

This is a tape for Dr. Whiting at Wrinch Memorial Hospital, June 15, 1970

Mrs. Olga Walker, Principal, Two Mile School interviews Dr. Whiting.

- Dr. Whiting, we would like you to tell us the history of Hazelton and the Hospital as you so well told us before.
- Well, when I spoke with you before, I started away back, didn't I?
- You said that Hazelton was probably here a thousand years.
- Yes, yes. Hazelton is a very old community and much older than some other communities around here, much older than Smithers and Prince Rupert, which were just railroad towns.
- You mentioned then that at that time that Hazelton and all the other villages were. Of course, Hazelton wasn't called that, it was called by its Indian name, I guess.
- I suppose so, but, there it was at the forks of the Skeena where the fishing was good and people lived there for many, many generations, I expect.
- Yes, and as you say there was no Prince Rupert, and Smithers and no Prince George.
- No railroad, no road, just trails, I guess.
- And then, of course, there was Port Essington.
- Port Essington, I believe, was one of the old Indian villages and it became the head, the port for the river-boats that came from Port Essington up as far as Hazelton. Around the turn of the century these river-boats were run.
- And then of course in the east the nearest, so called place was Fort George.
- Yes/

- Yes. Or Fort St. James was another Hudson Bay Trading post from away back.

- And the whole country was, just as you say trails, and then the motor transportation was kind of interesting. You mentioned that they had horses.

- Yes. They had horses and they had dogs and dog sleds in the winter and used dogs as pack animals all the year round.

- And you had mentioned, because the children really remember this, that a dog, a good pack dog, could carry 40 lbs.

- Yes. This is the figure that I heard.

- And of course, the horses naturally. Then you mentioned about the white people and they arrived around, between 1850 and 1860.

- Yes. Traders first and later other people.

- And you also mentioned the problems they brought with them.

- Oh yes! The white man brought lots of problems for the Indian people. Diseases that the Indian people had never come in contact with before. Small pox was an especially bad thing, but other diseases too. Tuberculosis was brought by the white man and measles which was a very deadly thing.

- It often wiped out whole villages, just about.

- Yes. The small pox would almost wipe out an entire village with it.

- It must have been terrible. And then you mention with the coming of the white people that's when the steamers started.

- Yes. Then the steamers started and the steamers ran until the railroads came.

- And that Hazelton was the head of navigation.

- Yes.

- So that's, I suppose, the name Hazelton was then, that was now beginning/

beginning, the word Hazelton.

- Actually, I don't know when they got the name Hazelton, but quite possibly it's a white man's name for sure, not a native name.

- I understand that it stands for hazelnut town.

- I understand that too, and there are a tremendous number of wild hazelnut bushes grow around here.

- We are really quite proud of the fact that our town is really named after its nuts.

- So anyway, you have mentioned that there is fur trading and you have also mentioned about the gold, the supplies.

- They had this gold discovery in Madison Creek and there was quite a gold rush in the late 1800's into Madison Creek. Although it was dwarfed by the later gold rush to the Yukon, but there was quite a move of miners into Madison Creek. One of perhaps the most important take-off points for the Madison Creek gold field was Hazelton where the trail that led overland to Babine and Tatlow Lake and on to Madison Creek.

- That's really something, and then as you say they had dancehalls I suppose, and bars.

- They had their bars alright, another one of the blessings that the white man brought to the Indian people.

- Well, there must have been a fair population then, at Madison Creek.

- I guess so, I guess so, at the height, but I don't think it lasted - like most gold rushes.

- And then you mentioned what about the pack horses in the winter time, that was interesting?

- I talked with a man once that used to run a pack train into Fort Babine. He spoke of the pass between Hazelton and Fort Babine, where the/

the snow would come early in the fall and lie late in the spring. And they used to have snow-shoes tied on the horses feet, not ordinary snow-shoes, but sacks filled with hay - bulky - that would give bulk to the horses' feet, so that they wouldn't sink so deeply into the snow.

- You mention, that also these pack horses carried everything. That was a freight line, I guess.

- Yes, yes. It was the only way of getting freight in was by pack horses, and so they took the mining machinery in disassembled on horses. And there are stories of them taking pianoes in, probably partly disassembled on the horses.

- I guess they would have to disassemble them somehow, trying to put a piano on a horse

- Not quite.

- And then of course you mentioned 1899 was a big date for Hazelton.

- Yes. That was the year when Dr. Wrinch first arrived, the pioneer medical missionary under the Methodist Church, came and started the medical work here. The only doctor in that country.

- You mentioned the only doctor to practice between here and Kamloops.

- I believe that is correct, yes.

- That really, you might say, put Hazelton on the map a long time ago.

- Yes.

- You mention he came by steamer. Where did Dr. Wrinch come from?

- He came from Belleville, Ontario.

- And then, of course, by rail to the coast and then by steamer.

- Steamer/

- Steamer up the coast, but then we have heard that he didn't come up the river by steamer, but came up in an Indian dugout canoe. I don't know why he didn't come up by steamer, maybe, it was that steamers weren't running that year or something.
- Maybe the water was too low.
- Maybe, something like that.
- I understand steamers ran only in very high water.
- There season would of necessity be short. They couldn't run in the winter when the river is frozen. They couldn't run if there were too many logs drifting down in high water, and so on.
- I was going to ask you if Dr. Tomlinson was in the area at that time or if he came later?
- I think he might have been in the area earlier than that. I can't speak very authoritatively about that.
- You did mention that Dr. Wrinch and Dr. Tomlinson did work together or at least knew each other.
- Knew each other and were contemporaries in the work here.
- Then you mentioned that 1901 was another big date for Hazelton.
- What was that?
- That was the first hospital.
- I'm not sure of the date of the first hospital.
- And that went on until, well of course the next big project in the Hazelton area was the building of the C.N.R. railroad.
- Yes. The railroad was completed, I think, the first though train was in 1913.
- That's to Hazelton only.
- No. That was through to Prince Rupert.
- From where?
- From Montreal.

- My goodness, that really was something and then of course to South Hazelton.
- An interesting date on the river, on the Skeena Crossing Bridge over the river was the date 1911, stamped in the cement there, at that point, as you can see it.
- I can. I have to get a picture of that. Then you mention that it was an especially important date for you too.
- Well that would be the year I was born, maybe that is why I remember it - not that I remember that.
- So then, Dr. Wrinch, I suppose, had many, many services here to do with the railroad, no doubt.
- It brought a lot of medical work to him and the people were patients with Dr. Wrinch. As soon as the railroad was operated the river-boat traffic ceased.
- Because the rail-road went the year round.
- Yes.
- And then you went on to say that in 1931 the new hospital was built.
- Yes, but this hospital that we are in now was built in 1931. Dr. Wrinch planned it and built it and so 1931 was 45 years ago.
- And you mentioned that it was a kind of L-shaped sort of surrounded the old hospital.
- Yes, that's right it was built around two sides of the old hospital and when the new hospital was finished, the old hospital was demolished.

- They left the basement of the old hospital and the ground floor and put a roof over it. They used the ground floor as a drying shed for years and years, for drying linen. The basement was used as a fruit cellar for years after the new hospital was in operation.

- For goodness sake, but of course, you have those arrangements in the new hospital now - at least in this hospital.

- Now we have electric dryers for the laundry.

- I suppose, the basement was useful as you say, for drying facilities and were operated that way until electricity came in.

- Yes.

- One would go with the other.

- When I came here first in 1939, they had electricity, but they generated it in their own private plant and it was only a very limited amount of power they had. It was just a lighting plant. They couldn't use it for any other purposes. *

- Certainly not for dryers, anyway.

- No, no.

- You mentioned that one interesting thing was that a nurse graduated from Hazelton. I thought that was very interesting.

- She is still living here in New Hazelton. She is on our staff still, and she's Frances Willan. She was one of the graduates of Dr. Wrinch's training school for nurses here.

- And you mentioned that for the last three months that she would have to go out.

- She would have her affiliation time in the other hospitals. Most likely, I believe in Vancouver, as part of her training.

- And, of course, there must have been other nurses too that graduated.

- I guess so. The only one I know is Frances Willan.
- That's really terrific. You also mentioned that Dr. Eric Austin was the next Dr. Wrinch hired here and he was here for some time too.
- Dr. Wrinch retired in 1935 and they had some short term doctors. Dr. Leonard Wrinch was in charge of the hospital for a while after his father left. Then Dr. Eric Austin came in 1938.
- Well, Dr. Wrinch was gone then?
- Yes.
- I see, and also I know what I was going to ask you, was that Dr. Wrinch was really quite an unusual person. He wasn't only a doctor, but he was also a Member of Parliament.
- Oh yes. He was a Member of Parliament. For some years he was a M.L.A. for this part of the world in Victoria, and he was a liberal and he was also a quite an active M.L.A., I believe, and did a very good job on his committee work and served the government well.
- He did alot for Hazelton because he was such an active part in the Parliament.
- Yes. There is somewhere around I know, a picture, a photograph of him officiating at the opening of the Hagwilget Bridge in the 1930's.
- Oh, that's when the Hagwilget Bridge was opened in, 1939.
- 1930's. I son't know which year, and Dr. Wrinch officiating there.
- Well, we'll have to find that one. Then there was a Dr. Large.
- Yes. Dr. Gedded Large still has an active medical practice in Prince Rupert. He is getting on in his years now. When he was a young man here, he was here for a time with Dr. Wrinch.
- And then, of course, later on wrote books.

- He has written this book, "The Skeena, River of Destiny." He is very well informed and has made quite a study of the history of this whole area.
- Of course, he is still alive, is he not?
- Oh yes! He is still practicing medicine on a slower pace than he used to.
- You, then of course, mentioned in 1941, the bridge was washed out. I guess that's when the real Hazelton started. You mention for a while there were two stations.
- Yes. There was New Hazelton and South Hazelton stations on the railroad and the way to get to the railroad from old town was to cross the low level bridge down at old Town that crosses the Bulkley River over to Mission Point Flats there, then up the hill to South Town. That was Hazelton's station nearest on the railroad. Somewhere in the early 1950's the bridge was washed out with the flood time and was never rebuilt.
- Was it 1940's or in 1936 that they had that great big flood?
- No. It was in the "40's" when we were here in 1939 and '40' we drove across that bridge many times.
- And they called that the low-level road.
- Yes. I don't know why they called it that. It was low-level compared to the present Hagwilget.
- But the Hagwilget Bridge wasn't built at that time?
- Oh yes.
- It was? So there were two bridges then.
- It was in the '30's' we said we had this picture of Dr. Wrinch.
- For a while Hazelton had two bridges.

- That's right.
- I didn't know that I used to think that when that washed out that was it.
- No. They co-existed maybe for I don't know how long, for several years, the two bridges.
- When you arrived - that was the next big topic - of you arriving. It was interesting how you heard about Hazelton and what made you think about coming here and so forth.
- Well, I was interested in it because it was a mission hospital, a church hospital. I came up to Hazelton in 1939. My wife and I were married that same year. We had been with these church mission hospitals my whole medical career.
- You mentioned that of course, your home was in Toronto and that your trip was rather interesting with your car.
- Yes, that was in late December and early January of 1939. I drove from Toronto out to Hazelton. We arrived here January 9th, 1939, when I first saw Hazelton and the Hospital.
- You were very brave to drive this part of the country in January.
- Well, I don't know. I had no real trouble at all. The roads - there were no paved roads, no blacktop from somewhere around Ashcroft, north. There was a gravel road, but it was in the winter time, it was snow-covered and it didn't matter.
- That's when it was paved!
- Yes. It was paved with snow. Yes, I got on just fine except, I remember the day I was driving from Vanderhoof to Houston, it was snowing heavily and I got to Houston and put up in the hotel there that night. The next morning the roads were all clogged with snow and no traffic could get through, and I lay over ~~in~~ for a day in Houston, then the plough somehow came through. Then we came on to Hazelton.

- The snow ploughs were a little different in those days too.
- The machinery was different.
- But they ploughed them just same. That's the main thing. You mentioned that by the time you arrived Al Benson was doing a great business as a ...
-Taxidriver. He was the taxi driver.
- And of course of great service to the hospital.
- Oh yes, he brought us many patients. There were very few cars. Very few people had cars in those days. I don't think there were more than maybe a couple of dozen cars in the whole area around here so the taxi was very busy. People walked much more than they do now. They walked for miles. The standard way to get anywhere was to walk there.
- Its really interesting because one person was telling us how they used to sleigh ride. The children would sleigh-ride and course sue the old road to Hazelton. So I said, 'they must have really used that big hill and what about traffic' 'Oh', they said 'that was no problem there were two cars a day.
- Not much traffic.
- So it was quite safe. Of course, Madison Creek, all that had all finished a long time before that.
- You mentioned also regarding a little part about the nurses residence. The south part.
- If you look at the nurses' residence to-day, you can see that the south part of it is older looking than the rest of it. That was the residence, the old part was the only residence in 1939.
- And that's where Mr. Bennett and Judy Scott live right now.
- That's where they live now.
- The new part was built in 1945.
- Somewhere in the 1940's the new part of the residence was built.

- And then, of course, as you already mentioned that Dr. Wrinch had retired in 1936.

- Yes.

- So, Dr. Austin took his place at that time.

- Well, Dr. Austin didn't get here until a couple of years later.

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I think Dr. Leonard Wrinch, son of the old doctor filled in for two years.

- He didn't stay retired very long for he left this world in 1939.

- 1939. I think when we were here that we got word that he had died.

- ~~Then you went on to say that transportation to places like Kitwanga and all kinds of places along the way were entirely by rail.~~

- There was no road from Hazelton to Rupert in those days other than the railroads. You could drive as far as Kitseguekla along the route of the present highways more or less, but it was just a dirt road with grasses growing up between the two ruts. And when you got to Kitseguekla that was the end of the road. You couldn't drive any further. If you wanted to go to Kitwanga, you had to go by train. This is what we used to do all the time.

- But actually speaking Kitwanga, but of course, Kitwanga village would have been there long ago. ~~And then the Indians, they would go by trails and everything. They would have to cross the Skeena too.~~

- They would have their dug-out canoes.

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- Well yes. So then we went on to say that ... of course, you told a beautiful story about one of your unusual things that happened at the hospital. When, I believe, it was you, that was called to a maternity case.

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Oh yes. We brought the woman to the hospital here on one of the speeders that travelled along the railroad tracks and when she got here, she was delivered of twins, two little baby girls.

- Are these people still in this area or have they moved on.

- I think they have moved away from this area, but not too far away.

- I don't suppose, well it doesn't matter, if you'd rather not say?
- No, we had better not say.
- Would there be any other incidents worthy of interest to mention regarding your practice here. Of course, you'll have seen a lot of growth.
- Oh yes many changes.

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 - The Indian people have progressed remarkably in the meantime since 1939. Relations between the races have improved greatly. The races mix socially much better.

- ~~It really is fantastic, isn't it, how humanity just blends after a while.~~
- It takes time but then it happens. The co-education of the Indian children and the white children has done much to accomplish this end. *Mutual understanding leads to mutual respect and regard.*

- ~~It really has. I think I would say the knowledge of Indian people of the white, shall we say, and the knowledge white of the Indian.~~
- ~~Yes and vice versa. Mutual understanding leads to mutual respect and regard.~~

- ~~I suppose you have had calls and personal calls to all the villages and been inside them in all kinds of circumstances.~~

- ~~Oh, yes, oh yes. Indeed some of the circumstances happy and some very sad.~~ *These are happy*
 We've seen our share of tragedy and heart-ache and disappointment, death.

- ~~Yes, always one or the other.~~ 13

- Yes.

- ~~I suppose, well of course, your word to the wise your warnings or your outlook toward what the future here - naturally caution to the children to watch the usual accidents that occur with children.~~

- Yes, yes.

- Just one more question. Did you ever or have you during your practice in the last, later years. I suppose you will have brushed with people being involved with this sad thing of drugs. Would you say that it's been noticeable, on the decline or on the increase, or is it?

- If in drugs you mean alcohol, or this sort of thing. We do have some of the

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the other drugs. There's been a lot of talk about other drugs, marijuana, heroin and so on, but the worst drug and the biggest problem by far is alcohol, and it is a drug and it is the cause of many times as much heartache as these other drugs, and they are sad things too, the other drugs. But, the real heartbreaker is ~~xxxxx~~ the way alcohol is used and abused all the time, every week.

- Dr. Whiting, you mentioned that the statistics say certain things about alcohol.

- ~~Yes~~ First of all people that are concerned about alcohol and health make the alarming statement that alcohol is killer number three. That in one way or another alcohol is the third commonest cause of death in our society and heart disease is the commonest, cancer is the next commonest and alcohol related diseases, violence, highway deaths and so on is the third commonest cause of death. In British Columbia, ~~according to government statistics~~, which we would expect to be fairly conservative because the government likes to think it makes money out of the sale of alcohol, but according to government statistics published just two or three years ago, there are 70,000 alcoholics in B.C. *This is chronic alcoholism* 14

- That's chronic alcoholism?

- Yes, chronic alcoholism.

- As compared to you mentioned earlier, even to chronic heroin users.

- Yes, the same set of statistics said that there were probably 12,000 to 14,000 heroin addicts in British Columbia as compared to 70,000 alcoholics.

- What do you think is the cause of, do you think it is man trying to escape from his problems or making excuses for himself, or what do you think, just a personal opinion?

- Oh, a personal opinion. *my personal opinion* I guess, is that man's a sinner and this works 2

works itself out in so many ways. The profit motive has done so much to promote the sale of alcohol and still is. Time magazine has the most beautiful coloured 'ads' in Time magazine in the liquor 'ads' invariably they present the drinking custom as a glamorous thing, very attractive to the young people. Of course, they never show any of the heartaches that goes along with this.

- I know that T.V. practically that any of these little paly, movies, have just so much.
- Its the thing to do and everybody jokes about the durnk. The drunk is the saddest thing you see in our society and you see it all through. Its not something to laugh at but everybody laughs at someone who is drunk. +3
- It is interesting to note that tobacco 'ads' and smoking in general has been under control a bit.
- A little bit, and tobacco is a killer too and I'm glad that they put a warning in the 'ads' that its harmful to health and it is harmful to health. But no such warning in the liquor 'ads' that it is killer number three.
- So anyway, I understand that the little party that the community had for you they had an interesting gift for you.
- Indeed they did. They had several gifts, what.....?
- I'm thinking of the big book.
- Yes. Some folks got together and collected pictures of hundred of babies that I had delivered, although I Haven't delivered them. I stand by and let the mother deliver the baby.

- I guess so!

- I believe in the mother having the baby, not the doctor having the baby.

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But, anyway this book that was presented to me, and it's just a lovely gift, and it's got pictures of several hundred babies that were born in the hospital here and in the hospital at Bella Coola, while I was there.

- You were there too? years between 1940 and 1955. I was away from

- Yes, for fourteen years, between 1940 and 1955, I was at Bella Coola.

Hazleton for those fourteen years and then returned in 1955.

- So you were working both places?
- ~~No, no.~~ I was away from Hazelton for these fourteen years and then returned in 1955.
- Oh! That's interesting, I didn't know that. Oh my, that would be interesting. Did you have a total, did you have a total of the babies?
- ~~No,~~ I don't know how many are in the book and I don't think we've got them all, but they've done a wonderful job of trying to get very many pictures.
- That's wonderful. I wondered if they had maybe submitted names of those that they couldn't find pictures of.
- There is a long list of the names of the Bella Coola babies in the book and I think there are more people on the list than have pictures. 15
- And so, I understand, you are going to retire into the beautiful Okanagan Valley.
- Yes, that's our plan.
- And just grow beautiful apples.
- Well, we have a small fruit farm, that's less than two acres in size. That doesn't sound very big, but it has 160 fruit trees on it and that does sound big.
- My goodness, you are going to be busy. Oh my, I guess you have every variety.
- Yes. Apples, pears, peaches, plums, apricots and cherries.
- Oh, I'll have to get your address. It sounds beautiful. That is a beautiful place to retire to. Well, I thank you very kindly Dr. Whiting. I think this has been just tremendously enjoyable.
- Well, it's been a pleasure for me and an honour for me to be asked to speak to the children and I've enjoyed it very much and they are bright children. They were not backward about asking questions and making remarks. It was a very enjoyable morning there at the school.