

**SP FC 3803 U54 N\_5-4-trk1a Allan Coleman.mp3**  
**Recorded 196?**  
**Transcribed by Donna Sacuta, November 2024**

**Interviewer** [00:00:00] Barbers' Union Local?

**Allan Coleman** [00:00:02] 120.

**Interviewer** [00:00:03] Mr. Coleman has a few facts on the union in B.C.

**Allan Coleman** [00:00:11] You want just the facts of B.C.?

**Interviewer** [00:00:12] The one that you—

**Allan Coleman** [00:00:13] We were originally organized in 1899. One of the officers who played a very prominent part from 1909 was the late Mr. Clarence Herrett.

**Interviewer** [00:00:26] How do you spell that?

**Allan Coleman** [00:00:26] H-E-R-R-E-T-T. He was secretary of this local for 30 years and was very prominent in the establishment of the local as such.

**Interviewer** [00:00:49] When did you say in the international—

**Allan Coleman** [00:00:53] The international was born in 1886, and at that time Canada was sparsely populated. The Trades and Labor Congress at that time could not, due to the fact of funds, were not able to organize the unorganized. They suggested to us that we at that time ask the American Federation of Labor to assist us, which they did.

**Interviewer** [00:01:17] When did your union affiliate, the Vancouver local affiliate with the international?

**Allan Coleman** [00:01:22] 1909.

**Interviewer** [00:01:27] Do you remember anything, were there any major problems or major issues in the Barbers' Union that you remember?

**Allan Coleman** [00:01:38] Well, of course, in 1909, that's a little bit before my time, however, the problems of the unions in those days were similar to what we have today, only possibly in that time more pronounced. A service trade such as we are, which embraces the employer and employee in one union. Although while they meet separately, we do meet and as a matter of convenience and finances that we function together. Problems at that time would be, I believe, the fact that in that time they only had the journeymen organized. The shop owner was not a part of the union.

**Interviewer** [00:02:28] When did they come in?

**Allan Coleman** [00:02:31] I would say that it would be approximately 1940 when the shop owners came in as an integral part of our union and were embraced as a member of the union, can hold office and has the same privileges as the journeymen. I might mention that we do meet separately. The shop owner and the journeymen do not meet together to

decide any issues. The journeyman meets and decides his wages and the shop owner meets and decides his prices and that sort of thing.

**Interviewer** [00:03:03] Do you have any negotiation? The negotiation takes place in a sense between the journeymen and the owners.

**Allan Coleman** [00:03:12] That's correct, yes.

**Interviewer** [00:03:13] So one part of the union negotiates with the other?

**Allan Coleman** [00:03:15] That's right. Then we come for ratification to the main body, to the union. A committee is struck by the shop owners and a committee is struck by the journeymen. They negotiate together, and when they have come to an agreement, then we take that to the union meeting and have it ratified as to what the requirements of what they asked for. They're the final judges, yes.

**Interviewer** [00:03:44] What about before? Before this merger. Before taking in the owners, how did it run then?

**Allan Coleman** [00:03:52] Well, at that time, the journeymen, of course, negotiated on their own. The wages were very low.

**Allan Coleman** [00:03:58] Barbers' wages, union wages were as low as \$17 a week. That would be prior to 1940, much prior to that. When the haircuts were \$0.50, which was approximately in that period, the union wage was \$27.50, and that was when the time that they came together to decide to work out a solution for themselves by a marriage of convenience, so to speak, in order to further the interests of both the shop owner and the journeymen.

**Interviewer** [00:04:42] Do you remember anything else? Have you always been affiliated with the Canadian Trades and Labor Congress?

**Allan Coleman** [00:04:53] Yes we have been affiliated with them. As a matter of fact, I was the public relations officer for them for some time. It was the Vancouver District Labor Council, and I did act for one year as public relations, on the public relations for the B.C. Fed [B.C. Federation of Labor].

**Interviewer** [00:05:11] When was that?

**Allan Coleman** [00:05:19] I would say that about 1959-1960 somewhere in there.

**Interviewer** [00:05:31] Did you ever have any strikes?

**Allan Coleman** [00:05:32] No. We've never had a strike in our history, no. We settle all things within ourselves. We've never had arbitration. We've never had conciliation. We've never had a picket line. I don't say that we never will, but we have never had the occasion that we do settle things within ourselves.

**Interviewer** [00:05:54] You never have much problem with non-union barbers?

**Allan Coleman** [00:05:57] Yes, they're always a problem. We have at the present time many non-union shops. It's a free country. They can charge what they wish. We endeavor

to show them that it's of their own benefit to belong to the union, and we have been quite successful in this because we have approximately in the whole province, approximately 90 percent organization. Probably in Vancouver proper, which is the worst trouble spot, we have about 85 percent organized.

**Interviewer** [00:06:34] Anything else that strikes you as important? How active a part did your union play in various labor issues? Issues the effected labor as a whole? For instance, things like the general strike in Vancouver in 1919?

**Allan Coleman** [00:06:58] I don't recall what part. We would do what we could. As you know, we're not a wealthy union. We would do what we could at that time, but what was done, I can't honestly tell you. But in any program that affects labor, for instance, I was over to Port Alberni here just last week and I made it a point to go to their picket line and offer them encouragement and told them that I was a labor man myself and wished them every success. Again, a tangible way, we are at times operating under fiducial spending. We're spending more than we are taking in as our dues are very low and we naturally do not have the money to be of tangible support to many of these organizations.