DM. Now this, this is a little bit pertaining to Bing Kee and the early coal mining days. See Bing Kee purchased the Ganner estate, and this is back in 1903. A year before the original act giving the coal rights to the settlers came into force. He was successful in his action against executors of the Ganner Estate. In other words in those days um, all the minerals right reserve belong to the E & N, or the Western Collery, mf or the Dunsmuir family. But he had purchased that, prior to that law became uh, became that law became enforced.

BG. then it goes on to say the court holds that coal rights conferred in 1904 passed on to Bing Kee with his land, not to the Ganner Estate, which claimed to retain the coal rights. And this was article on April 3rd, 1919. In other words he fought this, and won, and they appealed and he won the appeal. And in succeeding years it went right to the Supreme Court of Canada.

BG. Really.

DM. Where it was overturned in favor of, the coal company.

BG. What date was that? Do you have that date?

DM. Well this was.

BG. Oh that was that.

DM. On April 3rd, 1919, this article.

DM. OK. Now this, this is a continuation of, of, we're about Mah Bing Kee, now this is a continuation of the history of the Mah family.

The first Mah, took the name of Mah(Fook Boo Goom)(typed as sounds)(?) . And the origin of the Mah's was in Northern China. The early ancestry was from Northern China. During Chongas Khan's rule, a forefather was a
commander in one of Ghangus Khan's armies. In those days they were not called generals they were called commanders. Another forefather was a professor in the courts of (Koo Bly Khan)(sp?) (Koo Bly Khan was a grandson of Ghangus Khan. And I would say the latest prominent Mah, in mainland China, was a general in the eighth root (?) (army. Which was the most successful army during the Japanese invasion of China, in the 1930's. We won battles against the Japanese in Shang Hi (SP) later the long march to the interior of Hopei Province(SP?) (They not only fought the Japanese, but Shang Hi (as well. It was this nucleus of this army that took over China in 1947, and posted the nationals to Taiwan.

DM. All the Mahs came from the same original forefather, Fookm Boo Goom (sp?) (So in other words all the Mahs are related it may be very distant but they are related. Now in the last few hundred years the Mahs moved to southern China where the weather is much more tropical than northern China. Bing Kee's forefather settled in the province of Kan Ton(sp?) (a south sea port province. From there he migrated to the America's. Destination, six California Gold Fields.

BG. Hmm, in the 1800's?

DM. Ok. Mah Bing Kee was born in 1848, Kan Ton (sp?) (China. When he was 14 or 15, he came to Sacramento California, for the gold rush. The date approximately was 1862. Later on he went to the Klondike Gold Rush in 1899. One of his companions was a Mark Bates. Who later was one of the earlier mayors of Nanaimo. They were always close friends. Mark Bates died in England. I don't know what date he died, but he died in England. After the Klondike Gold Rush, he worked on C.P.R. Railroad, uh, Fraser Canyon, and through the Rocky Mountains. After that he went back to China to be married, and his wife was the daughter of a prominent San Francisco Chinese Merchant. And Mrs. Bing Kee's father was later killed in the great San Francisco Earthquake.

BG. 1922.....

DM. 1920..... I'm not sure of the date anyway. After all his travels and that he returned to Nanaimo to farm. Farming was one of his businesses. But he had several types of businesses. He had a grocery store, and his family was born, he raised his family between farming, the time of farming and the and the grocery store. But he had all different kinds of businesses in Nanaimo. He had all kinds of land holdings, not only Nanaimo but Vancouver, Interior
in various places of B.C.

Now heres an episode about raciAL, early racial discrimination. This is pertaining to the Capitol Theatre in Nanaimo. Bing Kee, and Mayor John Hillbrecht, (sp?) went to see a movie. But the manager of the theatre, or some personnel in the theatre says, oh, Mr. Bing Kee you have to go upstairs. After that episode, racial discrimination against Chinese was ended.

BG. That's interesting.

DM. Anyway, he went back to China in 1927, when he was 72 years old. Yes he was born in 1847 and he passed away in 1942 in China. So that would make him 95 years old. And he was stranded in China during the Japanese war, and that's where he passed away in the Mah Village in China.

BG. Do you think he wanted to come back or?

DM. I'm not sure, I'm not sure if he did want to or not.

But the circumstances you know, wouldn't permit him to come back during the war.

BG. I've often heard that a lot of Chinese people wanted to get back, to China.

DM. Yes, that's right, because they say you come here to make your fortune but you go home to die.

BG. And we visited Bakersville, and I noticed you had a photo, and in there it mentioned that the ones that could wanted to get back and I believe some even have their bones sent back.

DM. They did, they did, because every 10 turns, after 10 years, in turning the ground, they would dig up the bones and they were shipped back to China to be buried.

BG. After 10 years?

DM. After 10 years.

BG. Oh.

DM. But anyways to continue on, uh, this is pertaining back to the coal business, he purchased 158 (hundred and fifty-eight) acres down in timberland which is across from the airport, the Nanaimo airport here, and this is where the mineral rights all came about. But he did log it. He did log the um, all the timber on it, and he bought Chinatown, and he rented the stores and the houses to the people.

BG. And what date did you say, did you give me a date?

DM. I haven't got a date on that.

DM. Now that would be, oh gosh I would, I would say probably around the 1900's, somewhere in there.
BG. In the early decade.

DM. Ya that's right. But he bought it up secretly bit at a time, and when the people found out about that there was very much resentment.

BG. Is this amongst the Chinese people?

DM. Yes this is amongst the Chinese people. So they moved out, they tore their building down, and they took each piece of board and they built their ChinaTown on Pine Street. And you know, eventually it burnt down you know, in 1961, I believe, in 1961 was the Chinatown Fire.

BG. So the original one has disappeared then eh, the literally took the buildings, and....

DM. That's right. But anyway, after they moved out what he did was he had the thing all surveyed, subdivided, and he sold lots. And he named the streets were named Bing Kee Street, Far Street, Walk Street, and Why Street.

But the only one that was really gazetted was Bing Kee Street. And he had a grocery store in the old Chinatown, he had a drugstore. And the drugstore sold opium, which was legal, as I showed you that license.

BG. Ya, I wonder when that ceased to be legal, when it was banned.

DM. I, I don't know the date but uh, wasn't that long ago, I was down in the Victoria, in the museum, I saw another one of these licenses displayed in the Victoria Museum, showing you know a license for selling opium.

But in those days I don't imagine opium was any worse than alcohol, or cigarette, or tobacco, than today. I mean they'd be in the same category anyway.

BG. That's interesting.

DM. And he had a restaurant on Commercial Street, and the restaurant is well the location that was the Woolworth, and later became the Sally Shop. That's where he had a restaurant. And later on he moved to Chapel Street. While on Chapel Street, that's where he built his home on Skinner Street.

There's a picture of that house here.

BG. Yes, the picture here. Oh,.... He had quite a large family.

DM. In 1877 the population of Nanaimo was
Dm. In 1877 the population of Nanaimo was 1,150 (one thousand, one hundred and fifty) whites, and 300 (three hundred) Chinese. When the E & N Railroad was under construction, many more Chinese were to arrive to work on the construction of the project.

Bg. I believe they came in and were willing to work (rustling of papers, not understandable) or was there something...

DM. Yes, that would be it. In those days well still called, America's was called the Golden Mountain. Chinese (Golden Mountain). So I guess a lot of people come from China to seek their fortune.

One of Bing Kee's old friends was Senator Planta, he was his legal advisor and he represented in this, this court case against the Canadian Colleey. And here is some more of the property that he owned in Nanaimo. He owned property in Chapel St., Wallace St., Skinner St., and he had the wood yard in Nanaimo, which is where the Feed, CO-Op Feed Store is now. He had railroad siding into it. Did a big business in the wood business. And he had a bakery in Ladysmith. What he did was, in a lot of these ventures, he would put up the money and he would put friends in to manage it, and later split the profit fifty, fifty. Just on a hand shake.

Now when he farmed, he was one of the earliest ones to go Mechanized, while a lot of people still using you know, horses drawn, but he, he had these mechanical plows and tractors, and planters, etc.

Bg. He was very progressive, of course he's, he does adventure, because the money? and he is adventurous in his....

DM. I guess he had a little foresight, and uh, and he was willing to take a chance.

Bg. Yes, I would think he must have established a lot of people in successful businesses....

DM. Yes I would say so.

And he had a store with a rooming hose, a commercial building on the corner of Hecate and Kennedy St. And that building today still stands.

He had houses at Extension which he rented to the coal miners and different workmen. The man was never sick a day (good eyesight, and never saw a dentist. Never had a toothache in his life.}
Dm. And here's something of interest, he was the third man in Nanaimo to own a motor vehicle.

BG. What was it?

DM. It was a great big black Ford touring car.

And this is when electricity first came to Nanaimo, and this this, he wasn't living on Skinner Street there, I believe this would be up in old Chinatown and my aunts tell me that they used to charge, electric company used to charge, one dollar per month for each light bulb in the house. In the early days, he bought a piano from G.A. Fletcher. And the original bill of sale with the old stamp and the envelope and everything, and I think the insurance was come from Boston of someplace like that, but of interest I gave that bill of sale to Alan Fletcher, I went to school with Alan Fletcher you see, and I mentioned this to him and he says oh gee, we'd like to have this for the records so I gave, I gave that to Al.

And Bing Kee, he enjoyed the sport of hunting and fishing. And in 1908 one of his hunting licenses, in B.C., in those days it was divided into two game management areas. One was east of the Cascade, and the other was west of the Cascade. And there was no limit of deer or any other game animal, the only restriction was no man should have more that 50 (fifty) ducks in his possession at one time.

But you know, like in those days when you bought a car there was no mechanics, like today there are garages here, you did your own work. But the manual on the repair instructions on some of these tools and that I gave to Ralph Holland, of Myers Holland, he wanted some of that because he hasn't got anything like that so I gave that to him.

But at present I still have his old guns, my grandfather's old guns during you know his gold mining, prospecting days.

And here's another little bit of information, he had a bank account of over a hundred thousand dollars, at one time.

BG. That's tremendous, fantastic, especially in those days.

Dm. He set up businesses, on a fifty, fifty basis he did the finance, and he'd put people into to um manage these different places.

But during the depression, the unfortunate part is, he lost a lot of his holdings. It was tough to put people out because they can't pay the rent. So after a while you know things go for tax sales and that.
DM. And here is something, I had an old land deed, its now in the possession of the Nanaimo Museum, and it was a piece of property on Haliburton Street. In those days I think Haliburton Street was the centre of the commerce during the early miner's days. It was written on paper that was woven with linen in it, it was a big huge thing, and the envelope was made of the same material. But the unusual thing about that deed, it bore the Lord and Mayor of London Seal on that deed.

BG. How come?

DM. I don't know, I guess well I guess in those days everything was pretty well owned by British interest or the Hudson's Bay Co. but that um, that land deed now is in, in the Nanaimo Museum. It was when Mr. Jack Parker was curator that he asked me if I could contribute something of interest to the museum.

Well a few years ago a Mr. um Jack Hardcastle was still alive, I commissioned him to do some research on some of these old sailing ships that brought some of my forefathers to America. Which he did, he wrote to Lords of London, and got the uh, you know, give him the dates of departure from Canton, and after much research he did paint me a couple of these old sailing ships that they came over on.

Here's some more on the Bing Kee house on Skinner St. It was built around the turn of the century, and it cost the sum of $3,500.00 (three thousand five hundred dollars) which was a great deal of money in those days. It was four storeys, it had a basement, and main floor, upstairs and a huge attic. All the walls were plastered, and fully electric light. There was complete sets of bath. One upstairs, and one downstairs. It had huge stair cases, and huge lighting fixtures, in the dining room, and it had large hallways, five bedrooms, formal dining room, and two parlours. It had a huge kitchen and dining area. And a huge pantry. Down in the basement was a wooden coal furnace, the furnace came from Birmingham England. And bricks were from England. Well I guess its what you'd call central heating, hot water radiators, into every room. I guess in those days it was quite a luxurious home. Well he did a fair mount of entertaining in his days. I remember those, you know beautiful old furniture in that house, you know the silver ware, well you know its something you don't see today anyway.

BG. Was he popular generally, you mentioned that they moved ChinaTown,
and were angry when they found out that he had... How was he with his own people?

DM. Well, he was respected. He was well respected. They might have resented his action, but uh, you can't ya can't take anything away from the man anyway.

I remember all those beds were solid brass beds, in the house.

Beautiful dinner place, chinaware.

BG. Did they bring a lot of their furnishing, would a lot of them come from China, or more likely.....

DM. Oh, no, mostly Western....

BG. He came when he was a young boy, so he wouldn't have brought anything.

DM' That's right. Uh, ha.

If you want, I'll show you some of his uh, chinaware later.

Well he was a very rugged and durable person, and he had to be you know to go through what he did in his early days. But um, when he went to Klondike, he had to have a ton of supplies, and they had to pack that thing, all the supplies up that (chugle)(?) (415)

Pass, before they were allowed to go up to the gold fields.

BG. I've seen pictures of that and it seemed so steep, have you seen the book, one man's gold rush.

DM. No, I don't believe I have.

BG. That has marvelous photographs, what else do you know about his experience in the gold mines.

DM. Well he must have found gold. Because he came back...

BG. Do you know how long he was there?

DM. Up in the Klondike, I'm not sure, Ya, must have been a period of...

I'm not sure, I'm really not sure, but I know he was there. Maybe.....

BG. Some people were there a short time, and then they had enough to...

DM. But uh, here's another little incident uh, the ship that carried explosives, from the CIL plant, which is down here, at Cilaire here, this used to be the explosives wharf. It caught fire in Nanaimo Harbour, and they towed this thing to, I believe, to the other side of Protection Island, and where this ship exploded, the house on Skinner St. overlooks the waterfront, and when that ship exploded with its cargo of Nitro glycerin or whatever it had, it shattered a lot of the windows in town and it didn't spare the house, Bing Kee's house on Skinner St. At that time, they were
sitting down at the table, and for some reason, whether it be premonition he got up and walked away from it, and that explosion came, and the sheet of glass came right across, and he if he hadn't moved, it would have deactivated him. But he had interest in two laundries. One was Boo Kee on Hallow, and the other one was, one was on Fraser Street, I think that one was called Win Kee Laundry. (names typed as sounded)(#455)

And that was down from the Canadian Times building now, and the other one, the Boo Kee laundry, I think Don Bahtina used that, for a parking lot, but even as I was a young man, I can remember the, the laundry as they had horse drawn, you know, delivering laundry with horses and buggies.

Well when I was a very young man, well my name is Dick Mah. I am Ring Kee's grandson, but when I was a very young man I remember the old grubby bridge, the old Bastion wooden bridge, I see through the old blacksmith at the west, the top end of the bridge. And I remember the old City Hall, and the old City Jail, at the bottom end of the bridge. And in those days City Hall was staffed by very few persons. There was a Mr. Highe, and Tom (Janes, my Mr. Haack wood, and a man there I forget the lady's name, and Mr. Sheppard who was in charge of the works department) (names typed as sounded) (#480, 372)

In those days a brand new car cost about 2,000.00. Only a hundred of people ran the city, it's not like today.

And I can remember these old Washrooms, there's old Don Calhoun, Bill Neally, and ah, George Hama. Of course that was the Provincial Police in those days.

And I remember Uncle Pat's he had a store on Bastion Street, it was called the (Aquay)(145)(#495) Produce, and there was a tailor shop, there was a tailor shop, the Eagle Building now stands. The Eagle Building?

And I remember my brother's first store, called the Quality Produce, now where the AC Taxi stand is, up across from the Metropolitian Box. So all in all the Mah family has had a business in Nanaimo, that goes back a long time, way, way, back into the 1880's, 1890's. Continuously.

OK. This is about the old days, the Chinese head tax. I think they started off with $50.00 per person to come over. And it kept going up until, it hit $500.00 (five hundred dollars).

BC. This was imposed by the government?

CM. Yes, the government (names typed as sounded) (#24) so they didn't want to discourage any further immigrant Chinese Immigrant from coming into
Canada. So in other words, when the men worked here and they made as little as $30.00 or $50.00 dollars, that was enough passage to go back to China for a month or two, and this is where most of them married and had their family and children, and...

BE. Then came back again...

DM. Came back, worked a few months and go back to China. They committed by whether it be steam ship, or sailing ship.

BG. Was most of immigration from China to Canada in those days?

END

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