

Transcript for Laurel packing house interview

Land acknowledgment by Marshall at the beginning:

M: before we begin, I'd like to remind everyone that the land that this presentation was filmed on is the traditional unceded and still occupied territory of the Syilx Okanagan people. For over 11,000 years, at the very least, Kelowna and the entirety of the Okanagan has been the traditional Syilx Nation. Unceded means of the land was never given over by treaty or anything like that, and when I say it's still occupied, that's to remind everyone that the Syilx are a nation who are still alive and well.

Introduction:

D: Hi everyone, my name is Dora Chen, and I am a teacher candidate from the UBC Okanagan, and we are here at Laurel packing house today. I am so excited to learn about the history of Okanagan orchards, and the gentleman standing next to me is Marshall. He is a well-experienced education assistant that works for Kelowna Museums. With his vast knowledge and deep understanding of the Okanagan orchards, he is going to share with us some fascinating insights into this topic.

Q: What is the Laurel packing house?

M: Well, nowadays the Laurel packing house is home to the Okanagan Wine and Orchard Museum as well as being a popular event space for the City of Kelowna. However, beginning in 1918 and running all the way to the 1970s, this space was actually a packing house where fruit, mostly apples, was processed here coming from our local Orchards and being packed into fruit boxes and shipped off across Canada and mostly across the British Empire in the early days.

Origins of Okanagan Orchards

M: With the arrival of European settlers in the 1860s, specifically a man named Father Pandosy and his crew, coming into the valley with the specific purpose of Catholicizing the Indigenous population. Well, they brought along with them some fruit seeds and planted them - they weren't the large industrial Orchards that we know today. They were smaller and more personal; however, they were the beginnings of the orcharding industry as we knew it. The Okanagan has a reputation as the orchard city, the Garden City, a place where historically it was advertised you could just throw down your seeds and watch your orchard grow before you. Was that true? Not entirely, but it did work, they got people to come out and start their own ranches - fruit ranches.

Land that had previously been used for cattle was irrigated and subdivided and then sold as land for orcharding, fruit ranching. So, we get that start with a lot of men coming in, particularly from England. A lot of those men were now here with a plot of land that was perfect for growing fruit and with enough money to hire, generally Indigenous workers, who were intimately familiar with the land, and the orcharding process already. They went on to start their own Orchards. Many of which ended up being quite successful.

What fruit naturally grow in the Okanagan?

M: Well, it may be easy to think fruits like apples, peaches, apricots all grow here naturally, since they do so well in our fertile, rich soil, however that's not true. Things like apples, cherries, plums, they were all brought here from somewhere else. Usually around the mid to late 19th century fruits were brought in, however they weren't native to the area. For thousands of years however, the Indigenous Syilx people, who have lived here for at least 11,000 years with upper estimates placing them at 40,000 years of civilization in this area, have for thousands of years intentionally planted and harvested Saskatoon berries in small orchards.

Saskatoon Berries:

M: Small Orchards with Saskatoon berries, or Siya in Nsyilxcen, the Syilx language, were planted intentionally and harvested because each family needed about 100 pounds dried up to survive through the winter, but also because with just a little bit of training the branches will grow incredibly straight and make wonderful shafts for arrows, a very important plant that grows completely naturally here in the Okanagan. Another plant that grows very naturally here in the Okanagan, that you might have seen before, are these sumac berries.

D: Can I touch them?

M: Yeah of course, give them a sniff. They smell really nice.

D: They have this beautiful, sweet, herbal smell.

M: Almost citrusy, Yeah.

Orchards Irrigation Systems

D: I'm quite curious about the Irrigation system for the orchards. Since Okanagan has a dry, desert-like climate, where and how do the farmers get water for their orchards?

M: Large flumes, almost water slides were constructed historically, things like this metal here even wood in the past, and these large water slide type flumes would go all the way up to the top of the mountains, down to the farms. You can see here an example of a water trough. And this would be the final destination for that water. And it would then go and irrigate the plants below.

Impacts on Okanagan Salmon:

D: Since they are taking water away from the creek, I'm wondering, if there are problems for salmon and other creatures living in the creek and how is that impacting their life?

M: The salmon particularly have been very affected very hard by the changing of the Okanagan region. Mission creek in particular used to be slow and winding, which is exactly the kind of water that Salmon love, however it's not very good for building houses and golf courses. So over the years, mission creek has been transformed to be very fast, and very, very, very straight. Which is bad for salmon, as well as just trends of global warming, causing an increase in water temperature that salmon don't like. The indigenous diet for thousands of years of the Syilx people was 85% salmon. And so losing that has been a huge loss. Not just for the indigenous population but also, for the region in general.

Coping with Pests and diseases:

D: What are some of the challenges that orchard farmers face, and how have these challenges been addressed over time, in terms of pests and diseases?

M: Well, actually, the Okanagan is unique in that it is the only region that has apple orchard that has not yet been affected by the apple maggot, so we're quite lucky in that regard; however, the codling moth is one invasive pest species. And another would be birds and other bugs such as Starlings. And we deal with these the same manner that you would typically deal with pest, things like pesticides, fungicides, things of that nature, however there is an ongoing demand for organic grown fruits, (fruits grown without those pesticides).

Harvesting Fruits:

M: Dora, Thank you for putting on the apple picking bag so I can demonstrate how it works. As you can see, these apple picking bags, which have been worn for about a hundred years are still used today in Orchards.

D: They are fairly big, and I wonder why it's hollow and it doesn't have a bottom

M: Well, that's because simply dropping the fruit through will cause it to fall out. These little drawstrings on the side hook into hooks on the side here and here.

D: Oh, there's drawstrings!

M: And allow fruit to be collected inside this bag. When the bag is filled, you can lift up the drawstrings and allow the apples to fall out.

D: Wow! That's so easy!

Relationship between Kelowna & the Orchard Industry

D: How has the orchard industry shaped Kelowna as a community and what role does it play in the development of the city?

M: I think it is impossible to separate the history of Kelowna from the history of our orcharding. We've one as far as being known colloquially as the orchard city. Turning this desert landscape into a veritable gem of the country. Well, how do you do that? It's through the use of water certainly, and it's through littering our landscapes with orchards and Vineyards, which has allowed in tandem, to grow with the budding and now fairly successful wine industry in the Okanagan. Allowing for that, we create an environment that allows for tourism and grows the economy in a way that goes hand in hand with the orcharding industry.

