

## CITIES AND COMMUNITIES: THE ROLE OF ORAL HISTORY

Chair: Alan Artibise -- Professor, Dept. of History,  
University of Victoria

Keith Peterson -- Latah County Historical Society,  
Moscow, Idaho

Daphne Marlatt -- author, Opening Doors and  
Steveston Recollected

John Gilpin -- Ph.D candidate, Dept. of History,  
University of Alberta

"Small Towns--Interpreting Oral History  
Source Material"

by Keith Peterson

I'd like to begin this presentation with a brief introduction into work that Mary Reed, who was also here today, and I are doing on six small towns in Washington and Idaho and then briefly explain how and if oral history can be useful to our work. The Palouse County of eastern Washington and northern Idaho was settled in the 1870s, and by the turn of the century the shape of the region was fairly well established. Most trading communities had come and many had come and gone, based upon the need of the people and the whims of the railroad builders.

To look at a map of the region today, you see a document dotted with the names of many towns with no physical remains. Some of the early towns however did

survive and six of these huddle around a thirty mile arbitrary boundary which we call the state line. Three of them-- Palouse, Pullman and Uniontown are in Washington and they are paired with their "sister communities" in Idaho-- Potlatch, Moscow and Genesee. The communities range in population from 400 to 20,000 when all the students are in town. After living in one of those towns for a few years, Mary and I realized we knew very little about any of them. It did not take long after a quick search of the literature of American urban history to find out that in fact people know very little about these size communities anywhere in the country. In recent years American historians have spent so much effort studying cities that a new field called "urban history" has evolved. But most American urban history is just that, it deals almost totally with large urban areas. With few exceptions American historians have not been interested in documenting small town experiences. Yet the historian Page Smith has written: "If we

except the family and church, the basic form of social organization and experience by the vast majority of Americans up into the early decades of the 20th century was the small town."

Some significant work has been done on colonial villages and mid-western towns, but the new urban history has largely passed western towns by. Who makes decisions in these towns? Did local talents become less autonomous with improved transportation links, the rise of chain stores or increased governmental authority at County, State and Federal levels? Are small towns really socially simple communities? Why do some ethnic groups settle in some towns but not in others nearby? What about boosterism and the role of the women's organizations in community development? Why do some towns grow and others languish? Finally while there have been individual case studies of numerous cities and a few towns, we did not know enough about the comparative development of communities. Did towns develop in vacuums or did one community have an impact upon the development of another? If we believe that western towns are deserving of more study, then we must develop a methodology for such study.

Yet historians attempting to study such communities can become frustrated. I may give you an example or two. Much of the most important, although laboriously written urban research in recent years, has been undertaken by quantifiers using census records. However all the towns in our study, as is typical of western towns, were founded after the 1870 Federal Census. By 1880 only one town in our study was large enough to have a separate listing. The 1890 Federal Census was destroyed by fire. By the time of the 1900 Census five of our towns were already well developed, and only the 1910 census is the latest one open to the public. Thus it is really impossible for us to use census material to show mobility or migration patterns or in other ways to utilize them in

tracing a town's development. To give you another example: many official town records have casually been thrown away over the years. Unlike the official records of large cities, these small town records are usually handled by volunteer city councils and whether or not they have managed to make it through the years, is merely a matter of chance.

But I don't want to belabour this point of lack of records that can be used to try to establish what was going on in small towns: court and probate records, newspaper accounts, minute books, church, lodge, and civic club records, photographs, plot maps, artifacts, oral histories, and the list could go on and on. In fact, I guess, one of the problems that we are having is not the lack of records, but the bulk of them and how we deal with this overwhelming amount of material. I doubt that the small towns that we are studying are unique in that regard. But it normally takes a good amount of time to find these materials because they have not yet been deposited in archives and handily catalogued. It is because of this that so little work has been done in this field. Because these types of records have been so hard to find it seems that much of what has been recently passed for social and urban history is not social at all because historians are unwilling to go out and seek information that is not in the library. Consequently many social historians have become quantifiers, laboriously searching through available statistical records. But "social" to me connotes people, and too much social history really tells us very little about people. One cannot squeeze social information from a tomb stone or from a census record. Therefore we are fortunate in one sense when dealing with the comparatively recent history of a small western town because we do have a primary source of information that can truly tell us about the social development of the communities, oral history informants.

We all know that oral history can be used to fill in gaps in documentary evidence and we all know that it can be used to add color to our narratives. For example there is a story that is often told among Latah County informants about the founding of Potlatch, the lumber company in town, in 1905. Moscow, the biggest town in the county at that time, fully expected that the gigantic Weyerhauser sawmill would be located in their city which they not so humbly called the "queen" city of the "Palouse." But Bill Derry who was the general manager of the Potlatch Lumber Company had a slightly different idea as one informant has noted. A group of directors of the lumber company were meeting in Moscow to decide where to locate the factory. Old Bill Derry came in from the woods, pulled off his boots and began drying his feet and stockings by the stove. When he heard the directors discussing Moscow as the site of the mill, he jumped up barefooted, went to the table where a large map lay, picked up a pencil and said in his thick Irish brogue: "Gentlemen, there is not enough water in Moscow to baptize a bastard, the mill will go here." He then punched a hole in the map, exactly where Potlatch now stands. Of course Bill Derry was very familiar with the map. We have never been able to verify that story. I personally doubt that it ever took place exactly like that. But to ignore such oral history accounts is to miss a good amount of local color and tradition and beyond that we could write pages and pages which never state as succinctly as this does as to why the mill was not located in Moscow.

There is nothing wrong with using oral history to plug gaps or to add color, but unfortunately this is the only way most historians of today are found to utilize this truly outstanding primary source. To most historians oral history is still non-traditional and not relied on to the extent it should. Too often historians will use oral history as a fine collection of photographs.

Once a manuscript has been written, they will spend a couple of hours browsing through the photographs to plug pretty pictures into their book. It is not clear to them that non-traditional sources like photographs and oral history can be just as valuable as a research tool as newspapers or census records or any of the other traditional sources. Oral history informants can tell us things that are not written in any type of documents. For example in our study we have found that the depression really hit the Palouse the hardest in the 1920s, and by the time of the 1930s most people would not have known that they were in a great depression if they had read about it. Oral history informants have also told us how things work: sawmills, factories, threshing machines and so forth. Information that we at least had never been able to find written down in any place. Informants will often mention a topic that a historian would have never thought of inquiring about if he or she only sat in an archives. For oral history forces us to look at issues in an entirely different way than reading documents does.

If someone had miraculously lived to be 200 and some and grown up in a colonial village, had a historian known he was living he would not have ignored such a valuable resource. In fact, it would be incredible folly not to interview a person simply because we harbor some notions about the frailty of human memory. And yet there are people who purport to be historians running around late 19th and 20th century topics, who had an opportunity to speak to just such informants and who did not do so. It is time that "social" historians become truly social. The intensive use of oral history can greatly enhance our knowledge of the social development of small western towns. In fact I would find it difficult to accept as serious history any written record of western urban areas or small towns that did not make extensive use of oral history materials.

I do not want to dwell on our project

overly long, suffice it to say that we are fortunate to live in an area that has three very large oral history collections, totalling well over a thousand hours of tape, one of which was very finely collected for the Whitman County Historical Society, largely by Margaret Knight. We are utilizing many of these as well as written reminiscences and transcripts of interviews conducted with pioneers of the 1930s and 1940s. It is no exaggeration to say that these first person accounts are our most valuable resources.

There are two fundamental drawbacks that I should mention about these rich records, however. One lies in the fact that all the collections consist almost totally of life history interviews and we will still need, despite the vast amount of material, to do more interviewing on more specific topics. Further because of the sheer volume of the material available, we find that we cannot make use of the collection unless the tapes are transcribed or at least extensively indexed because we simply don't have time to listen to every tape of every old timer. And I think that this is a problem, that too often oral historians spend so much attention on the pre-interview and getting the interview that we still, despite people haranguing about it over and over again, do not spend enough time to make our collections accessible to the public.

"Let Me See with Your Eyes--Vancouver  
East"

by Daphne Marlatt

I thought what I would do is tell you about the project, how Carole Itter, my colleague and I operated in it, give you a history of the project itself. First of all, this is not an oral history collected by two women who are oral historians. We are, by profession, artists. Carole is a visual artist and

a writer, and I am also a writer. We are, however, both interested in oral history. We came at it as amateurs, with an amateur interest. We came on it more or less by chance. I received a call from Bill Langlois who was then editor of Sound Heritage, asking me if I would like to edit an issue. During the course of the project, which took about two years, Derek Reimer took over from Bill. As it happened, I had just moved into Vancouver East. I had been living in it for 6 months when he phoned me, and I said right away: "Well, the obvious area to do an oral history on is this neighbourhood." Carole had been living in the neighbourhood for six years by then, and I asked her to join me on it. We both wanted to find out more about what we thought was our neighbourhood, although in very obvious ways it was not "ours." It clearly had a long history that preceded us and it obviously had a culture that was different from our own WASP background. So that is the first point I want to make. We were in it, we were in the middle of it, but we were also distinct from it.

Because we were not oral historians, we were anxious about accuracy. We took the "history" part of oral history very seriously. We did a lot of research, reading other oral histories, then historical books about various ethnic minorities, for instance, Adachi's The Enemy That Never Was and Morton's In A Sea of Sterile Mountains. Certain sociological studies too, such as Novak's The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics and local history, Matthews' Early Vancouver which is a fantastic history of a city. We also looked at a range of local pamphlets and small books. We cross checked as much of the stories we were told as we could, by going through the backfiles of local newspapers, consulting the Historic Photos Division of the public library, checking old city directories and consulting whatever labour histories we could find. All this formed a sort of support net for the information derived from people's life stor-

ies. That information being more fragmentary but also much more vital and moving.

When we began interviewing, we felt we should make a sociological study of the neighbourhood, and so derived a list of standard questions which we meant to put to all our interviewees. Accuracy and standardization were our initial bugbears. These included questions of parentage, the old country, date of immigration, occupation, schooling, religion, membership in social groups like the Ukrainian Community Center or Chinese Benevolent Society or the Italian Origin Societies. Because we were women and mothers of young children, we were particularly interested in ethnic diet, various cooking methods, home medicine, traditional festive food, attitudes to schools, methods of home gardening, survival skills like mushroom gathering, dairying on False Creek flats, raising chickens. We quickly abandoned the universal list however when we realized that people had stories to tell us, stories in both the sense of life stories which are sociological questions only interrupted or forestalled, and stories in a sense of anecdotes, tales they enjoyed telling, tales they had been told before either within the family or on the block or in larger groupings. There was often a very affectionate, sometimes a still angry telling of tales which gave a whole new list of things we had to cross check: for instance, characters in the neighbourhood, both heroes and eccentrics, brothels, bootleg joints, shoot-outs, the 1918 flu epidemic, the longshoremen's strike of 1935, Hoggan's Alley, the Japanese evacuation, certain groceries or bakeries the whole community took pride in. Here it was a matter of sorting out exaggeration from fact. And there were certain topics and themes that would be volunteered over and over: the local theatres, trusting one's neighbours, bootlegging, the cultural mosaic, and which streets were ethnic settlements.

It became clear to us that a portrait

of the neighbourhood could only be drawn from overlaid portraits of many individuals' lives. We kept some of our original questions, more or less as a way of keeping our own record straight. After those initial locating questions we then let each interviewee tell us what they had to tell us, their life stories with prompting and a certain amount of guidance from us. So we were basically after two things at once. The first was the feel of the times of the neighbourhood--the texture of the daily life of each ethnic group, a sense of how the district looked in a particular period--in other words, the collective oral history. In a novel this would be the background of the setting. And then secondly what amounts to the foreground, the individual's life story, the shape of his or her experience.

Methodology: Well, it was a large project. We visited some 50 people in depth, about 70 people in total, not counting meetings with others who then decided against being interviewed. This was a problem in certain ethnic communities. Each recording session lasted about an hour and a half.

We ended up with 200 hours of tape and a transcript, spaciously typed, of over 3000 pages. We began interviewing in January 1977 and the book came out, I think, in late 1979. It took about 2 years altogether. We gathered so much information and misinformation that it became necessary to keep track of everything so as not to confuse ourselves and our interviewees. We kept detailed workbooks for this purpose.

Procedure: We tried to stay within one ethnic community, finding out as much information as we could about it, doing as much cross-checking as we could before going on to the next. We interviewed within the following communities: Italian, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, Yugoslavian, Black and Ukrainian communities. We could only find one individual that was still living from the original largely WASP enclave of Strathcona, and he moved there as a child from New West-

minster in 1898, or at least he was the only one we could find who would give us an interview. We did meet a couple of elderly women of that group but they were very loath to be recorded. We failed to contact any Gypseys or Swedes, although both of these groups were referred to often.

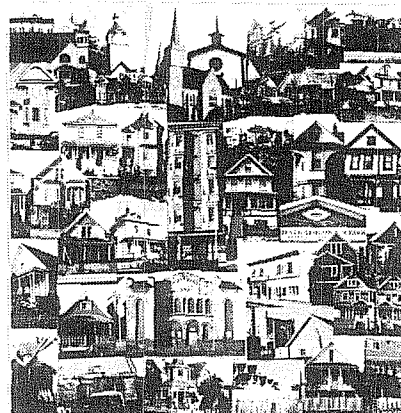
Also it took us a while to get the feel for each ethnic community. To figure out who the spokespersons were, what the politics was—there were various rival groups within each community. Who we wanted to interview and who we were able to interview did not always overlap, unfortunately. We made initial contacts by telephone or by mail saying who had referred us and what we were doing and why for what purpose, what particular help we felt that particular individual could give us in filling out our picture of the neighbourhood, etc. And I think it was helpful to us that our basic push was to do a portrait of the neighbourhood because I think that made our interviewees feel less threatened. That is that each was contributing something to the collective portrait in the form of telling us their life stories but the focus was on the collectivity.

If the person was interested in being interviewed, we made a preliminary visit with a non-recording session. It gave us a sense of how willing the interviewee was, how articulate, and what his or her experience might contribute. At first we tried to avoid having them tell us any stories because we were very afraid that once they told us a story, they would never repeat it. Then we discovered that people enjoyed retelling stories so that was clearly not a problem except in a few instances. Then there were two, sometimes three recording visits and sometimes a wrap up visit.

Editing: Well, the transcribing was a huge job. The Archives supplied us with an excellent transcriber, Lorraine Buchanon, who had a music degree and a very accurate ear. So the first phase

## OPENING DOORS

### VANCOUVER'S EAST END



## SOUND HERITAGE

### Volume VIII, Nos. 1 & 2



of transcribing was absolutely primary. She transcribed everything including pauses and "ahs" and false sentence starts. As the project went on and the piles of transcript pages began mounting, this was changed to a more economical approach. Leave out false starts and "ahs" which would be edited out of the book anyway. The problem with this was that it meant leaving some choices of what was significant to Lorraine to make, especially in those passages where self-censoring was evident. As we started running out of time with the publication deadline to reach and the project grown beyond budget limits at the Archives, this was further changed to transcribe only those parts pretty definitely to be used in the book.

The editing was mostly a matter of cutting. We went through several drastic cuts because the material we had even after the first editing was much

more than a double issue of Sound Heritage could cope with. We had to be much more selective than we wanted to be as this involved selecting for content and losing some passages which were told uniquely. We often had to splice to get different parts of the interview together and were careful to be as close to the original context as possible.

But the real dilemma facing us as editors was how much to clean up grammar for the sake of publication. Carole and I had many debates about this. We both felt that this was an "oral history," that the full significance of what was told lay not first in what, but in how it was told. The publication should be faithful to that how. We felt for instance that in many of the oral histories that we did read, that too much had been taken out and that the actual character, the texture of the voices had been lost. There was a kind of suspicious uniformity in speech. Now some of that happens when you have a single transcriber anyway, because the transcriber is the one who essentially makes the choices where sentences begin and end because people speaking orally do not speak in sentences. So when you have a single transcriber, you do tend to get a certain uniformity anyway. But we felt that we wanted to retain as much of the individual quality of these voices as possible.

On the other hand we often interviewed people whose first language was not English, whose English on the page with the expectation of proper English gave a false impression of their actual articulateness. That is, they were often highly articulate in their own language but quite stilted in English. And these were people who highly valued education and fluency. Yet if we cleaned up their grammar we were subtly altering their actual voices. For us as listeners and readers much of the pleasure lay in the way it was told. We heard a language music in what others might read as only awkward or ungrammatical or broken. We finally decided to

trust our ears and change as little as we could. We kept to original idiosyncratic speech movements even when our editing meant cutting up original sentences. But when it came to colloquial contractions, for instance, "gonna" for "going to" we opted for the standard form, the full spelling. In cases where dialect was operating, for instance, "so the next year come" or "this town it just run itself" and in some cases, it was very musical, "night time, any time and Sundays all day" (that is practically a line of poetry), we found that the dialect had a music of its own and kept it. In fact, there were one or two tapes which we found so fine at this speech level, we insisted on transcribing it ourselves. There were also one or two tapes we felt Lorraine would have great difficulty transcribing because the English was so heavily accented and broken. In fact, we had to transcribe them immediately after the interview while we still could remember what was said. These we transcribed ourselves, linking up broken phrases only enough to make the sense apparent, but still retaining as much as possible of the idiosyncratic movement, especially the rhythm of that person's speech.

Finally, I think, for me, the value in collecting this history and editing it the way we did, was that it was an attempt to give a public voice to those who do not usually have a public voice. We felt this particularly in our neighbourhood. The people who actually live and make up the life of a district. Most of the histories you get are like bumps off the hilltops of the terrain. You don't get what is actually going on in the sloughs and the potholes. So much gets told in the way people speak, and when you have a collage, a composite of so many different voices, accents, origins, dialects, you get a truly urban and truly collective portrait in a way no one man history of a city can match.

"Edmonton: A Study of Development  
to 1930"

by John Gilpin

The object of my project has been the analysis of the development of the city of Edmonton to 1930. It did not have an oral history focus: I was after a variety of documents. This project has been undertaken in two phases, the first of which was concerned with the social, political, physical and economic development of the city of Strathcona. Strathcona existed as an independent community from 1891--when it was established by Calgary-Edmonton Railroad--to 1912 when it was annexed by the city of Edmonton. The results of the research carried out in this phase were compiled into my master's thesis which was completed in 1977. The second phase which will be hopefully completed this fall, is concerned with the entire city of Edmonton from 1881 when the city building process was initiated by the Hudson Bay Company, through to 1930. The focus of this latter study has been primarily economic.

Between the commencement of the research for my master's thesis and the completion of the research for my Ph.D. dissertation I have come full circle in terms of my interest in and use of oral sources in the study of Edmonton for this pre-1930 period. My initial interest in oral history and community history was sparked by the activities of a community group in the old Strathcona area who were collecting historical information on influence in the development of a transportation plan. An oral history program was the focus of their research effort. My direct participation in this activity started after these interviews were completed when results were being organized for presentation in a report prepared by the Stra-

thcona historical group. A total of 35 individuals were interviewed of which four were adults during the period in which Strathcona existed as an independent community, the remaining 31 were either born in Strathcona or arrived as children.

The four people included in the group were the potentially most valuable informants since they could comment directly upon such issues as amalgamation. This group included Charles H. Grant who was interviewed in 1972 at the age of 88 and died a couple of weeks after the interview. Grant, who was a member of the former Strathcona law firm of Rutherford, Jamison and Grant, had participated in the drafting of the City of Strathcona charter in 1907 and had participated in the amalgamation debate which took place in 1911 and 1912. Alexander Cameron Rutherford, the senior partner of this law firm, had been the first secretary of the town of Strathcona. So this firm certainly was associated with the political part of Strathcona. After the amalgamation Grant had served on the city of Edmonton Council in 1917, 18 and 20. During the interview Grant discussed in some detail the issue of amalgamation. He, however, did not provide any specific information, when Edmonton made its initial overtures to Strathcona. The information provided was also partly contradictory. Initially he stated that he was probably the only businessman who supported amalgamation. He then went on to say that there were real estate people who opposed amalgamation, there were two points of view.

Now two other members of the Strathcona business community were also included in this group but, unfortunately, they were not part of the business establishment of Strathcona and had not participated in any way in the amalgamation debate though both demonstrated a strong loyalty to old "Scona." The last informant was Mrs. W. Reed who arrived in Strathcona in 1904 to teach school. She remembered amalgamation as not being



an issue of any interest to her or her husband. These informants thus provided little clarification with respect to such issues as Strathcona's origins as a separate community, and why it chose to give up its political independence at the height of the boom.

The interviews with the 31 other people also demonstrated a similar view of the old Strathcona and they talked in depth about south-side institutions such as the University of Alberta. The documenting of a strong sense of community identity within the context of Greater Edmonton was the most positive result achieved from the interviews. The information provided in these interviews would have allowed one to conclude that amalgamation was an unpopular decision, that Strathcona was a very dynamic community, very concerned about its future and that it was bullied into amalgamation by Edmonton. So this was one conclusion that I came to. But there was a vast array of other issues which these interviews simply did not allow me to deal with. The decision to write a master's thesis on the city of Strathcona was largely the result of the deficiencies of these interviews.

My thesis research indicated that, contrary to the oral tradition, Strathcona, during its existence as a separate community, demonstrated a distinct lack of will to promote its development as a separate city. This was particularly apparent in the business community which had led the efforts towards amalgamation. Strathcona thus lacked the will to be anything other than a suburb of Edmonton. Charles Grant's observation was partially accurate to the extent that he was the only businessman who opposed amalgamation. The other person being the newspaper editor who had a vested interest in Strathcona's continuation because he could sell papers on the basis of that. But Grant's point about the opposition of the real estate agents was misleading. Real estate promoters such as J.J. Tipton who was a prominent local politician, were strong-

ly for the union. He promoted it with great enthusiasm. So other sources certainly did not support the thesis that Strathcona had been dragged into amalgamation.

My basic conclusion of all of these experiences was that oral history could not be used as a starting point for the study of Edmonton during this period. Due to my experience with oral history on the old Strathcona project, my Ph.D. research began with detailed examination of public records, manuscript collections, photographs and cartographic documents. The use of oral history was placed at the end of this methodology. This approach was necessary because no adequate history of Edmonton had been prepared to allow me to make immediate use of the existing oral history resources or to initiate my own oral history program. Authoritative research based on other sources was unavailable to check the relevance or accuracy of the information obtained from oral history sources.

Based on my review of these traditional sources, Edmonton's overall pattern of economic growth between 1881 and 1930 involved three phases. The years from 1881 to 1903 were a period during which time the Edmonton business community marked time until the coming of the second transcontinental railroad. In 1903 the town council signed a terminal agreement with the Canadian Northern Railway Company which was followed by a similar agreement with the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway of 1909. These agreements set off an unprecedented period of economic activity which lasted until the First World War. The era from 1914 to 1930 was one of adjustment to the realities of slow growth. In Edmonton's case a major effort was required to rationalize the organization of a city which had been grossly distorted by boosterism and a highly competitive land market. The key decade for my study therefore was 1903-1914 when the major preoccupation of the Edmonton business community was land speculation.

Having clearly defined the focus for my economic study then I cast about to see how many of these people were used and, to what extent, institutions such as the City of Edmonton Archives and the Provincial Archives of Alberta had conducted oral interviews with these key individuals. The results of this survey were not particularly surprising. The vast majority of these individuals had died long before the inauguration of any oral history gathering program. In some cases the children of these people such as Johnny McDougall and Richard Seacord had been interviewed. The interview with Eddy McDougall, Johnny McDougall's oldest son, provided some information about his father's activities as an independent trader in the 1870s and 80s. Moreover his very important role as a land speculator was discussed in a very cursory fashion. As Eddy admitted, his father never talked to him about business. There was no transmitting of information from one generation to the next. Richard Seacord also indicated during the interview that his father did not discuss his business affairs at home. So he knew very little about what his father did.

Despite the very dismal prospect that oral history could be used in my thesis, a number of tapes at the Provincial Archives of Alberta and various contacts have finally proven to be quite indispensable. These sources served to illustrate two types of business men who came to Edmonton during this boom town era. These tapes had been significantly enhanced by the quality of supporting information of other documents. The first of these interviews was with a gentleman born in England but began his business career in the United States by the name of Arnold Taylor who was interviewed in 1971 at the age of 82. He represented that group of land speculators who had arrived with their own funds to participate in land speculation. Supporting documents for this interview included the original subdivision plans, certificates of titles which

documented land transfers, land transfer documents which gave you some idea of the price and the residence of the people who were buying land and a beautiful photograph of a bill board that he and his partner had used to promote their development. He purchased two quarter sections, had them subdivided and named Marlborough Heights and Regent's Park after his English upbringing. He did not really know when the interviewer said: "Where were they?" He said: "I don't know, but what I do remember is a lot of people from Ontario were prepared to spend money on it." And that is all he cared about.

What I derived from these interviews is the fact that you can see the spread of the idea that Edmonton was a place to make money, so that you can see a rush to a boom town. Because the word is out that that is a place to make money. It also documented the fact that it was very easy to get into land speculation. This fellow had a certain amount of cash and was able to create two entire subdivisions, 320 acres. You see how people could get into the real estate market without great difficulty. But the opportunism which explain Taylor's reasons for being in Edmonton were also evident in the business careers of two other land speculators that I had information on, based on oral sources. John Ducey, a prominent Edmonton baseball promoter told me about his father who left a job with the Pennsylvania Central Railroad to come to Edmonton to participate in the land market. And Mr. Ducey remembers his parents arguing vehemently about having to stay there. His mother did not like it, but his father was continually saying: "I want to stay for one more deal. There is money to be made out there, and as soon as that is done we will leave." I think that says a lot about Edmonton at that time.

The second tape was an interview with H.M.E. Evans. Now in contrast to the other fellows who arrived and were a sort of booming around North America, he was a member of the western Canadian

business establishment. And he was interviewed at the age of 91. It was a very good interview, given his age. His reasons for being in Edmonton were in his capacity as an agent for British capital, and he repeated that phrase throughout the interview many, many times. He said it with such great feeling that it was very impressive. An interesting side part to that is that he lived right across from the Lt. Governor and he had the impression that he was the representative of British capital and the Lt. Governor was the great representative of the British Crown, and he felt very conscious of his status as a connecting link between the British Empire and Edmonton's development. Supporting documents for this interview included his entire business files which are at the City of Edmonton Archives, a collection of at least 35 linear feet of documents. In this interview Evans discussed his role as representative of British capital, the loss of confidence in Edmonton by the English investment community. He pinpointed the exact date when the British investment community lost respect for Edmonton, based on a bond issue, the problems created by World War I. He also discussed his associations with the British upper class. This was particularly important because he would serve as an agent for a number of English members of the nobility. And when these people travelled through North America, he would always be the person identified as the person to stop and see. And thus a stream of prominent visitors went through his house. This tape, therefore, provided some unique information with respect to the social relationships which underlined British investment at this time. These were particularly important because of heavy British investment in land and other things. Both interviews therefore provided some valuable details about the dynamics of Edmonton's boom and the social behaviour of its business class.

In the context of my project, oral history was thus not getting preference

nor was any source seen as a sort of oracle. Each source was questioned like subdivision plans. You look at a map of Edmonton of 1914, and it gave you the impression it was a city of half a million people when in fact it was simply vacant land you were looking at. So that oral history sources were used by me simply to interpret the overall history of an urban community on the frontier. And I did not go into it using oral history to explore new fields of urban history. I think that probably the study of western Canadian urban history has only begun and I think the issues that have been identified by Alan Artibise and his literature will occupy Canadian historians for some time.

#### "Concluding Remarks"

by Alan Artibise

Your closing comments, I think, bring out a certain focus to the discussion. Oral history obviously, and I do not think that the debate needs to go on any longer (as suggested), does play a role very much in deepening our understanding of issues that have already been identified and adds texture and context to many of the studies that are already under way. But the real value in terms of convincing others to attempt to use and utilize oral sources, is the value of raising new issues, broadening our research agenda by finding out things that we would not have thought about or found out about by using traditional sources. One of the approaches to that is what Daphne called the "collective history" of a neighbourhood. Having read that volume, I think that it does raise a number of issues that any historian of Vancouver now will have to address. He simply cannot ignore the kind of statements that came from the people themselves. So that is one area where I think we should be concerned in our work is to try to present some systematic approach that will generate these questions. And then they can be tackled by the use of more traditional sources as well as oral history sources.