said nothing to me and I tried to tell them about the Hudson Bay, and the big guns, and furs from the Indians. Then he showed me his card; he was the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company! He said to me- he had a good joke about it- he invited me to London to have dinner with him at Hudson Bay House in London. The Hudson's Bay Company are very good to the Bastion. They always supplied the flag - the Union Jack - you know, for the last 30 years, and the present one is four feet by nine feet.

WB: Joe, coming in I noticed a few cannons still poking around the Bastion. Now, would you enlarge what they were used for?

JM: Well, these cannons in the Bastion were used for a special purpose. Chief Stewart, a very patriotic and minded citizen. Chief of Police had charge of those [unintelligible], and on
special occasion he would have them fired. Take the 24th of May, the Queen's birthday, he would fire 21. And when the Governors or any other person would come [unintelligible] he would fire 17. When Sir John A. Macdonald laid the golden spike of the E & N Railway, Chief Constable Stewart had the prisoners haul the cannons up to the depot, and he fired off 17 cannons for Sir John A. Macdonald.

WB: Mr. Muir, you remember that occasion, do you?

JM: Yes, I do. I remember it was on August the 13th, 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, and also at the Labour Day track and field meet, we sponsored that for 20-odd years. And I was always the- looked after the gate receipts and the cash.

WB: Yes, that's fine. You told me the other day that you didn't have much time for sports, that you were always working.

JM: Well in the camps you'd work, I was working seven days a week and half the nights, and worry about what I'm going to do the next day.

Mr. Barraclough, I wish to thank you most sincerely for this interview and the recording of my voice living 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....

JM: June the 20th, 1963.

WB: We are recording the voice of Mr. Joseph Muir within the walls of the historic Hudson's Bay Company's fort, the Bastion, Nanaimo.

As a final note, Mr. Muir, about this bell.

JM: Well this bell was cast in London in 1862, and it's 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.

[Bell clanging]