

The following transcript of
Jack Buchanan's interview
on

Memories and Music

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: Jack Buchanan TAPE NO: 55
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THEME: North Bay, railways, schools; Creighton, baseball;
Sudbury Pipe Band; Nickel Diggers' Quartet.

D.M. Friends and neighbours we have as our guest now Mr. Jack Buchanan who is a relatively new retiree. Jack retired in July of 1973. Well now Jack to get us started here would you like to tell us how long you were with Inco at your retirement and what you were doing when you retired?

J.B. Ah, I was 42 years with Inco and ah, I was chief clerk in the file and mail department in Copper Cliff.

D.M. Right. All right now Jack I gather that ah, if you were born in this area. Where were you born?

J.B. I was born in, in the Ottawa Valley in Westmeath which is a small village near Pembroke.

D.M. Anybody around now who might be listening to the show, who was from the same village?

J.B. Well there's Sam Rogers in Copper Cliff here, should remember the, the blacksmith there and a, he'll know the Buchanan name

D.M. Right, I take it then that your father was the village blacksmith, eh?

J.B. He was and ah, he, he looked after all of the horses from the neighbouring farmers and the lumber companies throughout that whole district. That was a lumbering community down there.

D.M. Now I'm just wondering "under the spreading chestnut tree the village blacksmith stands" is that right? A famous poem as I recall it, do you know the poem? *

J.B. Oh yes I, that

D.M. "The muscles on his brawny arms stood up like iron bands", eh, was that, was that true?

* see page 12 for the correct first verse of the "The Village Blacksmith"

J.B. That's quite true.

D.M. How did your father, is he a native of the area that, that he picked up the blacksmith trade.

J.B. Oh yes. He was born down near Renfrew which is, which is also in the Ottawa Valley . . . all our corn came from down that way.

D.M. So ah, Buchanan's got to be a Scottish name I take it, eh?

J.B. That's right our forefathers came over from Scotland, I don't know whether they were black sheep or, or what they were but they, we landed over here and that's where we settled.

D.M. Well now Mr. Buchanan did you then go up and go to school in Westmeath?

J.B. Oh no we ah, my family ah, moved from Westmeath to North Bay because as you know the, the horse went the way of all flesh and, and my father. I was one of a family of eight and ah, he had to look after his family so ah, the family moved to North Bay where ah, the older ones got jobs amongst the railways, that being a railway town and he got a job as a blacksmith with the Ontario Northland and ah, that's where I got my schooling in the North Bay Public School in the North Bay Collegiate.

D.M. I find that interesting, would he be called a blacksmith working for the railway up there or would he have another name?

J.B. Oh yes he was ah, made a blacksmith there just the same as they have at Inco. They have blacksmiths at Inco, too.

D.M. Well then what ah, what did you do Jack when you finished school in ah, North Bay?

J.B. Well when I was in high school in North Bay I was very fortunate . . . I won a public speaking contest for the Toronto Star and I won the Northern Ontario public speaking contest and ah, the Taylor Statten camps operated in Algonquin Park and ah, they invited me down there to look after their books and what not for one summer, which at 18 was quite a, quite a thing. In 1925 I was just a young fellow and it was a real experience to go down there. I think those camps are still operating around Canoe Lake, and coming back after the summer was over I went to work for the Ontario Northland Railway in the office where I worked for, oh about, 2 years.

D.M. Well now I'm going to interrupt you, this public speaking contest that, that interests me. What subject was that on?

J.B. It was on, on Canada.

D.M. Now what did you have to say about Canada back in that speech? Do you remember any of it?

J.B. Well . . . after this length of time I would say no. But I remember that the ah, contest, the, the final contest was held in Massey Hall in Toronto and there was speakers from all over Ontario and ah, it was judged in Massey Hall in Toronto. It was the only time I was in Massey Hall I think. But I was on the stage there.

D.M. That sounds great. How, how long, how long a talk was it?

J.B. It was a 10 minute talk.

D.M. This was something you had written yourself, I guess.

J.B. Yes. Oh with the help of, of the family let's, let me put it that way.

D.M. On Canada and patriotism as well as what . . . equality

J.B. (unintelligible)

D.M. Well I'll be darned. You don't have a copy of that speech or anything left.

J.B. No I, I do not. Not at the present time, no.

D.M. And what, what year did you give that talk down there?

J.B. Oh in 1925.

D.M. Marvelous Jack, just, just great. All right so we got you back in ah, in North Bay and working for the, the railroad up there. But you, something led to you leaving North Bay and coming down to Sudbury or Copper Cliff. Now what was that story.

J.B. Oh yes. A lot of people in Sudbury would know Mrs. Kay Coates and a, she is a cousin of mine and ah, she informed me that there was a job up here with International Nickel and imagine living 80 miles from Sudbury and not even knowing what International Nickel was but

D.M. Is that right?

J.B. However ah, I came across and ah, took the job as secretary to the superintendent at the Ontario refinery, Mr. J. K. Bryan. Now . . . I don't know how many present will know he was superintendent of the building of that complex out there but I know Tommy Mainville will remember him all right. He was a real character. However, I was secretary to him then and ah, that was in 1930 for about a year and

a half and then of course that was in the Dirty Thirties and it didn't last, it only lasted that long when the word came that was it.

D.M. Well that word came to an awful lot of people in the, in the 30's Jack as I recall. So what did you do then?

J.B. Actually no work around Sudbury at all. I went back to North Bay and ah, I wanted to just hang around. I went to technical school and took up woodworking of all things. I don't know whether, whether it's ever paid me off, I can't hammer a nail straight yet to this day but ah

D.M. Maybe you know the theory of it?

J.B. It did put in the time until about June 1933, when International Nickel started to revive and ah, I was called back to ah, to a job at Creighton Mine to be a clerk in the time office.

D.M. Well now Jack I know that, that you have wonderful memories of your time in Creighton Mine and I, I'm going to ask you about them. But before we do that can you tell us something about your brothers and sisters? Now ah, I think 2 are dead but you had how many brothers and sisters?

J.B. Well there was 8 in our family. There's five boys and three girls. You know in a large family it's ah, we don't have large families anymore within towns and cities . . . tend to be smaller families but there's something to be said for large families and there is er, closely knit things and there's always room for one more and I know in our family. . even ah, when at North Bay as my mother's sister died and left two babies, she took them for seven years, there's always room for more.

D.M. Jack that's marvelous, I don't know whether that attitude or that thinking has gone out of today's people or not. But I, it's nice to hear that.

J.B. But ah, there, my stakes are in North Bay, my family's stakes but ah, a lot of people who're retiring when they say ah, you retire, where, where are you going to go? What are you going to do? Well the minute I retire I'm going to get out of Sudbury. Well no way am I going to get out of Sudbury because I've lived here all my life, my friends are here and my, my roots are here.

D.M. Right.

J.B. And ah, that is the reason I bought a home here and as long as I can look after it, this is where I'll be.

D.M. Great well now, we still didn't get around to your brothers and sisters Jack. What did they do, where are they living now (unintelligible)

J.B. Well they're all in North Bay, they all grew up on the railway as the railways, that's a railway town just the same as Sudbury's a mining town and ah, I have one brother. He was a purchasing agent with the Ontario Northland, another was a conductor on the C.N.R., my dad was on the Ontario Northland, I had another brother with the, as a freight handler and then my youngest brother he's now purchasing agent with Canadian Longyear in North Bay. My sisters . . . one is a retired school teacher in North Bay and ah, my other sister's retired in North Bay on a permanent home on Trout Lake.

D.M. Well that's, that's very nice. Now sir we're going to move into the Creighton period now and what, what year did you move to Creighton?

J.B. I worked there in 1933

D.M. Now what ah, what got you out there? Was this another call from the company to go out there or something?

J.B. Well is was after the opening of the, of the mines after the shut down. They needed more men and ah, of course the office had to be staffed. So ah, I was sent out there. And as a young single man coming here, I got on the bus, went out there and was met at the bus by Bob Brady the police chief, which was there at the time. And a, he took me all through the time office and Tom Mulligan and Bert Behanna introduced me to the intricacies of town office work.

D.M. Right.

J.B. And a, I stayed there until 1947.

D.M. Well now, now Jack you're getting ah, you're a little faster here than I think we want to go here now. Tell us about your first impressions of Creighton. Where you stayed, what it was like during your first years there?

J.B. Well ah, to staff a mining town, opening up it's mostly single people that go in. Therefore, there was large boarding houses and ah, I stayed at Betsy and Mike Forlong. Now a lot of people around . . . the Sudbury district will remember them as being the most marvelous people to run a boarding house of men who worked hard, played hard, and lived hard. But ah, as people they were the best people in the world. You were never wanting for a friend and ah, they were always there when you needed them in sickness or in health.

D.M. Jack that's as fine a tribute . . . I have ever heard by anybody, to anybody else. Do they have any family or anything around, do you know?

J.B. No as their son's gone. We're talking about 35 or 40 years ago. Now ah, Betsy Forlong has passed on, Mike Forlong who was a shift boss at Creighton he is passed on, he worked under Charlie Lively and Charlie's passed on and the superintendent his name was S.J. Kidder, of course, he's passed on and a, that a, I guess I'm just one of the younger ones. (unintelligible) . . . still have a life yet.

D.M. True enough, true enough. Now during your time in Creighton I'm talking now about the 30's. The so called Dirty Thirties and so on, I gather that you feel now that there was ah, apart from these wonderful people at the boarding house, that there was a great community spirit out there, that, that was reflected in, in athletics and things like that. Now can you tell us something about that.

J.B. I've often wondered in our present day if this is not becoming less. I, I don't know whether it's a good thing that we're missing that in our, our communities as they are set up today. In Creighton I consider the time that ah, my wife and I spent there as the best years of our lives and we had a hockey team, our baseball team, our football, which the whole town supported and I'm sure, that people around the district will remember Big Marshall Dunn. He went on to pitch for the a, for the professional baseball team.

D.M. That's Marshall Dunn, that's still Marshall Dunn.

J.B. Big, big Phil Marshall Dunn

D.M. Oh yeah, oh yeah.

J.B. And then, and then we had Bill Tenant he was another great pitcher and that was in our baseball, we're in our, in our hockey we'd, the McGwashen [phonetic] and the community spirit lead them after their hockey playing days were over, to remain in the community. Therefore, there must've been something there to hold them after. There's a Ernie Mosher, there's Stan Dobson, they a, there's Norm Silverson and a

D.M. These are names that are going to bring back a lot of memories, I think so.

J.B. Well they're, they're around.

D.M. Yeah.

- J.B. To stay. That ah, I'm sure that ah, this community spirit, we would follow these teams. We'd fill the arenas, which we're having a hard time to do at the present day now. I don't know what that, what you call that spirit.
- D.M. Maybe, maybe you've got a little bit too much television or something now.
- J.B. Well
- D.M. A different world I think.
- J.B. Well it could be. We had nothing, there were no cars, there were no telephones. If you wanted to see somebody you had to go and visit them. Well ah, if two, two people visited at the same time, it turned into a party and if more than that visited it turned into a weekend. So ah, ah, as I say the friends we made in Creighton are, are friends because we were all of the same age. Our children grew up together and ah, they, they feel the same closeness that you have in a larger community.
- D.M. I, I couldn't agree more Jack. Now I'd like to talk about that a little further but in the meantime, we want to talk about Mrs. Buchanan. Now ah, I gather from what some things I've heard before the broadcast, that this was actually a sort of a school boy or a school girl romance, is that true?
- J.B. Ah, yes it is, we went to school together in North Bay and ah, then ah, my wife Frances . . . her dad ah, worked on the railway and was transferred to Toronto and of course she went with the family to Toronto and I eventually moved up to Sudbury. But ah, we kept in touch and in 1936 we were married.
- D.M. I take it or you told her that she had some misgivings about coming up to ah, to a wild mining camp now, is that true?
- J.B. Well I don't know whether she had misgivings ah, maybe I had a little but ah, I know my friends too had misgivings at me bringing her there. However I know she had some friends come up from Toronto and go back and tell her that's she was out of her cotton-picking mind to ever think of coming to a mining camp to live for the rest of her days. However, . . . I'm sure, she tells me even to this day that they were the best years of her life as well as mine.
- D.M. Very, very well said and I gather too that among other things in those days you ah, you had a bowling league without any winners in it. Now how did that work out?
- J.B. Well . . . Ted Marsh, his picture is in The Triangle I think in the last issue and a, I knew him very, very well and he ran the bowling alley and the pool hall and the, I

think he had two lanes down there and he had a mixed bowling league, I don't know. There'd be 16 or 20 couples in it and we'd, we anted into the kitty for a, for a party or what not. But we could never decide the winners, I don't know if it was the score keeping or whether we could add or what it was. But we decided to give everybody a prize and everybody got a turkey.

D.M. I think that's probably the best kind of league to have. Now also I think that you get pretty interested in first aid out there. Now what was that story.

J.B. Well at the present day . . . the R.D. Parker trophy, trophy is the prize trophy amongst Inco first aid teams and ah, in the 1930's the smelters, Coniston, Copper Cliff and the refinery, they took great pride in a, fighting for that trophy amongst themselves and the mines never had a chance. However, the first aid man Mel Dundas and ah, myself, we, we were friends and ah, we got together and said, all right we'll put up a team now and a, we'll practice for this and under Dr. Paul Kyle whose still practising in Sudbury. He trained us and a, we were the first mine, I captained the team and we were the first mine to ever capture the first, the R.D. Parker trophy from the smelters. The first time the mine was ever, ah on that trophy, it's been on there since but we were the first.

D.M. Well a great achievement now and that wasn't the only areas. Now Jack I know that, let's talk a little bit about music now I think that you, you took an interest in music, is that right?

J.B. Oh yes ah, well in a small community what have, what else have you got to do but sing and dance and do other things. So ah, ah under Grant Boaland, who, we were very fortunate to have skilled people. He was the efficiency engineer in Creighton but he was also an accomplished musician. And a, we got up 16 men, a double octet and went into the Sudbury Kiwanis Festival and of course walked off with the honours. Of course, I was also interested in a, with a name like Buchanan I was also interested in playing the bagpipes.

D.M. Right.

J.B. So a, we organized a pipe band and a, the Sudbury Pipe Band was part of that with Alex Anderson and a, Jack Elliot and Jack McIver and a, . . . not Bill Livingston but John, John Livingston, Bill came just a little bit after John.

D.M. I guess the pipe band would play, play at public gatherings and things like that.

- J.B. Oh no we'd play at anything. In 1937 we played for the King and Queen when, when they came down through Sudbury. * We, we were out there and we'd play for the, anyplace they wanted music, we were there. We'd go to Little Current or up to Blind River or out to Penage or
- D.M. I guess if you're a Scotsman you consider the bagpipes to be music.
- J.B. Well that's right.
- D.M. I'm only kidding, I like the bagpipes myself. Now ah, I think also Jack that you got yourself involved in a male quartet with a couple of fellows you remember and that you achieved some distinction there, is that right?
- J.B. Yes Don Dunbar . . . he held these amateur, amateur nights out in the baseball field there at Copper Cliff, out in the park. So ah, in Creighton . . . we formed a quartet and we dressed up in miners' clothes and we called ourselves the Nickel Diggers' Quartet. After that one night, I don't know, I guess we had a little help from within but ah, out we went and this warm night and ah, lo and behold didn't we win the contest and a, . . . Don says, Gee he says, you're so good, he says, we're going to send you to Toronto.
- D.M. Right.
- J.B. So they barrelled us on the train and sent down to the Inco Exhibition to the Inco exhibit at the Toronto Exhibition and ah, we sang at the ah, within the . . . the International Nickel Exhibit there that year.
- D.M. Well how about that, one trip to Massey Hall to speak and
- J.B. (unintelligible)
- D.M. Right. Who ah, who was with you on that, in that quartet Jack?
- J.B. Oh there's Bert Bacardic and Stu Fredeen, he's now up at Virginia town. I was just talking to Stu the other day, he's a he was down in Sudbury, he was, we were talking about these old times. Tom Starky was with us.
- D.M. Well the great days, eh?
- J.B. Oh they, they were wonderful years, those Creighton years.
- D.M. Well tell me around about the 40's or thereabouts I think you got ah, you got sent to Timmins on a special assignment, what was that Jack?

* Royal Visit, 1939

- J.B. Well of course the manpower during the war years was a problem for International Nickel as it was with all war industries and of course the nickel industry was classed as a, as a major necessity and the gold mines were not as necessary so the government allowed Inco to transfer gold miners to the nickel industry and I was sent up to Timmins for 6 weeks to organize the transfer of gold miners down to the nickel industry to help out the getting of nickel.
- D.M. Well, well now ah, Jack on another subject the ah, this family of yours I guess they're a little bit grown up now. I gather that you have a son born in 1938 who worked as a school principal in the south and didn't care too much for it and came back north. Would you like to tell us something about that?
- J.B. Oh yes my son, he received his schooling in Creighton and Copper Cliff High School and then went on through college, to Waterloo and ah, he ah, he was the principal of the high school down in Whitby and down in the Toronto areas but ah, being a northerner he, he finally came back north. He says, I like it up here, I like the weather, he says and he says I'm not going to get out of the north and back he is, he's now principal of the high school at (D) and he's living on St. Joseph's Island. Well my daughter
- D.M. Yeah
- J.B. She was a nurse and she, she nursed in Toronto there for oh 7 or 8 years and then her husband was transferred north and of course he's a Toronto man and ah, they didn't know how he was going to like the north but he's now converted, he says "no way will I ever go back to the rat race of Toronto."
- D.M. Great, spoken like a true Northerner sir. Now getting back to yourself around about 1947 the Creighton years came to an end, is that right?
- J.B. That's right.
- D.M. A promotion came in.
- J.B. Well Roy Barnes who had worked for International Nickel for over 45 years was due for retirement. He was head of the file and mail room in Copper Cliff and in fact he'd organized it and a, . . . Mr. Lambert asked, asked me in for an interview and then gave me the transfer of the promotion to become a head of that department. And a, I came in, in, 1947 and took over the department in 1950 where I remained 'til 1973 upon my retirement.
- D.M. This is about 23 years in, in

J.B. This is about 23 years, yes.

D.M. Well now ah, Mr. Buchanan we have you back then in the Copper Cliff, tell us something about those years I mean the, the, the things you interested yourself in and I think you played a lot of bridge and things like that.

J.B. They were also good years. Yes I'm an avid bridge fan I, I not too good at it but ah, I do enjoy it. In fact I remember the old Rose bowl games that Don Dunbar . . . organized. We used to come in from Creighton for those but of course they've gone out the window. But ah

D.M. Tell us a little bit more about those. What, what was the significance of the Rose bowls?

J.B. Well it was a, a, a trophy put up for a bridge tournament between all Inco departments and held in the community hall and they'd have oh 100, 125 tables that would be 400 people playing bridge. I didn't know there were that many bridge tables amongst (unintelligible) among the miners at that time, however, there was.

D.M. Right.

J.B. And ah, ah . . . even today I, I belong to the Sudbury Duplicate Bridge Club. But during the time in Copper Cliff, I sang for 15 years in the Copper Cliff United Church choir and ah, I belong to the Algonquin Lodge in Copper Cliff, the Masonic Lodge and ah, raising my family there took up quite a bit of time. Copper Cliff is a wonderful place to raise the family where you have all the . . . facilities close at hand. We were very fortunate that if you wanted the kids to skate, you could walk them there or to curl. The club was there for swimming, that ah, many of the other people weren't so fortunate to have.

D.M. Well it's ah, obviously you ah, you're happy in the Creighton years and happy in the Copper Cliff years Jack maybe you adapt well. Maybe you got a Scotch adaptiveness if that's a word, eh? Now ah, Jack we're pushing on here. You're into retirement, you haven't retired very long, you're a, a very evidently a, an organized sort of person. Have you got any philosophy of retirement particularly any work you want to do, things you're going to do that you have not had time for or been able to do?

J.B. Well I haven't been retired that long and I'm just, after retiring it takes a little while to become adjusted. That ah, I haven't found time hanging heavy on my hands. That ah, I was still becoming adjusted to it, I haven't found the time heavy as I'd said and ah, I do play a lot of bridge and I'm reading material which I never, should say that I had time to read before and taking my time at it. I'm doing a lot of walking and ah, enjoying life in general.

D.M. Good well now ah, I gather that you as a sort of a retirement trip you got something, a trip organized for next March, is that right?

J.B. Yes. We didn't go immediately ah, immediately I retired, I had a little problem on ah, on arthritis and what not. Gordon Harry said not too long ago, you have to live with it. Which I subscribed to, that you do have to live with arthritis but ah, I took the first six weeks that I was retired and I took this acupuncture.

D.M. You did, eh?

J.B. I did but ah

D.M. How did it work?

J.B. Actually it works on some and not on others. It ah, it didn't help me that much. So that took up quite some time but ah, I'm feeling very, very good and I think I can live with this and ah, we're looking forward to a trip in March to Hawaii and a, hopefully several more trips in the future.

D.M. Marvelous, marvelous. I, I, I you certainly are living with it. If, if I may say so, a, a happy man, a fulfilled man. Well now Mr. Buchanan I ah, I asked you about a philosophy of retirement. What about a philosophy of life? What would you say to a young fellow sort of starting out now, what would be your advice?

J.B. I always like to think that you do the best you can with what you have. Don't envy your seniors, don't envy your juniors. Just do the best with what you have.

D.M. Good and thats fits in pretty well with some of the philosophy that we, we use on this program. Friends and neighbours our guest has been Jack, Mr. Jack Buchanan who retired in July 1973 after 42 years with International Nickel. Jack is ah, told us about his childhood if you like in North Bay, his wonderful years, his very, very happy years in Creighton, and ah later moving to Copper Cliff for, he retired as chief clerk in the accounting department and the head of the filing and mailing department. Mr. Buchanan it's been a pleasure and a privilege to have you with us on the show and thank you very much.

* The Village Blacksmith

Under a spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

Longfellow