

OPPORTUNITY AND THE WORKINGMAN: A STUDY OF LAND
ACCESSIBILITY AND THE GROWTH OF BLUE COLLAR
SUBURBS IN EARLY VANCOUVER

by

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ABSTRACT

During its formative years Vancouver appeared to offer unusual potential for land and home ownership to its blue collar workers. The coincidental growth of the city's street-car system with that of the early population itself, gave settlers of moderate means greater housing choice than that available to workers in the older cities of central Canada. The large supply of residential land opened up by the street-car favoured the spread of detached family homes in the suburbs, in contrast to the attached and semi-detached dwellings characteristic of the older pedestrian city, which housed many Canadian urban workers. The study examines the availability of residential land and the extent to which it benefitted Vancouver working men prior to 1914.

Vancouver's early real estate market however, was subject to speculative swings which constrained opportunities for blue collar land ownership. Initially, virtually all residential land was in the hands of the C.P.R. and a few B.C. entrepreneurs who together, fostered a speculative land market in the city. The records of early land companies, and after 1900, the real estate pages of Vancouver dailies, record the rapidly rising price of residential land in workingmen's areas as investors and speculators traded blocks and further

out, acreage, among themselves. Land prices dropped temporarily during the depression of the mid 1890s but tax sales and auctions mainly benefitted those with the capital to ride out economic malaise.

During the massive wave of immigration between 1904 and 1913, rising urban land costs and speculation in suburban land were endemic to Canada's rapidly growing cities. In Vancouver however, land values rose faster than elsewhere, culminating in the real estate boom of 1909-12. During this period, economic security for many workers was precarious. Seasonal as well as cyclical unemployment was a feature of the city's lumber manufacturing and construction industries. A large Asian minority added to the general preponderance of single male migrants in the city produced a labour surplus; and high hourly wages were offset by the high costs of living in the city.

As Vancouver's population climbed after 1904, suburban settlement began to take shape. Two residential areas which attracted workingmen--Hillcrest and Grandview, are examined in some detail to determine the nature of the settlement process and, where assessment rolls are available, early land holding patterns. In general, large areas of both suburbs were owned by investors/speculators until 1909. By 1912 almost half the lots in Grandview and Hillcrest still remained undeveloped although rooming houses and small apartment blocks could be found near the streetcar lines. Turnover among Grandview residents was high and a large minority did not yet own

homes, a reflection of the volatile land market in the city.

With the exception of a few years during the late 1880s and early 1900s, the struggle for home ownership in Vancouver differed little from the struggle in most Canadian cities.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Vancouver, 1886-1914: Introduction

In 1886 Granville Townsite, one of three sawmill settlements on Burrard Inlet established in the mid-1860s, was incorporated as the City of Vancouver, the new Pacific terminal of the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.). As the new city expanded, transportation and service activities eclipsed sawmilling as the centre of the local economy, yet Vancouver remained an investment hinterland rather than a regional metropolis. During the depression of the mid-1890s city growth slowed and the number of real estate boosters in Vancouver dwindled, but the Klondike gold rush of 1897-98, together with mining development in the West Kootenays and expansion of the lumber market accompanying prairie settlement, brought new prosperity by the end of the century. By 1900 Vancouver's commercial and wholesale functions were firmly established and the city had replaced Victoria as provincial centre of banking, trade, and transportation.¹

Vancouver grew steadily but not remarkably until 1905 when a surge of population growth and a flurry of construction activity marked the start of the city's second land boom. A large scale westward migration from central

and eastern Canada, together with heavy immigration from Britain and, to a much smaller extent, continental Europe and Asia, produced unparalleled growth in the city. Between 1906 and 1911, Vancouver's population doubled from almost 50,000 to over 100,000. This rapid growth together with the anticipation of further expansion following completion of the Panama Canal, culminated in the extravagant land boom of 1909-1912. During this period, industrial activity expanded in the False Creek area of the city and residential development spread east and south of the older city core. By 1914, Vancouver's metropolitan functions were well established and its suburbs were open, if not yet filled. The city's first critical period of growth was over.

Recent studies of Vancouver's development between 1886 and 1914 have focussed on the city's elite, stressed the extent to which a closely knit group of business leaders shaped the city's early growth, and described the evolution of residential Vancouver into westside/middle class and eastside/working class divisions.² All have emphasized the pervasive influence of the C.P.R. as major landowner, developer and employer on the city's evolution. Generally, little attention has been paid to the experience of wage earners in the early city. In his study of Vancouver's West End elite, Angus Robertson explains the institutional basis of power in the city and its manifestation in spatial form;

he argues however, that pre-war Vancouver was "a land of private opportunity" for everyman. Like Deryck Holdsworth's work on house and home in early Vancouver, Robertson's study stresses the value attached to suburban home ownership without questioning its realization. Both writers assume that the opportunities available to wage earners in Vancouver were merely a scaled down version of those available to the elite.

Edward Gibson has treated the developing city as a reflection of the beliefs, values and political decisions of distinct social groups among the population. Gibson assumes that all social groups had similar opportunity to shape their residential landscape. In this view the white collar resident is concerned with order and visual coherence in his neighbourhood while the blue collar home owner is highly individualistic, unconcerned with the appearance of public space or (in some cases) his own front yard. Such a reading of the blue collar landscape vastly underestimates economic realities at the level of both costs and wages, and discounts the influence of senior government, whose funding policies for such blue collar suburbs as Hillcrest (D.L. 301) and South Vancouver were less generous than those for the city proper. The argument that the white collar worker and the blue collar worker held distinctly different ideas about desirable housing and residential space overlooks the question of different opportunities.

One writer who has recognized the economic realities facing early Vancouver wage earners is Robert Galois who examined the development of early Vancouver from the formal theoretical position of historical materialism. He sees the evolving urban landscape as the spatial expression of the social inequality inherent in capitalism. Thus Galois examines the roles of monopoly capital (C.P.R.), the local bourgeoisie (elite), and their relationship with labour to explain the inequality of opportunity in the city. This study has brought the experience of the wage earner into the foreground, providing valuable information on wages, cost of living and poverty in the early city but the focus on the tension between wage earner and capitalist precludes treatment of any comparative improvements in the lives of Vancouver's workers.

After 1900 there was a relentless shortage of decent detached homes for blue collar workers in the older cities of North America.³ In Canada, the Labour Gazette recorded a similar housing shortage for the nation as a whole by the end of 1903.⁴ While the situation varied from city to city, the housing shortage reflected both a lack of reasonably priced rental accommodation and increasing restraints on blue collar home ownership. The housing shortage was most acute in Montreal where over 80% of the population were tenants,⁵ and the influx of immigrants to the industrial cities of Ontario produced a similar and considerable pressure on the housing stock; and, as the price of urban land

rose rapidly, the rate of home ownership fell.⁶

In contrast, the burgeoning cities of the West appeared to offer new opportunity for wage earners to acquire their own homes. In this context, Vancouver's early period of growth bears comparison with that of Canada's older cities. As a new settlement in a thinly populated province, the growth rate of Vancouver in the 1880s was not significantly different from that of Winnipeg ten years earlier, or Toronto in the early 1800s.⁷ Unlike these cities however, Vancouver's initial growth came primarily from the influx of native born migrants (over 60% were Canadian born and over half that number were native to the province⁸), with expectations based on experience in the New World and a readiness to exploit the potential of the frontier city. The real estate boom accompanying their arrival was abetted by the same generous lending policies practised by local banks in Victoria in the 1860s and Winnipeg in the early 1880s.⁹ For those with capital or a line of credit, urban real estate was a popular speculative investment at a time when urban growth appeared to be as infinite as it was inevitable.

Contemporary booster literature extolled Vancouver as a place of economic opportunity for everyman. Local publications such as B.C. Magazine and Saturday Sunset made extravagant claims for Vancouver's future, while the city's dailies regularly issued "Souvenir Editions" extolling Vancouver's economic progress. Underneath local pride however, were the insecurity and uncertainty of life in a new and rapidly

changing environment, and the necessity to "sell" Vancouver to potential residents and investors. Comparing contemporary real estate pages of Canada's major daily newspapers, one is struck by the difference between the frantic claims made by western realtors and the more restrained [advertising] copy appearing in Toronto papers.

The cities of Canada's far West were a product of the transportation technology of the late nineteenth century. Vancouver emerged at a time when rail lines spanned a continent and streetcar tracks expanded the city. As a creation of the C.P.R., Vancouver was in a sense, an embodiment of the urban East, reflecting the institutions of older Canadian cities. Vancouver's new entrepreneurs, for example, quickly formed elite groups remarkably similar to their counterparts 'back East,'¹⁰ shaping the social landscape of the city, in familiar forms. The implementation of a streetcar system by 1890, however, produced distinctive features in Vancouver's residential growth. The city's morphology was, generically, modern as suburbs defined by streetcar lines were laid down in anticipation of, rather than in response to, settlement, in localities determined by large and influential property owners who frequently held positions in local government. Thus, large tracts of forest were made available for residential use and clusters of wood frame cottages soon rose over the rough cleared landscape in a manner unfamiliar in the older, residentially compressed sites of eastern and central Canada.

The extent to which this territorial expansion critically lowered the threshold of access to land for the ordinary resident of the city remains to be determined.

In 1912, a social survey of Vancouver undertaken by the Methodist and Presbyterian churches identified three distinct "social grades" in the city: the business and professional class, the artisan or man of moderate means, and the immigrant class.¹¹ The latter included over fifteen percent of the city's population and was composed of Chinese, Japanese, Italians, a small Scandinavian contingent and some central Europeans. For this group, economic opportunity was sought by setting the entire family to work, by leaving wife and family behind, or by crowding fellow immigrants into the home as lodgers. Confined to Vancouver's "immigrant quarter" in the East End, this group generally lived in unsanitary, substandard housing. Yet it must be recognized that such housing conditions were not restricted to the non-English speaking population. Among the 5094 household heads enumerated in a 1913 survey of Vancouver's immigrant quarter, thirty-two percent were British born and another twenty-one percent Canadian or American born.¹²

The greatest part of Vancouver's urban society was comprised of the 'man of moderate means.' This group included wage earners in skilled or semi-skilled trades, and those in modest non-manual occupations, such as postman, conductor or retail clerk, as well as the lower middle-class of foremen, inspectors, office workers and small shop keepers.¹³ As

Vancouver's suburban landscape took shape after 1900, this group occupied the residential suburbs east and south of False Creek where house and land costs were generally lower than those in the middle-class suburbs to the west.¹⁴ (Map 2:1, p. 15)

In 1911, three out of four Vancouver residents were newcomers to the province, carrying with them the mixed baggage of aspirations and expectations which accompanied newcomers everywhere. Migrants were a select population group, many with mental or material resources superior to those of their counterparts "back home."¹⁵ Those who met with disappointment or failure tended to leave the city, producing little or no record of their experiences, while many of those who stayed and prospered might have fared as well in many another Canadian city. In any event, the experiences of Vancouver working men in the years before 1914 cannot be determined from the contemporary rhetoric of city boosterism. Attention must be turned to the realities of speculation, living costs and employment opportunities in order to understand the nature of opportunity offered to men of moderate means in the burgeoning city.

Because the notion of opportunity has been frequently coupled with the control of land, chapter II of this inquiry into working man's Vancouver examines the residential land market in the eastern residential area of the city. Here the pattern of land ownership for the city's early years (1886-1891) is explored, along with the subsequent effect

of the depression of the mid 1890s on this initial land holding pattern. Discussion of the early residential land market focusses on accessibility and choice; the role of early building companies in the provision of homesites and/or houses for workers is briefly examined; the changes in the land market around 1900 and finally, during the critical period of Vancouver's population growth between 1905-1913 are evaluated. In the absence of most assessment rolls for this period, quantitative proof of changing land ownership and land values is piecemeal; nevertheless broad trends in the working class land market are uncovered.

Chapter III examines the economic conditions which supported blue collar life and home ownership in Vancouver. After a brief review of the city's developing urban economy, a discussion of the size and nature of the labour market is counterposed with an analysis of employment conditions. The cost of living in Vancouver, 1901-1912, is examined with particular emphasis on the cost of home ownership. Finally, the cost of housing will be put into national perspective by comparing house and land costs in the city and its suburbs with those in Winnipeg and Toronto.

A study of the economic realities which confronted wage earners in Vancouver provides one perspective on urban development, but a fuller understanding of the working man's experience in the city must include some closer observations of settlement patterns. Therefore chapter IV focusses on the growth of two Vancouver's blue collar suburbs. Near :

complete assessment rolls for one suburb provide a view of changing land ownership patterns and property turnover for a fifteen year period. For both areas, the changing rate and size of settlement are identified less precisely from city directories. Photographs and fire insurance atlases together provide a glimpse of the kind of houses purchased by wage earners and their density in the suburban landscape. Housing tenure is examined, and a study of residential mobility among these new suburbanites suggests a further dimension of the settlement experience in the early city. Throughout this study, then, city building is viewed from the standpoint of its carpenters instead of its architects.

NOTES

Chapter I

¹Summing up this first stage of Vancouver's growth, Robert McDonald states, "Railroad and real estate interests rather than wholesale merchants, lumbermen or salmon canners were Vancouver's initial city-builders." R. McDonald, "City-Building in the Canadian West: A Case Study of Economic Growth in Early Vancouver, 1886-93," B.C. Studies, No. 43, Autumn, 1979.

²See E.M.W. Gibson, "The Impact of Social Belief on Landscape Change: A Geographical Study of Vancouver," Ph.D. diss., U.B.C., Vancouver, 1972; D.W. Holdsworth, "House and Home in Vancouver: Images of West Coast Urbanism, 1886-1929" in G. Stelter and A.J.F. Artibise, eds., The Canadian City, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart), 1977; A. Robertson, "The Pursuit of Power, Profit and Privacy: A Study of Vancouver's West End Elite, 1886-1914," M.A. Thesis, U.B.C., Vancouver, 1977; and R. Galois, "Social Structure in Space: The Making of Vancouver, 1886-1901" Ph.D. diss., S.F.U., Burnaby, 1979.

³Sam B. Warner, Jr., The Urban Wilderness, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 19.

⁴Labour Gazette, Vol. IV, pp. 367-380.

⁵Terry Copp, The Anatomy of Poverty, Working Class Montreal, 1897-1929, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 70.

⁶In Toronto, a minority of homes in the blue collar areas of the city were occupied by their owners in 1914. M.J. Piva, The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-21, (Ottawa: U. of Ottawa Press, 1979), p. 125. The demands of newly arrived immigrants for rental housing and the movement of longer settled wage earners to the suburbs beyond the city may partly explain the low rate of home ownership in the city proper.

⁷Norbert MacDonald, "Population Growth and Change in Seattle and Vancouver, 1880-1960," in J. Friesen and H.K. Ralston, Historical Essays on British Columbia, (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1976), p. 204.

⁸The proportion of native born was 62.4% for 1891 and 61.3% for 1901; B.C. born made up 33.4% in 1981 and 36.9% in 1901. Census of Canada, Vol. I, 1891 and 1901.

⁹Victor Ross, A History of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Vol. 1, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1920), and R.C. Bellan, Winnipeg First Century: An Economic History, (Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1978), p. 20.

¹⁰J.M.S. Careless, "Aspects of Urban Life in the West, 1870-1914," in Stelter and Artibise, eds., The Canadian City, p. 136.

¹¹Vancouver, B.C., A Preliminary and General Social Survey, 1912, The Methodist and Presbyterian Church, Vancouver, 1912, p. 11.

¹²B.C. Federationist, October 3, 1913, p. 7. This survey included the area bounded by Gore and Campbell avenues, Cordova Street and False Creek, deliberately excluding Chinatown whose inhabitants were seen as incorrigible heathens.

¹³This broad classification of "ordinary folk" is recognized as forming a legitimate entity by urban sociologists who have found that the economic status, values, and behaviour of one stratum merge very gradually into another, forming a discernible urban community. Marc Fried, The World of the Urban Working Class, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973).

¹⁴West side suburbs such as Kitsilano were not exclusively white collar, just as the east side of the city contained some wealthy residents. The social sorting of the city was not rigid, nevertheless the east-west division had clearly been set. The category, "blue collar suburb" is used in this study to indicate residential areas of the city where blue collar households predominated.

¹⁵Erickson has investigated the backgrounds of various immigrant groups and individual personalities, as revealed in records of family correspondence. She found distinctive traits in her subjects which bore strongly upon their settling experience in 19th century North America. C. Erickson, Invisible Immigrants, (London: Leicester Univ. Press, 1972).

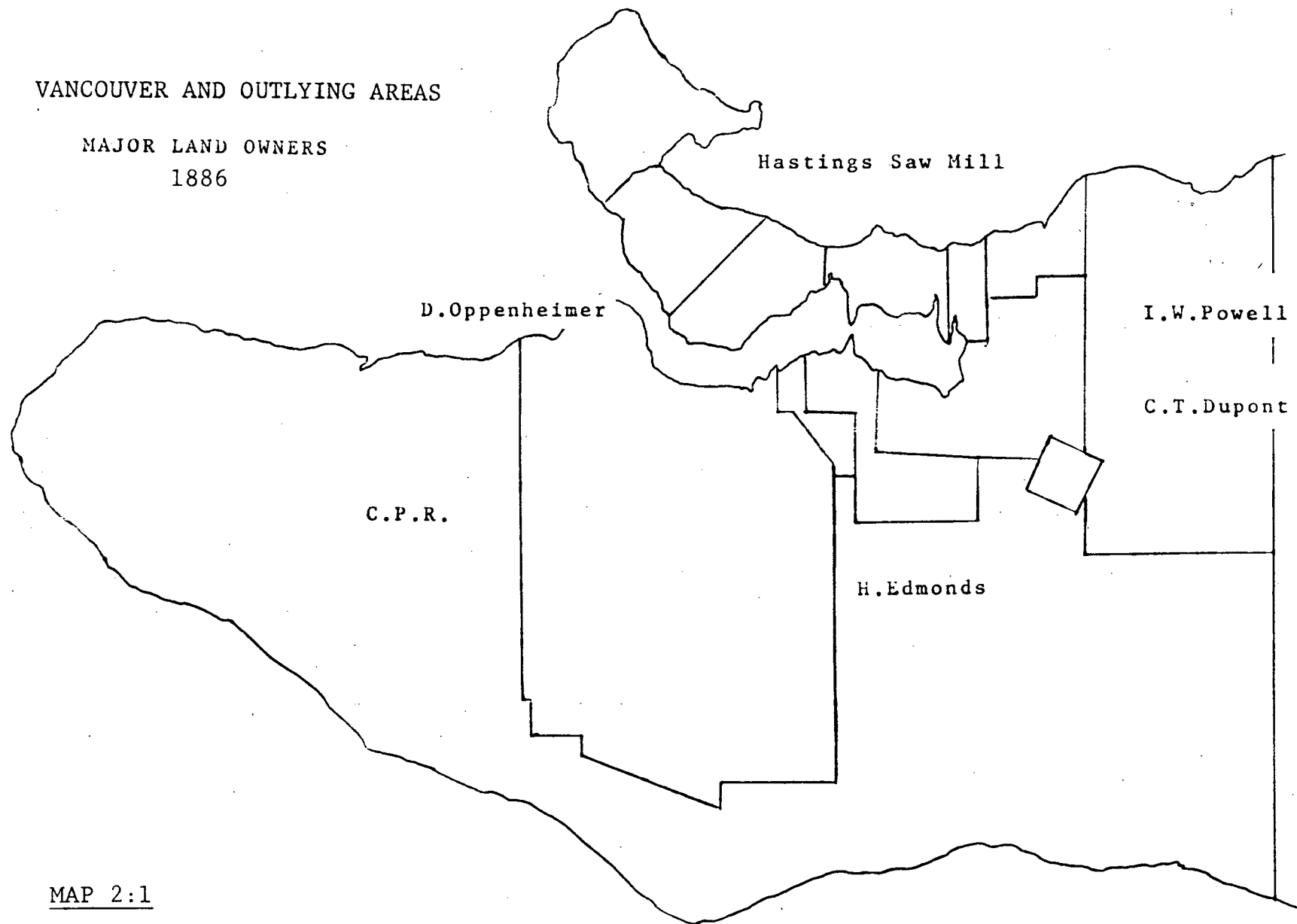
II. THE LAND MARKET ON VANCOUVER'S EAST SIDE, 1886-1912

The Concentration of Land Onwership: 1886-1893

At the incorporation of Vancouver, 1886, virtually all city and suburban land was owned by the C.P.R.¹ and a handful of entrepreneurs from New Westminster and Victoria (Map 2:1, p. 14). For making Vancouver the western terminus of the railway, the provincial government granted the C.P.R. the central third of the downtown peninsula, half the suburban land south of False Creek to the city boundary, and 4,000 acres south of the city limits. In addition, private landowners to the west and east of Granville Townsite relinquished one-third of their holdings to the railway company. The C.P.R. concentrated on the commercial and industrial development of the city centre and the creation of an elite residential district in the West End. With the exception of "Yaletown," a blue collar enclave housing railway yard workers, working class residential areas generally grew on land outside the C.P.R.'s domain, in the eastern and south eastern portions of the city. These areas were owned initially by a few large speculators.

VANCOUVER AND OUTLYING AREAS

MAJOR LAND OWNERS
1886



MAP 2:1

The importance of these early property owners is indicated by the assessed values of their holdings (Table 2:1). With the exception of Morton, Brighthouse and Hailstone, who together owned approximately two-thirds of the West End, the city's largest landowners controlled almost the entire area destined to house the city's workers. The Hastings Sawmill was the main landowner in the East End - Vancouver's first residential district; controlling interest in the mill was shared between London and San Francisco investors, but a large minority of shareholders (37%-47%) were local businessmen, active in the Vancouver land market as owners of real estate and development companies.² One shareholder, David Oppenheimer, was the largest private landowner in the city. About three quarters of Oppenheimer's land holdings were on the city's east side, with the heaviest concentration south of False Creek

TABLE 2:1. Vancouver's Largest Property Owners by Assessed Value, 1886

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| C.P.R. | \$ 1,000,000 |
| Hastings Sawmill | 250,000 |
| David Oppenheimer | 125,000 |
| Brighthouse & Hailstone | 100,000 |
| I.W. Powell | 75,000 |
| C.T. Dupont | 75,000 |
| J. Morton | 60,000 |
| M.V. Edmonds | 50,000 |
| J.W. Horne | 40,000 |

Source: M. Picken, City of Vancouver, Terminus of the C.P.R., 1887.

in an area later to become the blue collar suburb of Mount Pleasant. I.W. Powell and C.T. Dupont were the other major east side landowners of this period. In the 1870s and early 1880s both men amassed vast land holdings east and south east of the Granville Townsite. Unlike Oppenheimer, Powell and Dupont continued to live in Victoria while maintaining their Vancouver property interests. Fifth in importance among east side landowners was H.V. Edmonds, a New Westminster merchant who, in 1869-70, had pre-empted approximately 600 acres of land lying immediately south of False Creek, along the Westminster Road which linked Vancouver and New Westminster. Thus four men along with a dozen or so mill shareholders controlled east side property whose value was assessed at some 55% of that ascribed to the C.P.R.'s vast holdings.

This marked concentration of land ownership in the city led to a rapid institutionalization of Vancouver's social (and commercial) geography. With the political and financial support of the C.P.R., prominent east side landowners brought water, gas and electricity to the city's residential areas, and through the promotion and location of street railway tracks, determined settlement patterns. Table 2:2 (p. 17) shows the major east side landowners on the 1889 assessment rolls, while Table 2.3, (p. 18) shows the connections between these taxpayers and the city's transportation and utility companies. Through positions in Vancouver's leading real estate firms -- Oppenheimer Bros., Rand Bros., Innis and Tatlow, Robertson and Co., Edmonds and Webster -- and their

TABLE 2:2. Major* Landowners on Vancouver's East Side, 1889

17

| City area: | East End | North End | Grandview | Mt.Pleasant | Hill Crest | Cedar Cottage |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| District lots: | 196,181-82 | 183-84 | 264A | 302,200A | 301 | 195 |
| C.P.R. | ✓ | | | | | |
| Hastings Mills | ✓ | | | | | |
| Van. Improve- ment Co. | ✓ | | | | | |
| D. Oppenheimer | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| I.W. Powell | | ✓ | ✓ | | | (✓) |
| C.T. Dupont | | | ✓ | | | |
| R.G. Tatlow | ✓ | | | | | |
| D.R. Harris | ✓ | | | | | |
| G.A. Keefer | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Innis & Tatlow | | ✓ | | | | |
| I.Robertson | | | | ✓ | | |
| H.V. Edmonds | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| C.D. Rand | | | | ✓ | | |
| Reilley & Prevost | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |

*"Major" landowners were those owning four or more blocks of land within one district lot.

Sources: City of Vancouver, Assessment Rolls, 1889. The ownership of land in some eastside suburban areas is documented in Robertson & Co., Real Estate Listings, 1890, Add. Mss. 19, CVPA.

TABLE 2:3. Major East Side Landowners in Vancouver
Transportation and Utilities, 1889

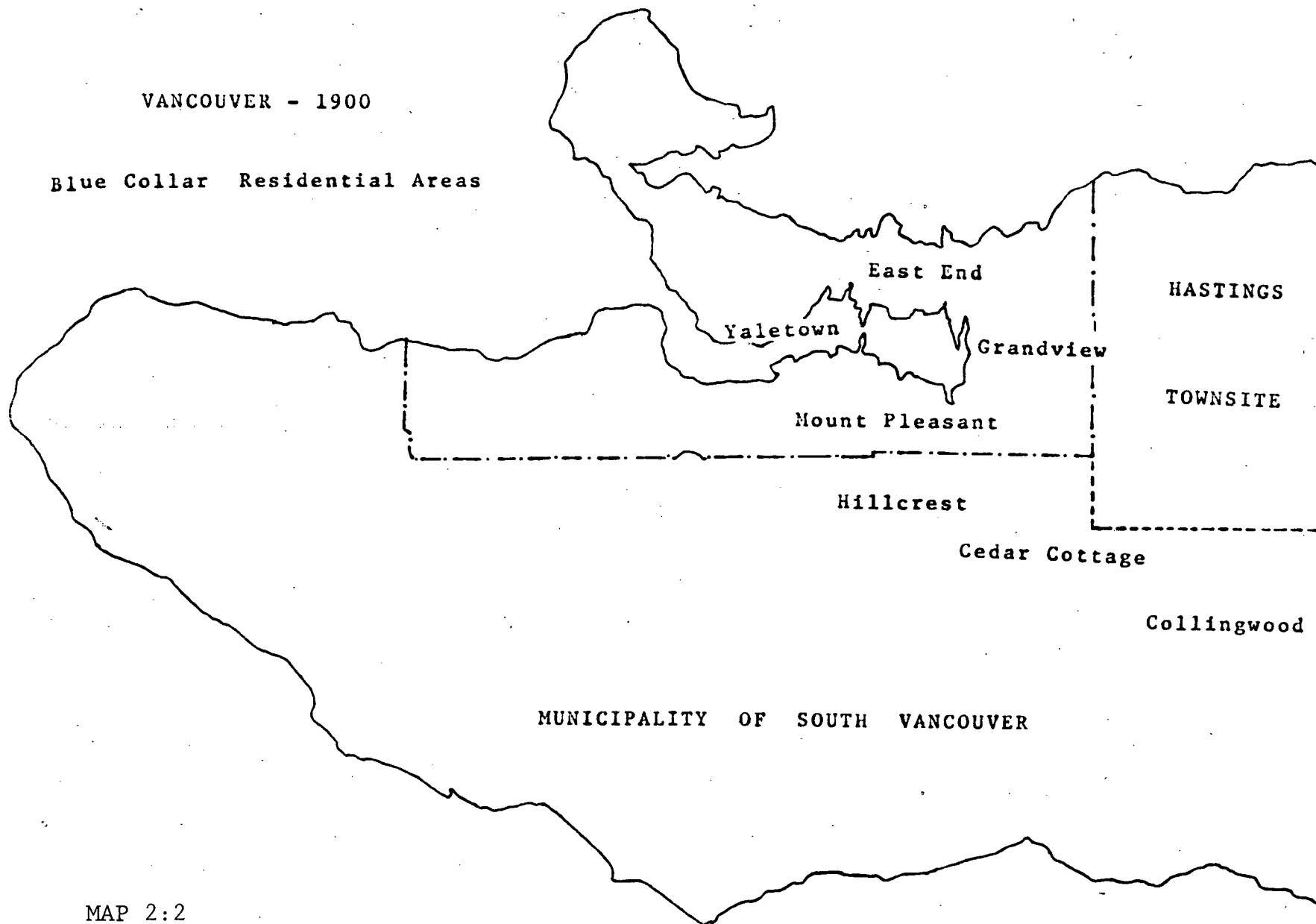
| | |
|---|---|
| Vancouver Water Works, 1886 | G.A. Keefer, Director |
| Vancouver Gas, Co., 1887 | D.R. Harris, Chairman C.D. Rand, Secretary |
| Vancouver Electric Illuminating, Co., 1887 | G.A. Keefer, Chairman |
| Vancouver Electric Railway and Light Co., 1889 | D. Oppenheimer, Director C.D. Rand, Trustee |
| Westminster and Vancouver Tramway, Co., 1890 | H.V. Edmonds, Director D. Oppenheimer, Pro- moter |

Source: M. Picken, compiler, City of Vancouver, Terminus
of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Vancouver, 1887.

directorships in Vancouver's major development company, The Vancouver Improvement Co.,³ these large land holders were able to shape the evolving residential landscape of the city (Map 2:2, p. 19). Furthermore the major land promoters and realtors in the city maintained close links with the city's financial institutions. The Vancouver agent for The B.C. Land and Investment Agency, the province's largest real estate firm and a major landowner in South Vancouver,⁴ R.G. Tatlow, also served as Vice-president of Vancouver Loan, Trust, Savings and Guarantee, Co. and acted as agent for Oppenheimer Bros. Finally, David Oppenheimer's political influence as alderman (1887-88) and mayor (1888-91) and J.W. Horne's participation in both civic and provincial politics, facilitated

VANCOUVER - 1900

Blue Collar Residential Areas

MAP 2:2

the hegemony of this land owning elite.

Many contemporary observers were critical of the city's large landowners and protested the power they held. In 1885 the Port Moody Gazette deplored the actions of Oppenheimer and his 'Coal Harbour Syndicate' in gaining control of Hastings Sawmill property.⁵ The Vancouver News Advertiser later condemned Oppenheimer and his political friends as the "speculative and jobbing element" who promote unstable growth for personal advantage.⁶ Oppenheimer was criticized for his dual role as mayor and president of the Westminster and Vancouver Tramway Co.. Partly in response to this criticism, the city's leading real estate promoters Horne, Rand and Oppenheimer formed The Daily Telegram to express their point of view.

One historian of 19th century Vancouver, R.J.M. McDonald, has described the years between 1886 and 1892 as an era of exaggerated expectations;⁷ for the city's business elite, much of this expectation was reflected in heavy investment in urban land, and between at least 1887 and 1889, considerable turnover among the city's prominent landowners.⁸ Property listings for small residential lots in the city's East End indicate the rapidly rising prices between 1886 and 1890 and suggest the presence of speculation in undeveloped land (Table 2:4, p. 21). Among the undeveloped lots for which comparative listings are available, prices of the cheapest lots showed the greatest rate of increase. Developed lots increased in price far less than undeveloped lots as the cost of housing rose only fractionally in comparison to the cost of land.

TABLE 2:4. Prices of East Side Lots, 1886 and 1890

| <u>East End D.L. 181 & 196</u> | <u>Vancouver Improvement Co. 1886</u> | <u>Robertson & Co. 1890</u> | <u>% increase</u> |
|--|---|---|-----------------------|
| B1. 49, 1. 39 | \$ 160.00 | \$ 650.00 | 406 |
| B1. 50, 1. 36 | 325.00 | 1,000.00 | 308 |
| 37 | 325.00 | 1,000.00 | 308 |
| 38 | 325.00 | 1,000.00 | 308 |
| B1. 56, 1. 6 | 625.00 | 1,000.00 | 160 |
| 1. 7 | 625.00 | 1,000.00 | 160 |
| B1. 75, 1. 20 | 300.00 | 425.00 | 142 |
| 1. 21 | 300.00 | 425.00 | 142 |
| B1. 72, 1. 19 | 300.00 | 650.00 | 217 |
| B1. 79, 1. 3 | 100.00 | 420.00 | 420 |
| 1. 4 | 100.00 | 420.00 | 420 |
| 1. 5 | 100.00 | 420.00 | 420 |
| B1. 42, 1.6 (house) | 2,000.00 | 3,000.00 | 150 |
| B1. 68, 1.26 (house) | 1,325.00 | 1,700.00 | 128 |
| B1.60, 1.32,33 (house) | 2,900.00 | 4,200.00 | 145 |
| B1. 40, 1.19,20,21 (2 houses) | 3,500.00 | 6,500.00 | 186 |

Although the price of residential property near the downtown core rose most markedly in the late 1880s, suburban lots were not cheap. Fueled by the rhetoric of promoters who predicted a population of 200,000 for Vancouver by 1900, and the relocation of the province's legislative buildings to the slopes of Mount Pleasant,⁹ all real estate values soared. As early as 1892 The Vancouver News Advertiser alleged that the "high cost" of property in the city was "discouraging the industrial and middle classes who wished to buy homes for

themselves."¹⁰ Prices for uncleared lots in the Grandview area, subdivided in 1888, were, indeed, relatively high in 1890. When a labourer might have earned as much as \$450.00 a year if he had full, well paying employment,¹¹ 25' lots on Graveley St. and 1st Avenue, one mile south of the street-car terminus at Clarke and Keefer, were priced at \$200.00 each, while nearly a mile further east, a pair of lots were available for \$125.00 each. In the south east corner of the district, two miles from public transportation, two lots were listed at \$90.00 each.¹² Moreover these listings were exceptional in that the majority of Grandview lots handled by the real estate firm of Robertson and Co. were sold in blocks or, less frequently, parcels of 4-8 lots. That this practice favoured speculative investment is perhaps reflected in the common response to visitors who remarked on the large amount of unsettled land in Vancouver: "oh, it is tied up by speculators."¹³

The Depression and the Land Market

Economic depression in 1893 curtailed rising land prices, but did not end land speculation. In that year J.W. Horne, C. Rand and H.T. Ceperley, promoters of the Vancouver Electric Railway and Light Co.,¹⁴ extended their streetcar line along Venables and down Park, opening up the forested Grandview area for settlement. Despite the economic downturn

(see chap. III) lots in this area maintained their earlier prices, ranging between \$175.00-\$300.00 each, in the summer of 1894.¹⁵ There were very few buyers. One prominent real estate firm, unable to attract buyers, admitted that its prices for half a dozen lots in the north east corner of Grandview were inflated, noting, "These are our old prices and perhaps if split in half would be more like right prices."¹⁶ All six lots were subsequently sold to one buyer, presumably at a reduced price. By the end of the year, it was clear that a small number of buyers were acquiring a diverse collection of suburban lots at bargain prices.¹⁷ Revealingly the largest buyer at a tax sale of Mount Pleasant and Grandview property was the city's leading landowner, J.W. Horne, who purchased almost 40% of the 284 lots offered for sale. A dozen other bidders purchased virtually all of the remaining property. Apart from Oppenheimer, none of them had been large land holders during the boom years. The press labeled the sale "a poor man's sale" because of the very low selling prices (many lots were priced under \$25.00), but judging by the extent of individual purchases, there were no "poor men" taking advantage of these prices. Rather the land fell into the hands of petty capitalists such as E. Odlum and J. Banfield, a local realtor: both men owned many small parcels of land scattered in the Grandview and Mount Pleasant areas of the city. During the municipal sale, Banfield purchased another 38 lots, and Odlum, at least two dozen lots.

Through 1895-96, the land market remained stagnant but bargain prices were rare except in tax sales. Property changed hands between speculators. David Oppenheimer, for example, purchased 9.4 acres in the Cedar Cottage area from one of the city's leading realtors for \$3,000.00.¹⁸ In the daily press, a few advertisements offered acreage in the municipality of South Vancouver at low prices for those in the financial position to take advantage.¹⁹ At the end of 1895, The Monetary Times cautioned potential investors in Vancouver real estate,

There is ... far too large an aggregate of individual indebtedness in ... unproductive, mainly unimproved real property. ... in pure speculation, either in the form of wild land or vacant town lots.²⁰

The depression may have reduced the number of those who could afford to enter the land market, but it had evidently not ended land speculation.

As the city emerged from the depression, land prices rose very slightly. By the end of the decade commercial land in the center of the city and residential property in the adjacent West and East Ends were offered at prices similar to or higher than those asked on equivalent properties in 1890. The property list of Oppenheimer Bros., 1899 (Fig. 2:1, pp. 25-27) indicates this trend while showing some drop in land prices on the outskirts of the city. In the East End, two adjacent corner lots were offered for \$75.00 and \$100.00 in 1891;²¹ one block south, two similar corner lots (182j) were listed at \$185.00 and \$235.00 by Oppenheimer

Fig. 2:1

February, 1899.

Price List of Property of Oppenheimer Bros.

Limited Liability.

This Price List is Subject to Change Without Notice.

For terms and further particulars apply to—

MAHON McFARLAND & MAHON, LTD. LTY.,
541 Hastings Street,

or R. G. TATLOW,
Bank of B. C. Building,
General Agents.

| Subdivision 185. | | | |
|------------------|-----|---|----------|
| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
| 15 | 12 | Seaton | \$ 4,000 |
| | 13 | Pender | |
| 16 | 1 | " Northerly $\frac{1}{3}$ of } | 1,500 |
| | 2 | " " $\frac{1}{3}$ of } | |
| 41 | 8 | Beach Avenue..... $\frac{2}{3}$ of.. | 600 |
| 52 | 15 | " $\frac{1}{3}$ of.. | 500 |
| 53 | 5 | " | 2,500 |
| 54 | 7 | Georgia... { N. W. 60 ft. of } | 2,000 |
| | | Water front } | |
| 55 | 5 | " N. W. 32 ft. of } | 2,100 |
| | 6 | " S. E. 46 ft. of } | |
| | 24 | Alberni 66 ft. of } | 2,000 |
| | 25 | " N. W. 49 $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. of } | |
| | 33 | Robson | 800 |
| | 35 | cor. Bidwell..... | 1,000 |
| 57 | 28 | Barclay, cor. Cardero..... | 900 |
| 58 | 2 | " | 750 |
| | 24 | Nelson..... | 750 |
| 59 | 1 | " | 1,000 |
| | 24 | Comox..... | 750 |
| 60 | 2 | " | 750 |
| | 26 | Pendrell | 2,400 |
| | 27 | " | |
| | 28 | " | |

| Subdivision 196. | | | |
|------------------|-----|----------------|-----------|
| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
| I | 1 | Alexander..... | \$ 75,000 |
| | 2 | " | |
| | 3 | " | |
| | 4 | " | |
| | 5 | " | |
| | 6 | " | |
| | 7 | " | |
| | 8 | " | |
| | 9 | " | |
| | 10 | " | |
| | 11 | " | |
| | 12 | " | |
| | 13 | " | |

(This property has 325 feet frontage on the harbor and for same distance on the main line of the C. P. R., bounded by Alexander St. on the south side and Carrall St. on the west side, and is to be sold en bloc.)

| Subdivision 196—continued. | | | |
|----------------------------|-----|-------------------------|----------|
| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
| 6 | 28 | Powell..... | Reserv'd |
| | 29 | " | Reserv'd |
| | 30 | " | 2,200 |
| | 31 | " | 2,200 |
| | 32 | " | 2,200 |
| | 33 | " | 2,200 |
| | 34 | " | 2,200 |
| | 40 | " | 7,000 |
| | 41 | " | |
| | 42 | " | |
| | 24 | Oppenheimer..... | 12,500 |
| | 25 | " | |
| | 26 | " | |
| 11 | 27 | Hastings East..... | 1,100 |
| | 28 | " | 1,100 |
| | 29 | " | 1,100 |
| 15 | 38 | Princess | 7,000 |
| | 39 | " | |
| 11 | 18 | " | 700 |
| | 19 | " | 700 |
| 15 | 21 | Keefer | 750 |
| 21 | 34 | Barnard..... | 450 |
| 25 | 1 | Prior..... | 6,600 |
| | 2 | " | |
| | 3 | " | |
| | 4 | " | |
| | 5 | " | |
| | 6 | " | |
| | 7 | " | |
| | 8 | " | |
| | 9 | " | |
| | 10 | " | |
| | 11 | " | |
| | 14 | " | 525 |
| 4 | 6 | Westminster Avenue..... | 1,600 |
| | 7 | " | 1,600 |
| | 8 | " | 1,600 |

Fig. 2:1 Cont'd.

Subdivision 196—continued.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|-------|-----|-------------------------|-----------|
| 23 | 24 | Westminster Avenue..... | \$ 20,000 |
| | 25 | " | |
| | 26 | " | |
| | 27 | " | |
| | 28 | " | |
| | 29 | " | |
| | 30 | " | |
| | 31 | " | |
| | 32 | " | |
| | 33 | " | |
| | 34 | " | |
| | 35 | " | |
| | 36 | " | |

(To be sold en bloc, but may be sold separately if sold from the north end only, at \$75 per front ft.)

| | | | |
|----|---|-------------------------|-------|
| 24 | 8 | Westminster Avenue..... | 1,100 |
| | 9 | " | 1,100 |

Subdivision 200a.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|-------|-----|-------------------------|--------|
| 2 | 4 | Front..... | \$ 575 |
| | 12 | " | 1,500 |
| | 13 | " | |
| | 14 | " | |
| 3 | 28 | " | 365 |
| 4 | 3 | " | 265 |
| 6 | 1 | Cor. Westminster Ave. } | 1,000 |
| | 2 | " " " } | |
| | 3 | Front..... | 315 |
| | 4 | " | 315 |
| 10 | 5 | " | 250 |
| 3 | 1 | Westminster Avenue..... | 1,000 |
| | 2 | " | |
| 14 | 9 | " | 625 |
| 43 | 1 | " | 2,500 |
| | 2 | " | |
| 4 | 24 | Dufferin | 365 |
| | 25 | " | 425 |
| 5 | 9 | " | 425 |
| 9 | 12 | " | 265 |
| 10 | 19 | " | 235 |
| | 20 | " | 235 |
| 12 | 1 | " | 365 |
| | 3 | " | 275 |
| | 13 | Lorne..... | 275 |
| | 15 | " | 275 |
| | 16 | " | 325 |
| 19 | 2 | " | 275 |
| | 3 | " | 275 |
| | 7 | " | 275 |
| | 14 | Lansdowne..... | 275 |
| | 15 | " | 275 |
| | 16 | " | 325 |
| 26 | 12 | 5th Avenue..... | 800 |
| | 13 | " | |
| | 14 | " | |
| | 15 | " | |
| 33 | 23 | 6th Avenue..... | 525 |
| | 24 | " | |
| 35 | 1 | " | 375 |
| | 3 | " | 325 |

Subdivision 200a—continued.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|-------|-----|-----------------|--------|
| 35 | 15 | 7th Avenue..... | \$ 300 |
| | 16 | " | 350 |
| 46 | 15 | 8th Avenue..... | 325 |
| | 16 | " | 365 |
| 48 | 6 | " | 300 |
| | 7 | " | 300 |
| | 8 | " | 300 |
| 17 | * | 9th Avenue..... | 350 |

(*Sell en bloc, if possible.)

Subdivision 302.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|-------|-----|-------------------|----------|
| 26 | 1 | 9th Avenue..... | \$ 7,500 |
| | 2 | " | |
| | 3 | " | |
| | 4 | " | |
| | 5 | " | |
| | 6 | " | |
| | 7 | " | |
| | 8 | " | |
| | 9 | 10th Avenue | |
| | 10 | " | |
| | 11 | " | |
| | 12 | " | |
| | 13 | " | |
| | 14 | " | |
| | 15 | " | |
| | 16 | " | |

(Full block. Cleared.)

| | | | |
|----|----|-------------------------|-------|
| 30 | 1 | Westminster Avenue..... | 475 |
| | 2 | " | 425 |
| | 3 | " | 425 |
| | 4 | " | 425 |
| | 5 | " | 425 |
| | 6 | " | 475 |
| 31 | 6 | " | 2,800 |
| | 7 | " | |
| | 8 | " | |
| | 9 | " | |
| | 10 | " | |
| | 11 | " | 110 |
| | 12 | 11th Avenue..... | |
| 36 | 20 | 12th Avenue..... | 5,000 |
| 48 | 1 | 13th Avenue..... | |
| | 2 | " | |
| | 3 | " | |
| | 4 | " | |
| | 5 | " | |
| | 6 | Westminster Avenue..... | |
| | 7 | " | |
| | 8 | " | |
| | 9 | " | |
| | 10 | " | |
| | 11 | " | |
| | 12 | 14th Avenue..... | |
| | 13 | " | |
| | 14 | " | |
| | 15 | " | |
| | 16 | " | |

(Cleared, grubbed and graded. Stream of living water.)

Subdivision 302—continued.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|----------------------------|-----|-------------------------|---------|
| 49 | 1 | Westminster Avenue..... | S 1,000 |
| | 2 | "..... | |
| | 3 | "..... | |
| | 4 | "..... | |
| | 5 | "..... | |
| | 6 | "..... | |
| 53 | 1 | 14th Avenue..... | 160 |
| | 2 | "..... | 160 |
| | 3 | "..... | 160 |
| | 4 | "..... | 160 |
| | 5 | "..... | 160 |
| | 6 | "..... | * 210 |
| | 7 | 15th Avenue..... | 210 |
| | 8 | "..... | 105 |
| | 9 | "..... | 105 |
| | 10 | "..... | 105 |
| (*Prefer to sell en bloc.) | | | |
| 61 | 5 | 17th Avenue..... | 105 |
| | 9 | Westminster Avenue..... | 105 |
| | 11 | "..... | 105 |
| | 12 | "..... | 160 |
| | 16 | 18th Avenue..... | 105 |
| | 17 | "..... | 160 |
| 63 | 1 | 15th Avenue..... | 210 |
| | 2 | "..... | |
| | 3 | "..... | |

Subdivision 192.

An Undivided 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ Acres..... \$.....

Subdivision 264a.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|--|-----------------------------|--------|----------|
| 92 | 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ acres..... | | \$ 7,000 |
| (Rented for 10 years at \$100 a year.) | | | |
| 110 | 2 $\frac{1}{10}$ acres..... | | 1,750 |
| 174E | 3 acres..... | | 2,000 |
| 58 | 2 acres..... | | 1,250 |
| 68 | 3 acres..... | | 1,800 |
| 154A | 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres..... | | 1,800 |
| 160D | 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres..... | | 1,800 |
| 160B | 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres..... | | 1,800 |
| 167B | 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres..... | | 900 |
| 166A | ..... |  | 475 |
| 166B | ..... |  | 475 |

Subdivision 182k.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|-------|-----|--------|--------|
| 2 | 17 | ..... | \$ 800 |
| 8 | 3 | ..... | 350 |
| | 6 | ..... | 350 |

Subdivision 526.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|-------|-----|--------|--------|
| 313 | 20 | ..... | \$ 450 |
| 314 | 17 | ..... | 450 |

Subdivision 183d.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|-------|-----|--------|----------|
| 1 | 11 | ..... | \$ 1,200 |
| 3 | 1 | ..... | 315 |
| 5 | 1 | ..... | 315 |
| | 2 | ..... | 300 |
| 6 | 1 | ..... | 235 |
| | 2 | ..... | 210 |
| 12 | 25 | ..... | 160 |
| 17 | 13 | ..... | 625 |

Subdivision 182j.

| Block | Lot | Street | Price |
|-------|-----|--------|---------|
| 24 | 1 | | S 1,800 |
| | 2 | ..... |  |
| | 3 | ..... |  |
| | 4 | ..... |  |
| | 5 | ..... |  |
| | 6 | ..... |  |
| | 7 | ..... |  |
| | 8 | ..... |  |
| | 9 | ..... |  |
| | 10 | ..... |  |
| | 11 | ..... |  |
| | 12 | ..... |  |
| 31 | 11 | | 185 |
| | 12 | | 235 |

Subdivision 195.

85 $\frac{324}{1000}$ acres..... \$ 17,500

Part of Block 36, Township 11, New Westminster District (Langley Prairie), known as the Oppenheimer Farm, and containing 172 acres, with all buildings and improvements thereon. \$65 per ac.

Lot 834, Group 1, New Westminster District (Lynn Creek), containing 58 acres, water power. \$1,000

Mission City.

Block 153, Lot 1.....\$.....
 " " " 2.....\$.....

Bros. in 1899. In northern Grandview, C.G. Major listed his lots in the five blocks between Power and Harris, at \$150.00-\$300.00, in 1891²² while Oppenheimer Bros. were asking \$160.00-\$315.00 (183d) in the same area, eight years later. As in 1890, suburban property in the southeastern periphery of the city was still being sold in blocks. Prices were still depressed: Oppenheimer had purchased land in suburban Cedar Cottage (195) for \$325/acre in 1895; his 1899 selling price was \$205/acre. In Grandview, land located one-half mile from a proposed streetcar line, and one and a half miles from the existing line sold for \$500/acre in 1890, but \$400/acre in 1899. By the turn of the century, the price of individual lots in working class suburbs had returned to former boom time levels, while the cheapest land still remained undivided and therefore, beyond the price range of many wage earners.

The collapse of the land boom in the early 1890s precipitated a breakdown in the concentration of land ownership in the city. Powell and Dupont had sold off much of their Vancouver property before 1890. In 1890, Edmonds put up for sale most of his property (half of D.L. 200A and all of D.L. 301) in the Mount Pleasant area of the city. Among the dozen largest east side land owners in 1889, only four: Oppenheimer, Rand, Tatlow and Innis reappeared among the city's 16 "important" real estate promoters for 1890-93.²³ Over the next decade Innis became increasingly involved with the promotion of real estate in the interior of the province and Tatlow widened his business interests to include manufacturing and

wholesale trade. By 1904 only Rand remained among the dominant names in Vancouver real estate.²⁴

Many speculators who had over extended themselves during the land boom were forced to sell off their land at the municipal auctions in order to offset losses from property sold on worthless agreements.²⁵ Other speculators -- Banfield, McFarland, Ceperley, Rand and Oppenheimer attended and later profited from the same sales. For instance, Oppenheimer Bros. listed lots in Mount Pleasant (200A) for \$275.00 in February 1899; municipal tax sale records show that Oppenheimer paid \$16.20 for a couple of these lots four years earlier.²⁶ Oppenheimer died in 1899, but the others gained prominence in the local real estate market after the turn of the century. None of these men however would own Vancouver land on the scale of their predecessors, or, more important, exercise the same control of the city's residential development.

Throughout the depression however, David Oppenheimer maintained an active role buying and selling property through his real estate firm, Oppenheimer Bros.²⁷ In 1897, the real estate assets of Oppenheimer Bros. totalled \$335,000.00, nearly three times the value of their assets ten years earlier (Table 2:1, p. 15). Approximately one third of this land was east side residential land. With the recovery of the urban economy, Oppenheimer managed to sell approximately one-third of his land holdings by October, 1899. At least some of this property was sold to pay off debts incurred during his long term accumulation of Vancouver real estate. Using

land with highly inflated assessments, Oppenheimer had financed many of his 1890 land purchases by borrowing from among others, the wife of Charles Dupont, the city's leading wholesaler, Henry Bell Irving, and the ever accommodating Bank of B.C.²⁸ After David Oppenheimer's death, his brother began to rebuild the property assets of Oppenheimer Bros. but was obliged once again to sell off more land and his shares in the Vancouver Improvement Co., in order to pay taxes and mortgage interest on the remaining land. By 1905 the Vancouver land holdings of Oppenheimer Bros. at one-quarter their 1899 size, comprised 52 urban lots and three blocks of suburban land. The prominence of the Oppenheimer name in the city's tax rolls had lasted just two decades.

Economic depression ended the first land boom but did not end speculation. Attendance at government auctions and tax sales was lower than during the 1880s²⁹ but lots were still being purchased by those who could afford to hold their property and wait. The most prominent buyer at these auctions was J.W. Horne, whose property holdings for 1894 were valued at \$1,500,000, equal to those of the giant C.P.R.³⁰

As promoter and director of the city's first indigenous financial organization, The Vancouver Loan Trust Savings and Guarantee Co., director and/or president of the Vancouver City Foundry and Machine Works, B.C. Building Association and Vancouver Electric Railway and Light Co among others, and MLA (1891-95), Horne's power was unsurpassed by any other individual in the city. Arriving in the city in the late

1880s with large capital derived from previous real estate investments on the prairies and in central Canada, he was an astute businessman whose land investments were made for the long term gain which would accompany the city's inevitable growth. Although his development interests were concentrated in the city's commercial centre, Horne acquired a vast amount of suburban property on the city's east side. In suburban Hill Crest, for instance, he held as much as 16 blocks for 17 or 18 years before selling out in 1908.³¹ Horne influenced the lives of many wage earners as employer, developer, financier and promoter of public transportation, but there is no doubt that his greatest impact on the growth of working class residential suburbs derived from the large tracts of land which he took out of circulation for nearly a generation.

Most Vancouver speculators sought a faster gain than J.W. Horne. Their pursuit of profit was supported by the Bank of B.C., Vancouver's largest, whose London directors gave manager J.C. Keith a free hand to make loans secured by real estate.³² The directors however, were soon alarmed by the size of the bank's loans and the highly inflated prices of local land and repeatedly demanded that Keith call in his loans. Keith, who had a large personal interest in several of the most speculative concerns, ignored the commands and was dismissed from the bank in 1893. Remaining active in the city's land market, he later became promoter and director of the East Vancouver Land Co., the North Vancouver Land and Improvement Co., and president of the building company,

Vancouver Estates.

In those first years, 1886-1891, speculation in urban land attracted men of large and small means--wealthy, highly leveraged land buyers such as David Oppenheimer, dozens of small time speculators and very small investors. After the land market collapsed in the mid-nineties, many of these landowners lost their property. Addressing a meeting of shareholders, in 1896, a Bank of B.C. director explained the Vancouver branch's losses:

Many of our customers ... are now unable to pay the advances made them, and though we hold security (i.e. land) at one time considered ample, it has now so depreciated that we fear a contingent loss of a considerable sum ...³³

In Hastings Townsite, about one-quarter of the lots listed on the assessment rolls, 1897-1904, were marked "sold for taxes."³⁴ There were no well known names in this group; many of those whose properties were sold were absentee owners, residing outside Vancouver. In contrast, few lots in Hill Crest (D.L. 301), a suburban area south of Mount Pleasant were sold for taxes during this same period. There were comparatively few small investors in this area; most of the land was owned by large investors such as J.W. Horne, or financial institutions such as the Bank of B.C. (see Chap. IV). Among the business elite of the 1890s, Oppenheimer's concentration on urban real estate was exceptional; contemporaries like Horne, Tatlow and Rand, diversified their financial interests, and thus escaped the repercussions of overspeculation in Vancouver land.

Although land prices fell during the late 1890s, there is little evidence that wage earners bought residential lots at bargain prices. Purchases at tax sales and auction were monopolized by a few entrepreneurs, and much of the cheapest suburban land was sold in large parcels priced beyond the means of the wage earner seeking one or two lots. The residential land market remained quiet until 1904-05. The continuation of tax sales,³⁵ the low turnover in suburban lots, and the financial difficulties of established real estate firms like Oppenheimer Bros. were evidence that land was not selling. Prices were still high for many wage earners, and investors who were not forced to sell their land, were not lowering their prices but waiting for the expected rise in land values that most believed inevitable.

Early Building Companies

Early real estate boosters tended to confine their activities in the land market to the buying and selling of unimproved land in a few heavily promoted subdivisions which had been cleared and sometimes graded before being placed on the market. The provision of housing was left to the small contractor or the buyer himself. Some working men waited years to occupy a completed home. A sawmill foreman and his family who purchased a lot in Grandview in the early 1890s, for example, occupied a two room cabin for several years

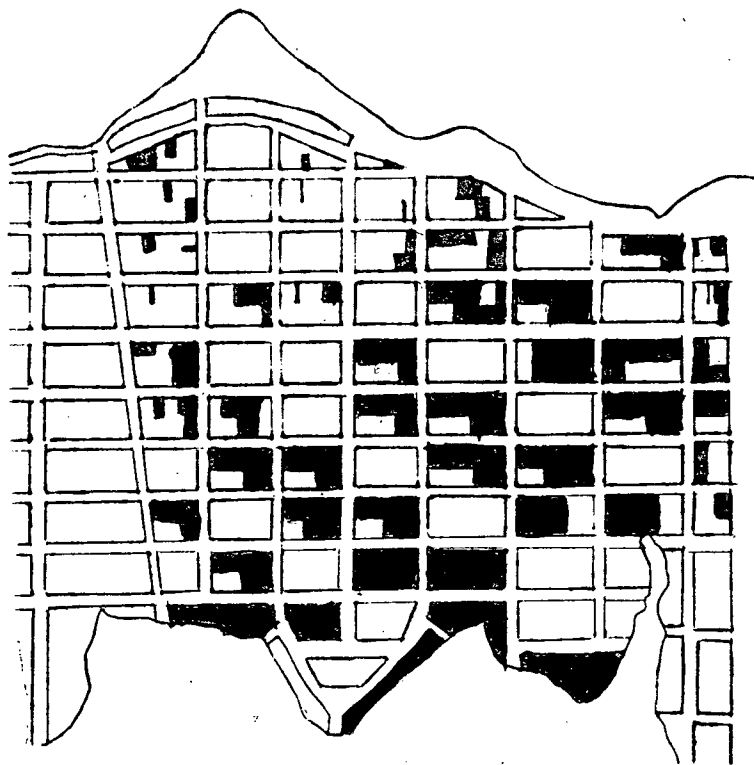
before they could afford to add a front room, and later still, two bedrooms. Similarly a young English carpenter borrowed money from an older brother to purchase a small East End lot, where he lived for five years in a tiny cabin while he built and subsequently rented, the house he waited to occupy.³⁶ The prevalence of cabins at the rear of residential lots in working class neighbourhoods indicates that the experiences of these men were not unique.³⁷

Few building companies existed to provide houses for wage earners. Thomas Dunn and W. Ralph incorporated the Terminal Building society in 1888 to develop their land holdings adjacent to the subdivision of Collingwood,³⁸ while H.A. Jones and H.T. Ceperley, owners of the subdivision, formed their own development company, the B.C. Building Association in 1890.³⁹ Both companies were of secondary interest to their owners, whose primary occupation was the selling and financing of real estate. In a city full of carpenters and self-styled contractors, small building companies were superfluous.

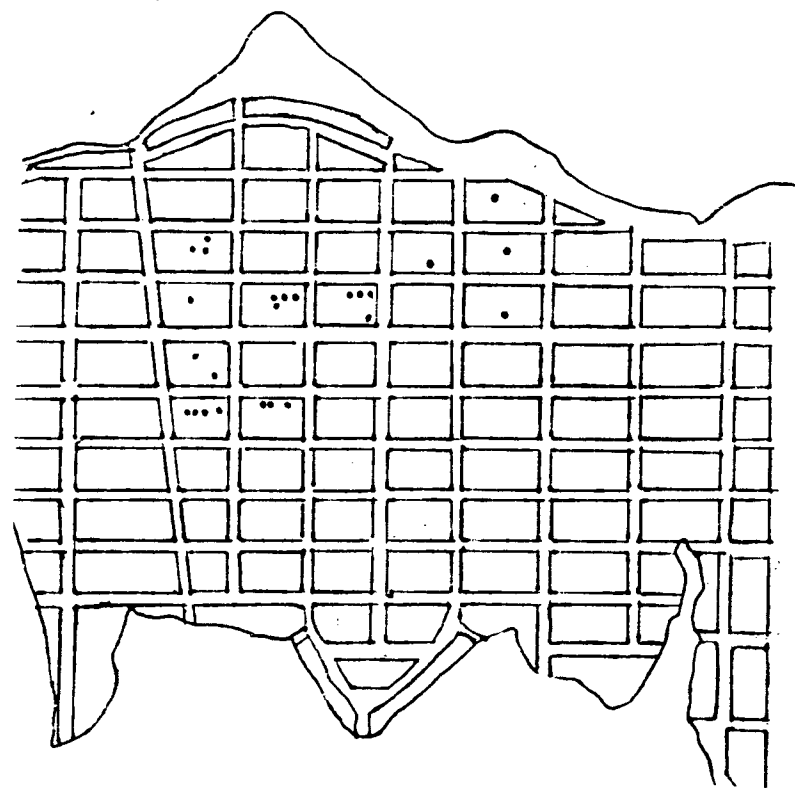
The relative importance of residential construction to so-called development companies was reflected in the operations of the city's largest building company, The Vancouver Improvement Company. The said company was incorporated in 1886 by a group of Victoria businessmen to assemble and develop the property in D.L. 181 and the eastern 130 acres of D.L. 196 (together comprising Vancouver's East End).⁴⁰ (Map 2:3) The mainstay of company profits however, became the marketing and not the development of its property. Immediately

VANCOUVER IMPROVEMENT CO.

LOTS FOR SALE - 1886

MAP 2:3

DEVELOPED LOTS - 1889

MAP 2:4

after registration, The Vancouver Improvement Company offered 800 lots for sale in the East End (Fig. 2:2, p. 37); 50% rebates were offered on the price of most residential lots for buyers who agreed to buy a company built home within six months of lot purchase. Relatively few buyers took advantage of this offer: the fire insurance atlas shows most (about 85%) of the lots offered for sale by the company in 1886, had no dwellings on them in 1889.⁴¹ Land sales however, had been brisk: only four out of the original 42 blocks in which lots had been offered were still in the company name on the 1889 assessment rolls.⁴² Investment in urban lots was a popular activity as Vancouver's first land boom neared its peak.

By 1891, the city's population was over 13,000 and the demand for housing had risen. The Vancouver Improvement Company was now active in construction of new homes, particularly modest cottages in the area bounded by Gore, Hastings, Heatley and Prior.⁴³ The company employed a string of small contractors to produce its housing: in the month of April, 1891, a total of 21 contractors were responsible for building 27 homes under The Vancouver Improvement Company name; in one block alone, ten contractors were at work on ten separate lots. In Vancouver where newly arrived carpenters were obliged to buy their first jobs⁴⁴ skilled labour was not in short supply, a situation which worked to the advantage of the city's construction companies. The plentiful supply of labour however, also made companies who built standard housing redundant, as many chose to act as their own contractor.

Vancouver Improvement Co'y Limited Property

LOTS 181 & 196

STR. P. 250
N. 158

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>BLOCK 39 Lot 1, each.....\$1000 " 2, each.....750 " 3, 4, 5, each.....500</p> <p>BLOCK 37 Lots 11, 12, 13, each.....\$1000</p> <p>BLOCK 30 Lots 5, 6, each.....\$ 700 " 7, 8, each.....800 " 9, 10, each.....900 " 12, 13, 14, each.....1000</p> <p>BLOCK 40 Lots 21, 22, 34, 35, each.....\$ 500 " 36, 37, each.....400</p> <p>BLOCK 42 Lot 13.....\$ 500</p> <p>BLOCK 43 Lot 24.....\$ 400</p> <p>BLOCK 44 Lots 12, 13, 14, each.....\$ 325 " 15, 16, each.....300 " 17, 18, each.....275 " 20, 31, 32, each.....850 25% rebate on certain lots for \$1000 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 48 Lots 4, 5, 6, each.....\$ 150 " 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, each.....100 " 16, each.....125 50% rebate on certain lots for \$500 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 49 Lots 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, each.....\$175 " 20, 21, each.....200 " 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....150 50% rebate on certain lots for \$200 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 51 Lots 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, each.....\$500 " 11, 12, 13, 14, each.....350 25% rebate for \$1000 houses erected in 6 months from date of purchase. Lots 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....325 50% rebate on certain lots for \$800 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 52 Lots 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, each.....\$350 50% rebate for \$1000 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 56 Lots 14, 15, 16, 17, 29, each.....\$650</p> <p>BLOCK 53 Lots 11, 12, each.....\$650</p> <p>BLOCK 57 Lots 14, 15, each.....\$600 " 16, each.....675 " (17, 18, 19).....1000 Condition that \$2500 house be erected in 6 months from date of purchase. Lots (22, 23).....\$600 " (25, 27).....600 " (28, 29).....600 Condition that \$2000 house be erected in 6 months from date of purchase.</p> <p>BLOCK 60 Lots 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, each.....\$ 325 50% rebate on certain lots for \$800 houses. Lots 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....\$ 300 Condition that \$2500 house be erected in 6 months from date of purchase.</p> <p>BLOCK 61 Lots 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, each.....\$ 225 50% rebate on certain lots for \$800 houses. Lots 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....\$ 200 \$2500 house conditional on either 2 or 3 of these lots. Lot 40.....300</p> | <p>BLOCK 63 Lot 1, each.....\$150 " 2, each.....100 50% rebate on one lot for \$500 house. Lots 2, 12, 18, 14, 15, each.....\$100 " 16.....150 Condition, \$1500 house on 2 or 3 lots.</p> <p>BLOCK 64 Lots 9, 16.....\$150 " 10, 11, 13, 14, 15.....100 50% rebate on \$500 houses erected in 6 months from date, on certain lots.</p> <p>BLOCK 65 Lots 1, 20, each.....\$ 250 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, each.....200 Conditions: \$2000 house on two or more lots in 6 months from date of purchase. Lots 21, 40, each.....\$275 " 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....225 50% rebate on certain lots for \$1000 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 66 Lots 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, each.....\$200 " 20.....250 \$2500 house to be erected on 2 or 3 lots in 6 months from date of purchase. " 21, 40.....325 " 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....275 50% rebate on certain lots for \$1000 houses erected in 6 months from date of purchase.</p> <p>BLOCK 68 Lots 16.....\$250 " 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, each.....300 Conditions: \$2500 house as above. " 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, each.....325 " 32.....375 50% rebate on certain lots for \$1000 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 71 Lots 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, each.....\$300 Condition, \$2500 house. " (25 and 29).....800 Condition, \$1000 house. " (28, 29 and 30).....300 Condition, \$2000 house.</p> <p>BLOCK 72 Lots 9, 10, 11.....\$400 50% rebate on certain lots for \$2000 houses. " 18, 19, 20, 21.....300 " 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.....800 25% rebate on certain lots for \$1000 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 73 Lots 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.....\$400 20% rebate on certain lots for \$1500 houses. " 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31.....\$300 " 32.....375 25% rebate for \$1000 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 75 Lots 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, each.....\$325 " 16.....400 " 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, each.....300 " 32.....375 50% rebate on certain lots for \$1000 erected in 6 months from date of purchase.</p> <p>BLOCK 78 Lots 1, 20, each.....\$400 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, each.....\$325 " 21, 40, each.....375 " 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....300 50% rebate on certain lots for \$1000 houses, etc.</p> <p>BLOCK 78 Lots 1, 20, each.....\$275 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, each.....225 " 21, 40, each.....250 " 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....200 50% rebate on certain lots for \$800 houses.</p> | <p>BLOCK 79 Lots 1, 9, each.....170 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, each.....100 50% rebate on certain lots for houses of \$500.</p> <p>BLOCK 80 Lots 1, 8, each.....150 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, each.....100 " 9, 10, each.....150 " 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.....160 50% rebate on certain lots for \$500 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 82 Lots 1, 20, each.....275 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, each.....225 " 21, 40, each.....250 " 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....200 50% rebate on certain lots for \$800 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 83 Lots 1, 20, each.....\$375 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, each.....300 " 21, 40, each.....275 " 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....250 50% rebate on certain lots for \$800 houses, as above.</p> <p>BLOCK 85 Lots 1, 16, each.....\$275 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, each.....300 " 17, 32, each.....325 " 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, each.....275 50% rebate for \$1000 houses on certain of these lots as above.</p> <p>BLOCK 88 Lots 1, 16, each.....\$375 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, each.....300 " 17, 32, each.....325 " 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, each.....275 50% rebate for houses of \$1000 on certain lots, as above.</p> <p>BLOCK 88 Lots 12.....\$350 " 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, each.....275 50% rebate on certain lots for \$1000 houses. Lots 13.....325 " 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, each.....250 50% rebate as above for \$800 houses.</p> <p>BLOCKS 90 & 91 Lots 1, 16.....\$325 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.....275 " 17, 32, each.....300 " 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, each.....250 50% rebate on certain lots for \$800 houses as above.</p> <p>BLOCKS 93 & 94 Lots 1, 20, each.....\$250 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, each.....200 " 21, 40.....225 " 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, each.....175 50% rebate as above, \$500 houses.</p> <p>BLOCK 96 Lots 10, 14.....\$150 " 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.....100 50% rebate as above for \$500 houses.</p> <p>BLOCKS 100 & 101 Corner lots, each.....\$ 225 Inside lots, each.....175 50% rebate for \$600 houses for certain lots.</p> <p>BLOCK 103 Lots 1, 16.....\$ 200 " 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.....250 " 17, 32.....300 " 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, each.....250 50% rebate on certain lots for \$600 houses erected in 6 months from date of purchase.</p> <p>BLOCKS 105, 106, 110, 111 & 114 Corner lots, each.....800 Inside lots, each.....250</p> |
|---|---|---|

Terms:

5% Discount for Cash, or 4 Cash,
Balance in 4, 8, and 12 Months,
8% Interest.

Where a rebate is allowed for a house it is understood that it is to be erected in 6 months from the date of purchase.

R. G. TATLOW & CO.

AGENTS FOR THE COMPANY,

1886.

CERDOVA ST., VANCOUVER, B.C.

1886

CITY ARCHIVES
CITY HALL

Thus, there is no evidence from the company records or newspaper reports, that The Vancouver Improvement Company was engaged in construction activity for more than the five years preceding 1892.

The impact of The Vancouver Improvement Company on the development of Vancouver's East End is difficult to assess. Company balance sheets suggest that the large profits of 1886-1893 did not derive from constructing homes. After the first year of operation the company quadrupled its stock capital; and most of the original shareholders sold their interest in the company, while Oppenheimer and two others, together maintained less than 15% of the shares. In 1887, 70% of the company's shareholders, still lived outside the Vancouver area: another 25% of the stock was owned by two British registered companies -- Vancouver Land and Securities Co. and Yorkshire Guarantee and Securities Co. The Vancouver Improvement Company continued to thrive until at least 1893, when a surplus of \$825,000 was recorded, and the value of shares stood at \$100.00. During the depression of the mid 1890s, the value of the company's assets dropped by over a half; by 1898 the size of its landholdings (1,200 lots) together with the amount of its liabilities (almost \$200,000) suggest that the company had purchased additional land during the depression and/or that previous holdings sold on now worthless agreements, had reverted back to the company.^{4 5}

In 1898 The Vancouver Improvement Company was purchased by the newly registered Vancouver Land and Improvement Co.,

which remained active in the Vancouver land market for just ten years.⁴⁶ (At the end of that period, Yorkshire Guarantee and Securities owned 40% of the company's stock, while Campbell Sweeny, manager of the Bank of Montreal, and W. Murray, manager of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, together owned another 45%.) There is no evidence that the company was involved in housing construction, rather its operation was focussed on selling land in the East End and Mount Pleasant. By the end of 1905, over three-quarters of the Vancouver Land and Improvement Company's 1200 lots had been sold; almost half of these sales occurred during 1905. Clearly profit still lay in marketing rather than developing residential land. Although many residents were building their own homes, the demand for undeveloped home sites was related to the large number of investors/speculators in the city. Building companies were in a sense, redundant, and their role in assembling, subdividing and selling land contributed to producing inflationary land prices in the city.

The "Blue Collar" Land Market After 1904

Vancouver added only 10,000 to its population in the dozen years preceding 1904, then gained another 10,000 between 1904 and 1906. This sudden acceleration of growth drove up land prices in 1905. The city's leading realtors, many of them prominent entrepreneurs from the 1890s, were joined by hundreds of new agents--small

businessmen with "shoestring operations,"⁴⁷ eager to profit from new urban growth. By the end of 1905, the city's leading real estate firms were reporting heavy investment in the East End and frequent turnover of full blocks.⁴⁸ Increasingly, title to undeveloped residential land shifted from the hands of a few large private owners representing the elite of the nineteenth century city, to a myriad of small entrepreneurs cum speculators.⁴⁹

The dominant landowners in the city's east side however, were probably the British based finance companies--Yorkshire Guarantee and Securities Corporation, B.C. Land and Investment Agency and the Vancouver Land and Securities Corporation. Among the three companies, Yorkshire Guarantee and Securities was by far the largest investor in the suburban areas of Hastings Townsite and Hill Crest (D.L. 301), with 2.5 times as much land as the next largest landowner, B.C. Land and Investment Agency, in 1906.⁵⁰ Former managers of all three companies--W.E. Farrell, E.B. Morgan and R.K. Houlgate, were directors of The Vancouver Land and Improvement Company during this period, providing valuable connections among the four largest landowners in the city's blue collar neighbourhoods. The implications of corporate rather than private ownership of residential land are a paradox. On the one hand, mortgage funds would have been more readily available for company owned land, encouraging home ownership, while on the other hand, large corporations had the financial leverage to speculate more successfully, thus driving up land

prices for the wage earner.

The players had changed but the speculation game was the same. By 1907, the demand for rental accommodation and small houses was high,⁵¹ but activity in the real estate market centered on the buying and selling of suburban acreage among dealers. Land bordering the eastern city limits was especially popular with investors who were awaiting the expected arrival of a new streetcar extension proposed for the following year.⁵² Until 1909, most lots in working class areas of the city were advertised for sale in blocks or portions of blocks. In 1901, for instance, a block of land in Grandview was offered for \$1,500.00 and the promise that "a quick profit of \$2,000.00" awaiting the buyer who subdivided this land into 24 lots.⁵³ As land prices grew so did the inventiveness of the copywriter. An advertisement for Grandview property in a 1909 paper ran, "Grandview money makers! 4 50' lots \$6,000.00. We will show you how to make a nice turnover on this property."⁵⁴ In a similar manner, before 1909 much of land in the Municipality of South Vancouver was sold as acreage to a mixture of speculators and settlers with the desire and the means for rural living. As the city's second great land boom got underway, the demand for South Vancouver land escalated and increasing numbers of "outside investors"⁵⁵ were buying both undivided acreage and parcels of lots in the municipality. Large landowners promoted their holdings as sure-fire investments. In 1909 a 20 acre land parcel (D.L. 336), located in the southeastern corner of the

municipality was offered for \$20,000.00.⁵⁶ Upon subdivision such a land parcel could yield 124 33' lots. The potential profit to the subdivider was clear from the paper's succeeding advertisement for a subdivision called "Victoria Road Heights," located immediately south of D.L. 336, and containing 33' lots priced between \$250.00-\$325.00 each.⁵⁷ The expected arrival of streetcar service connecting Eburne and New Westminster undoubtedly helped to push up the price of these and other South Vancouver subdivisions in 1909.

Speculators, small investors and new home buyers competed for residential land in the city and its suburbs. Lots in South Vancouver were reported to be turning over rapidly⁵⁸ and prices were rising accordingly. By 1910 the Labour Gazette reported that the bulk of sales in the city and suburbs were being made "by speculators to speculators."⁵⁹ A year later the Labour Gazette reported that residential sites, particularly those in working class areas of the city were not selling, implying that land prices were beyond the wage earner's means.⁶⁰ In 1912, even the local booster publications were reporting that small suburban lots were beyond the price range of many working men.⁶¹

As urban land prices soared over the 1909-12 period Vancouver was flooded with dozens of new companies eager to promote or finance real estate. Along with the established banks, about two dozen 'significant' loan and trust companies,⁶² the majority newly incorporated, were active in the local real estate market. Among the 35 major companies promoting

Vancouver land, only five firms had assets exceeding \$1,000,000.00 while another ten had assets in the range of half a million dollars.⁶³ Three local companies who promoted east side land were Bungalow Finance and Building Co. Ltd., East Vancouver Land Co. and Vancouver Estates Ltd. with assets of approximately \$300,000.00 each.⁶⁴ These firms were just three out of approximately 120 companies registered to promote or finance local real estate during 1909-12; another 40-50 companies registered prior to 1909, were still active in the real estate market.⁶⁵ This striking growth of interest in urban land reflected and stimulated soaring land costs in Vancouver. Many of these companies existed on the edge of bankruptcy and few would survive the recession and war years lying ahead. The instability inherent in most land booms would soon be reflected in the fate of these companies--from the spectacular collapse of Vancouver's largest indigenous financial organization, Dominion Trust, in 1915, to the mundane failures of dozens of very small companies like West Coast Land Co., or British Pacific Trust.

Down the city's social strata, men jumped on the boom time bandwagon. Middle class "investors" organized small trust and loan companies; members of the lower middle class formed co-operatives and lodge-sponsored organizations like the Mount Pleasant Phythian Loan Co. and the Vancouver Knights of Columbus Building Association, to finance "homes for the wage earner." A plethora of loan companies offered everyman a change to buy a home, while offering every small investor

a chance to lose his money!

Building Companies and the Real Estate Boom, 1909-1912

As the capital costs of speculating in undeveloped land became too high, many small entrepreneurs turned to development and construction for speculative profit. About 90.0% of the city's construction companies in 1912, were registered after 1909, a proportion even higher than land promotion companies (80.0%) or finance companies (84.0%) registered during the boom years. The large majority of these companies were very small, fewer than 10.0% had assets over \$100,000.00.⁶⁶ In the city's frantic land market, schemes abounded to attract the dollar of the potential home buyer. The Home Loan and Contract Co., for instance, offered loans at preferential interest rates to wage earners who bought shares in the company--a scheme which attracted two dozen buyers in the company's year and a half of operation.⁶⁷ Another building company whose authorized capital of \$1,000,000.00 reflected its grandiose expectations, was Vancouver Freehomes.⁶⁸ The company planned to build homes in Grandview and Mount Pleasant using the money of its blue collar shareholders as operating capital. As with the Home Loan and Contract Co., shareholders were given preferential albeit complicated financing. The company's first directors, an accountant, a Main street hardware merchant, two clergymen and a widow, resigned after three

months, their replacements departed in similar fashion, shortly after. The turnover in shareholders, less than a third of whom were actually blue collar workers, was likewise brisk. The company's rapid demise, inevitable in the face of urban land costs was undoubtedly hastened by the co-operative plan so enthusiastically touted in its prospectus. In the years before government assisted housing programs, schemes to house the worker based on speculative profit, were doomed to failure.

Most Vancouver homes were the product of small contractors or sub-contractors. In a sample of 140 applications for building permits during June 1911, over three-quarters of the applications for new house construction listed the owner as builder, and almost as many (70.0%) listed the owner as architect.⁶⁹ A total of 53 applicants received permits for 61 new houses; of the 49 applicants who took out a permit for one house, there is no way of knowing what proportion were building for themselves, but the large numbers who described themselves as "builder" and "architect" suggests that some at least, were building "on spec." Many who described themselves as "builder" however, may have contracted the work out to a small builder; among those applications where a separate "builder" is designated, the same name rarely appears more than once, suggesting once again that the city was well supplied with carpenters and construction workers who could call themselves 'builder.'

One large builder in Vancouver's east side was Frank Killam, who was alleged to have built 184 houses in 1911.⁷⁰

His Bungalow Finance and Building Co. had assets of over \$250,000.00; like the Home Loan and Contract Co. and others which escaped an early demise, Killam's company diversified its interests outside the Vancouver real estate market.⁷¹ Nevertheless, his financial success as an east side residential builder marks him an exception among the hundreds of builders in pre-war Vancouver.

Conclusion

Vancouver's first quarter century was marked by two short but extravagant land booms. While the C.P.R. orchestrated the development and expansion of the downtown core and the city's elite residential area to the west, a handful of prominent land developers controlled the supply of residential property in the East End and suburbs to the south. Municipal government backed by the C.P.R. endorsed the promotion of urban real estate, when the city's politicians and largest landowners were one and the same.

The collapse of the six year land boom in 1893 marked the end of the concentration of land ownership and control in the city. Speculative activity was only temporarily checked and resumed again as a few old and many new participants took advantage of tax sales and the like to buy up urban land at bargain prices. The control of the Vancouver land market however, was no longer concentrated in the hands of a few

prominent businessmen and politicians, but was increasingly drawn from the middle ranks of business, which had much less power over urban development than their predecessors.

At the end of the 1890s, the recovery of the urban economy marked the beginning of wider participation in the city's real estate market. Much of this participation took the form of investment in suburban land which typically, was offered in parcels of one to several blocks. The price of Vancouver real estate rose rapidly with its popularity, culminating in the second boom of 1909-1912. During this period the arrival of building co-operatives, shoestring finance companies and various schemes to house the worker signalled the strong need for affordable housing in the city.

NOTES

Chapter II

¹The C.P.R.'s impact upon the development of Vancouver is discussed in Patricia Roy, "Railways, Politicians and the Development of the City of Vancouver as a Metropolitan Centre 1886-1929," M.A. Thesis, Univ. of Toronto, Toronto, 1963.

The implications of the railway company's hegemony are also discussed in Galois, "Social Structure in Space;" McDonald, "Business Leaders;" and Robertson, "Power, Profit and Privacy."

²See Robertson, Op. cit., p. 231 for a list of mill shareholders. Large Vancouver landholders Oppenheimer and Dupont (Fig. 2:1) and Keefer and Harris (Fig. 2:2) together owned 3790 of the mill's shares; another 990 of the shares were owned by B.C. businessmen whose interests in the Vancouver land market are not known.

³Oppenheimer, Dupont, Keefer and Powell were all directors of the Vancouver Improvement Co. in 1887. [M. Picken, comp., City of Vancouver, Terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway, (Vancouver, 1887).] Harris' name appears in brackets after the Vancouver Improvement Company name on city assessment rolls, 1889. Tatlow's real estate company, R.G. Tatlow and Co., and Charles Rand's Rand Bros. both served as agents for the Vancouver Improvement Co., Property, 1886, list PACV.

⁴The Vancouver Sun, Sept. 12, 1973, p. 75.

⁵The Port Moody Gazette, May 16, 1885, p. 3.

⁶Vancouver News Advertiser, January 13, 1895, p. 4.

⁷R.A.J. McDonald, "City Building in the Canadian West: A Case Study of Economic Growth in Early Vancouver, 1886-93," B.C. Studies, No. 43, Autumn, 1979.

⁸City of Vancouver, Assessment Rolls, 1887-1889.

⁹The Vancouver World, March 19, 1890, p. 5.

¹⁰VNA, Sept. 1, 1892.

¹¹Rents for room and board were very high during this period and workers with families to support could probably not save more than \$50.00-\$75.00 a year. In any case, this period may represent one of the best times for the wage earner to buy land in Vancouver.

¹²Robertson and Co. Listings, D.L. 264A, Add. Mss. 19, PACV.

¹³Reported in the VNA, August 12, 1889.

¹⁴As integrated land promoters Ceperley and Horne were also directors of the B.C. Building Association and the Vancouver, Loan, Trust, Savings, and Guarantee Co..

¹⁵Robertson & Co., Listings, D.L. 264A and D.L. 184.

¹⁶Loc. cit.

¹⁷VNA, Nov. 30, p. 6; Dec. 4, p. 3 and Dec. 5, p. 3, 1984.

¹⁸Robertson and Co., Listings, D.L. 195, June 1895.

¹⁹In one listing, 39-3/4 acres were offered for \$650.00. VNA, Dec. 3, 1896, p. 4.

²⁰Monetary Times, Nov. 15, 1895, p. 628 (cited in Galois, "Social Structure in Space.").

²¹Robertson and Co. Listings, D.L. 182j.

²²Op. cit., D.L. 183d.

²³See McDonald, "Business Leaders," Appendix A.

²⁴Among the eight largest real estate firms listed in the 1904 director, "Rand Bros." is the only name dating back to the early boom years.

²⁵VNA, Nov. 30, 1894, p. 5. ²⁶Loc. cit.

²⁷The information in this paragraph is taken from "Oppenheimers," unpub. ms., Add. mss 108, Vol. 13, PACV.

²⁸See Chapter IV for further discussion of Bank of B.C.'s activities in Vancouver.

²⁹Robertson and Co., Listings, p. 273.

³⁰Vancouver World, May 12, 1894.

³¹Vancouver Suburban Lands, Assessment Rolls, 1896-1909.

³²Victor Ross, "The Bank of B.C." A History of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Vol. 1, Toronto, 1920 (also cited in McDonald, "City Building").

³³Ross, "The Bank of B.C.," p. 345.

³⁴Vancouver Suburban Lands, Assessment Rolls, 1896-1904.

³⁵Vancouver City Council, Minutes, 1895-97, PACV.

³⁶"Leonard Sankey," Add. Mss 54, PACV; William's B.C. Directory, 1892-1898.

³⁷Goad's Fire Insurance Atlas, City of Vancouver, (San Francisco, 1889).

³⁸Robertson, "Power, Profit and Privacy," pp. 197 and 207.

³⁹McDonald, "Business Leaders," Appendix A.

⁴⁰Company Records 1862 #86, PAPBC.

⁴¹A sample of six blocks, owned, subdivided and advertised by the Vancouver Improvement Co. in 1886 was checked with the fire insurance atlas for 1889 to obtain this figure. See Fig. 2:2 and Map 2:3.

⁴²City of Vancouver, Assessment Rolls, 1889.

⁴³VNA, April 14, 1891.

⁴⁴Diary of E.G. Barnes, 1889, priv. ms. Job "buying" in Vancouver, after 1900, is discussed in George Hardy, Those Stormy Years, (London: Lawrence and Wishout, 1956), p. 27.

⁴⁵Oppenheimer, Add. mss, 108, Vol. 13, sec. 7, PACV.

⁴⁶C R 1897, #78, PABC.

⁴⁷McDonald, "Business Leaders," p. 102.

⁴⁸The Province, Nov. 18, 1905, p. 1.

⁴⁹Loc. cit., the transfer of the Bodwell Estate (14.2 acres in D.L. 182) in 1905 to an out-of-town investor, G. Shopland, illustrates this trend.

⁵⁰Vancouver Suburban Lands, Assessment Rolls, 1906, Index to taxpayers.

⁵¹The Province, August 24, 1907, p. 20.

⁵²Op. cit., Oct. 12, 1907, p. 5.

⁵³The Vancouver World, May 1901.

⁵⁴The Vancouver World, April 15, 1909.

⁵⁵The Province, April 10, 1909, p. 17.

⁵⁶The Vancouver World, Sept. 2, 1909, p. 21.

⁵⁷Op. cit., p. 26.

⁵⁸The Province, April 10, 1909, p. 17.

⁵⁹The Labour Gazette, Vol. IX, pp. 589 and 1074.

⁶⁰L.G., Vol. XII, p. 245.

⁶¹Reported by R.J. McDougall in "Vancouver Real Estate for 25 years," B.C. Magazine, Vol. 7, December 1911, p. 607.

⁶²McDonald, "Business Leaders," Appendix B.

⁶³Loc. cit.

⁶⁴Assets ranged between \$277,000.00-\$327,000.00.

⁶⁵B.C. Sessional Papers, 1913, section J.

⁶⁶Loc. cit.

⁶⁷C.R. 1910, #263. The company withdrew from the Vancouver housing market in 1912, but renamed, continued on as a general finance company with national interests.

⁶⁸B.C. Sessional Papers, 1913, Sec. J.

⁶⁹City of Vancouver, Building Permits, June 1911. The designation of "self" as architect did not preclude the use of mass produced housing plans.

⁷⁰"Vancouver, a City of Beautiful Homes," B.C. Magazine, no. 7, 1911, pp. 1313-1315.

⁷¹C.R. 1910, PAPBC.

III. THE WAGE EARNER AND THE URBAN ECONOMY OF EARLY VANCOUVER

Introduction: The Composition of the Labour Market, 1891-1911

Before 1900, Vancouver was a modest commercial and transportation centre whose economic growth depended as much on expectation as on the presence of hinterland resources.¹ In 1891, almost 60% of the work force was employed in service and transportation, while another 17% worked in construction (Table 3:1, p. 53). Less than 25% of the work force was employed in manufacturing and most of this group worked in saw-mills to produce products for local demand. Many workers prospered during Vancouver's first few years of hectic growth but most faced severe wage cuts or unemployment when population growth slowed and investment dried up during the depression of the 1890s.

By the end of the century Vancouver's employment market had begun to grow once again, as external demand for lumber and new investment capital from central Canada fostered economic growth. The C.P.R. expanded downtown waterfront development and extended branch lines across False Creek to serve the burgeoning industry of lumber and shingle mills, machinery depots and gravel and cement plants. Nevertheless,

TABLE 3:1. Distribution of the Labour Force - Vancouver, 1891, 1901, 1911

| | <u>1891</u> | | <u>1901</u> | | <u>1911</u> | |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------|-------------|--|-------------|-------|
| Manufacturing (total) | 1,084 | 23.7 | 2,151 | | 9,063 | 17.9 |
| Lumber products | 586 | | | | 5,879 | |
| Other | 498 | | | | 3,184 | |
| Construction | 750 | 16.4 | | | 8,906 | 17.6 |
| Transportation/Utilities | 960 | 21.0 | | | 5,298 | 10.5 |
| Service (total) | 1,669 | 36.7 | | | 21,385 | 42.2 |
| Commerce | 862 | | | | 11,034 | |
| Government | N/A | | | | 3,680 | |
| Other | N/A | | | | 6,671 | |
| Professional | 97 | 2.2 | | | 3,971 | 7.8 |
| Other | N/A | | | | 2,005 | 4.0 |
| TOTAL | 4,560 | 100.0 | | | 50,628 | 100.0 |

Source: Manufacturing statistics for 1891 and 1901 are from Canada Census, 1901, Vol. III, Table III. All other figures for 1891 are derived from The Vancouver World, Souvenir Edition, April 1891. (Using the manufacturing statistics from the census as a guide, these figures were lowered proportionately to facilitate accurate comparison with census figures.) Canada Census 1911, Vol. III, Table IX, and Vol. V, Table VI.

by 1911 the proportion of the work force in manufacturing in general and sawmilling in particular,² had decreased from earlier levels, and the proportion of workers in transportation was half the 1891 rate. The construction industry recovered, then expanded with the accelerating urban growth which took place after 1900. Employing just under 18% of the labour force in 1911, its share of the employment market, however, was little different from that of 1891. In general then, the proportion of the market for blue collar workers was shrinking. The professional sector and service sectors, which employed a large proportion of women and offered the lowest wages to blue collar males, were the areas of the urban economy showing the greatest expansion.

The Labour Surplus

By 1900, Vancouver had replaced Victoria as the metropolitan centre of the province, but much internal and most external investment continued to flow heavily into real estate or the promotion of hinterland resources, rather than into the development of labour intensive secondary industry. For the wage earner the most salient feature of the urban economy was the regular surplus of labour. This surplus arose from three sources: a large pool of transient workers, a large enclave of Asian workers living in the city, and, especially after 1905, the heavy increase in migration to Vancouver.

Migrant workers on their way to and from railway gangs, logging camps or mining centres regularly gravitated to the city in search of temporary employment, and the seasonal nature of primary resource industries contributed to the constant body of unemployed in the city each winter.³ Many of those resource workers, from personal choice or economic necessity, remained in the city. For example, widespread closure of logging camps and sawmills in the Pacific Northwest during the spring and summer of 1904 and 1905 precipitated an influx of men searching for work in the city;⁴ this had a dampening effect on wages as the newcomers competed for jobs with the unskilled and semi-skilled members of the permanent population. Enlarging the city's labour pool still further, were the body of skilled tradesmen regularly laid off each winter.

Vancouver's Asian community, a population of over 5,000 in 1911, was a second source of unskilled labour which kept down wages in sawmills and other unskilled work in the service sector and construction. As early as 1887, unemployed workers banded together to protest the use of cheap oriental labour for clearing the West End forest,⁵ but Chinese continued to arrive in the city before the War, and most found work in semi-skilled and unskilled occupations for approximately two-thirds of the "white" wage. In 1906, for example, semi-skilled labour received \$2.00-\$2.50 a day while orientals doing the same work, received \$1.35-\$1.75.⁶ In 1911 Japanese labourers received .20 an hour in the city's sawmills while the going rate for white unskilled labour was .35 an hour.⁷

Moreover the Chinese tended to take the place of working class women as domestics, launderers and cooks.

The third, and after 1905, most important contribution to Vancouver's labour surplus, came from the surge of immigrants seeking permanent residence in the city. Even during the city's booms of 1886-91 and 1909-12, the number of job seekers could outstrip demand and some newcomers, skilled and unskilled alike, were obliged to buy their first jobs in the city.⁸ As early as 1891, a young Scottish wage earner sent warning home:

So you think you might try Vancouver! Well without capital or with (sic) a situation secured before hand, I think you are better at home. We get so many young fellows dumped out here from England that ... a number are going around idle.⁹

Emigration from Britain declined during the 1890s but resumed at an accelerating rate in the early 1900s. At a time of housing shortages and uncertain job prospects there was much animosity towards new immigrants, and employers in many Canadian cities advised that "no Englishmen need apply" for the jobs they had available.¹⁰ In Vancouver, anti-English feeling may not have been as strong as elsewhere, but certainly the newcomer's "English" status was no asset in his search for employment. One disillusioned immigrant wrote to The Province:

Is there an Englishman in all British Columbia who could tell another where he could get work? Machinist, millwright or would accept what is offered ... cannot get a job in Vancouver.¹¹

After months of searching, another Englishman, a skilled cabinet maker, obtained work by passing himself off as a Scot.¹²

One unfortunate young man, whose upper middle class family had sent him to Canada "to make a man of him" drowned himself in Burrard Inlet after weeks of semi starvation and nights spent sleeping on the C.P.R. wharves. His unemployed compatriot railed against the absence of workhouses in British Columbia.¹³

The city's labour papers advocated restrictions on immigration: the Federal government was accused of misrepresenting employment opportunities and the Provincial government of fostering unemployment through its support of the Salvation Army's recruitment schemes.¹⁴ Whether justified or not, these allegations reflected the opinions of labour spokesmen and received the endorsement of workers competing in a tight job market. Wage earners were soon backed up by officialdom. In 1909 Premier McBride announced that his government would discourage indiscriminate immigration to the province:

... the classes we desire to secure being skilled agriculturalists, farm labourers, women domestics and persons possessed of sufficient means to establish themselves as fruit growers, dairy men, poultry breeders and market gardeners.¹⁵

Three years later the editor of B.C. Magazine echoed the former Premier:

We want men with a fair amount of capital, say from four to ten thousand dollars, and experience in mixed farming ...¹⁶

Clearly B.C.'s largest cities such as Vancouver, did not need urban workers and the province's elite did not need the potential turmoil arising from continued levels of high unemployment.

Employment Conditions

Although Vancouver expanded rapidly between 1886 and 1914, periods of economic recession, high unemployment and depression were almost as characteristic as boom times during these years. During the widespread depression of the 1890s contracts from central Canada and Britain were cancelled forcing local mills and canneries in Vancouver to reduce staff and lower wages. American workers returned home and many small merchants went bankrupt. Some of the unemployed had been independent "small operators" in the lumber business, who had lost their capital¹⁷ and competed for scarce jobs with the larger firms. In 1894 city council established a "relief committee" as local churches opened soup kitchens and hundreds of unemployed men sought shelter in the public library.¹⁸

By the end of the 1890s the economy had recovered but cycles of mild to moderately high unemployment marked the next decade. The worst of these cycles was the recession of 1907-08 when construction in the city reached a standstill and wages dropped by half. Once again the municipal government provided relief work, cheap shelter and meal tickets for the unemployed. At least half of the estimated 5,000 men out of work were reputed to be skilled artisans.¹⁹ During the winter months of 1907, as many as three-quarters of the city's carpenters and electricians, and two-thirds of its

bricklayers were jobless.²⁰ The following year the situation was worse. Swelled by the influx of transients, the number of unemployed had increased. The local correspondent for the Labour Gazette estimated that 65% of the unemployed were permanent residents of the city.²¹ The Labour Gazette continued to record significant unemployment in early 1909, and despite a well established upturn in the urban economy by 1910, high levels of unemployment were again reported in 1911.²² By the end of 1912 unemployment rates were equal to those during the winters of 1907-08 and 1908-09.²³ According to one observer, the shortage of jobs was so acute that Chinese labour was being displaced by English labourers accepting even lower wages.²⁴

Job security and the prospects of a steady income were threatened by more than the broad swings of the province's economy. Hiring trends, particularly in the construction industry, trade disputes among organized labour and industrial productivity all contributed in some measure to restricting income levels in the city. Many if not most contractors hired construction workers, including the skilled, on a short term basis. During the city's first construction boom, the diary of one carpenter listed thirteen employers during one eight month period.²⁵ More evidence of the temporary nature of employment in the construction industry can be found in wage books: only two of the 28 men employed in 1898 by one contractor, worked full time, the remaining men worked for periods ranging from a few days to six weeks. Galois found that fewer

than 1590 of the artisans listed in the city directory of 1901 named a workplace or identified themselves as self-employed.²⁶ Most jobs in construction were to be found with small builders who could offer their employees only temporary positions. The scarcity of steady employment for tradesmen in the city was frequently remarked upon by the local correspondent for the Labour Gazette. During the winter months, skilled artisans in Vancouver averaged as few as twelve days of work.²⁷ Skilled construction workers averaged no more than 20 days of work with one firm at any time of the year; certainly construction workers in Vancouver (with the exception of masons) worked a shorter year than those in Toronto.²⁸

In 1905 the Department of Labour began to compare employment conditions in Canadian cities. For almost all blue collar occupations, activity in the Vancouver labour market consistently ranked below that in Winnipeg or Toronto when measured on a five point scale which rated employment conditions from "very dull" (1) to "very busy"(5). Three occupational groupings--manufacturing, building trades and unskilled labour were examined every four months between 1905 and 1913. In over half the total observations, employment activity in Vancouver was rated below that of both Winnipeg and Toronto; for an additional quarter of the observations, Vancouver ranked below at least one of those two cities. On only four occasions did employment conditions equal those of both the other cities, and only once (May 1912) were conditions (for building trades only) better than those in both

Winnipeg and Toronto. (Table 3:2). Toronto's overwhelming advantage in terms of size and proximity to large markets does not entirely explain Vancouver's relatively poor ratings--Winnipeg with less than half the population of Toronto generally had higher ratings than Toronto throughout the period. Job opportunities in Vancouver however, were frequently inferior to those in either city between 1905 and 1913.

TABLE 3:2. Employment Conditions in Vancouver, 1905-13: A Comparison of Rankings with Winnipeg and Toronto.

| Occupation | Ranks at bottom | Ranks 2nd | Ranks 1st | Equal Ranking to one or both | Total Observations |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Manufacturing | 7 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 12 |
| Building Trades | 17 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 25 |
| Unskilled Labour | 10 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 23 |
| All Occupations | 34 | 15 | 2 | 9 | 60 |

Source: Monthly tables, "Employment in Canada," The Labour Gazette, Volumes VI to XII.

The Department of Labour's tabulation of employment conditions was based upon the reports of local correspondents and did not take into account trade disputes or strike activity. Between 1901-1911, the Department of Labour recorded 46 trade disputes in Vancouver with peaks in 1903, 1907 and 1911.²⁹ Approximately 1800 men were on strike in 1903 attempting to gain union recognition and shorter working hours. Among those, 1000 transportation workers were on strike for

almost four months. In 1907, 1340 wage earners went on strike in reaction to the wage cuts and extension of the working day implemented that year. In 1911, approximately 7500 workers (15% of the city's work force) were on strike, and 5500 of that total were off work for two months or longer. All were in search of higher wages but many made no gains and others made only small ones. Among the 39 settlements recorded by the Department of Labour, 36% were unconditionally in favour of the employer and 44% ended in compromise. Overall, strikes in Vancouver did not involve exceptionally large numbers of workers but Department of Labour statistics do not tell the full story. The local labour papers reported more unrest than official figures suggest. More significant, the multiplier effect of trade disputes produced wage and job losses in occupational groups related to those actually on strike. In a sense, recorded strike activity represented only the tip of the iceberg: many wage earners were in no position to organize, let alone to strike for higher wages.³⁰ The number of trade disputes in the city may actually have risen if conditions in the labour market had been more favourable.

Wages

Until the depression of the mid 1890s, Vancouver wage rates for skilled labour were reputed to be high in comparison with those in central and eastern Canada. The majority of blue collar workers however, were semi-skilled or unskilled--mill hands, builders' labourers or employees in the lower paying transportation and service sectors of the urban economy (Table 3:1, p. 53), and with the exception of longshoremen, their wages held down by Asian competition were not much higher than those of labourers in say Toronto or Winnipeg. As a result the wage differential between skilled and unskilled labour was greater during this period than in succeeding years (Table 3:3, p. 65). Nevertheless, employment levels were high in the 1880s and early 1890s, and the 54 hour work week offered potentially high income in those few occupations where labour was in demand.

After seven years of relative prosperity Vancouver wage earners were strongly affected by the depression of the 1890s. Wage cuts were imposed on construction workers in 1892, millworkers and sailors in 1893, labourers and painters in 1894, and on municipal workers and longshoremen in 1895.³¹ As the economy recovered at the end of the decade, wages rose slightly but remained below their former levels. Not until 1900 and 1902, respectively did mill workers and construction workers regain the hourly wage rates of 1891; by then however,

the work week was ten hours shorter, resulting in lower take-home pay for many. The millhand who received \$10.26 a week in 1891, could earn \$11.00 a week in 1901; the machinist earning \$14.40 a week in 1901 still compared poorly to the machinist who brought home \$22.68 a week in 1891. While builders labourers' wages in 1903, at \$15.40 a week surpassed wages of \$11.34 in 1891, carpenters, at \$17.60 a week were still earning less than they had twelve years previously when wages averaged \$18.90 a week. In short, the unskilled or semi-skilled worker was catching up to the skilled wage earner. In absolute terms however, some wage earners were making little progress. The longshoreman, for example, waited approximately twenty years before receiving wages equal to those of 1891 (Table 3:3, p. 65).

The rise in wages between 1900 and 1912 was not steady. In 1905 a general labour surplus in the city reduced wages in several occupations to 1903 levels.³² During the recession of 1906-07 wages in construction dropped, on average, from \$5.00-\$2.00 a day.³³ Competition from oriental workers continued to depress wages. Mill employers paid Asian workers \$1.35 to \$1.75 a day for the same work that cost them \$2.00-\$2.50 a day for white semi-skilled labour.³⁴ The largest wage gains since the 1880s were made between 1909 and 1912. Carpenters' wages rose by 14% in 1909, lumberers by 25% in 1910, and longshoremen, by 27% in 1912; transportation workers made two gains of 15% in 1908 and 9% in 1911.³⁵ While these increases may look substantial, they were "catch up" gains,

which, when averaged over the preceding 20 years, fell well short of the rise in the cost of living for the same period. The Department of Labour indices show that British Columbia as a whole, experienced the lowest average rate of increase in wages among the nine provinces, 1900-1913.³⁶

TABLE 3:3. Vancouver Hourly Wage Rates, 1891-1911

| | 1891 | 1901 | 1903 | 1907 | 1911 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Longshoreman | .40 | .25 | .25 | .30 | .38 |
| Labourer | .19 | .25 | .35 | .35 | .40 |
| Machinist | .42 | .30 | .36 | .40 | .40 |
| Plumber | N/A | .33 | .50 | .50 | .62 |
| Carpenter | .35 | .33 | .40 | .44 | .50 |
| Motorman | N/A | .20 | .25 | .31 | .35* |

*Maximum rate after 5 years experience.

Source: 1891: Vancouver Daily World, "Souvenir Edition," April 1891.

1901-1911: The Report of the Board of Inquiry Into the Cost of Living, 1915, Vol. II, pp. 484-485 and Wages and Hours of Labour in Canada, 1901-1920, Report no. 1 (March, 1921).

Reports of hourly or even daily wage rates may provide a deceptively high assessment of wage earners' incomes. Generally average weekly wages were far lower than the estimate derived by multiplying hourly wages by the normal hours of labour.³⁷ On average, scaffolders, bricklayers and builders labourers in Vancouver worked eight months a year, while in

in Toronto, these same occupational groups averaged a slightly longer work period of eight and a half months a year.³⁸ Moreover Department of Labour wage data were based on the union rate although not all workers were paid union wages. In Vancouver, many skilled woodworkers including millwrights and cabinet makers received less than the union wage.³⁹ Certainly estimates of earnings based on Department of Labour data were higher than the overall actual earnings in Toronto's building trades during this period.⁴⁰

Average annual wages compiled from census data may provide the best indication of real wages.⁴¹ In occupations attracting transient workers (construction, dock workers, etc.) average wages will be deceptively low, however comparisons of average annual wages in cities of similar size and/or labour conditions are revealing. Table 3:4 (p. 67) shows the average annual wage for workers in manufacturing industries in Canada's ten largest cities. Vancouver's position second from the bottom places the city's labour market in national perspective. The participation of Asians (under 10% of the work force in manufacturing) does not explain the city's low standing given the heavier participation of low paid women workers in manufacturing in most other cities.⁴² Comparative average annual wages in such industries as construction are not available. Vancouver construction workers generally made a higher hourly wage than such workers in most other Canadian cities, however annual wages may not have reflected this advantage given the relatively high unemployment levels and volatile

nature of the construction industry in the city.

TABLE 3:4. Annual Wages in Manufacturing
in Canadian Cities, 1911

| <u>City</u> | <u>Employees in Manufacturing</u> | <u>Average Annual Wage</u> |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Calgary | 2,248 | \$ 656.35 |
| Winnipeg | 10,255 | 586.17 |
| Toronto | 53,157 | 495.02 |
| Hamilton | 18,865 | 491.03 |
| Montreal | 33,922 | 568.51 |
| Ottawa | 8,329 | 447.64 |
| London | 7,288 | 444.99 |
| Vancouver | 9,207 | 418.05 |
| Halifax | 5,175 | 331.46 |
| St. John | 5,356 | 377.88 |

Source: Canada Census, 1911, Vol. III, p. 214.

Living Costs in Vancouver, 1900-1912

By comparison with other Canadian cities, turn of the century Vancouver was regarded as an expensive place to live. Woodworkers claimed they would be better off employed at .20/hour in the east than .30/hour in B.C. "where the cost of living more than made up the difference."⁴³ The Vancouver

Postal Employees Union petitioned their Federal employers for a "regional wage increase," citing, "the high price of every article of consumption and the excessive high costs which prevail here."⁴⁴ Price indices confirm these complaints: among Canada's eight largest cities (Montreal excepted), Vancouver was rated as the most expensive for the period 1900-1912, according to the Department of Labour index representing a weekly family budget for food, fuel and lighting (Table 3:5). As the city's population grew over the decade, the gap in costs between Vancouver and most of the cities listed widened even further. The discussion of housing costs which follows, suggests that had the cost of housing (rental or purchased) been included in those calculations, differences in ratings may have been still wider. Indeed Vancouver's consistent position at the top of the budget index is remarkable given the appreciably lower fuel expenditures necessary on the west coast.

Figure 3:1 shows rising retail prices in major urban centres by province for the 1900-12 period. Again the wide gap between British Columbia and Manitoba and Ontario is evident. Moreover, the large differences among the 1900 price indices suggest that Vancouver (along with Victoria and New Westminster) had always been an expensive place by comparison with prairie cities and especially, cities of central Canada.

Commodity prices in many Canadian cities were documented at intervals by the Labour Gazette after 1900. While not everyone accepted that Vancouver's prices were being

TABLE 3:5. The Weekly Family Budget Index for Canadian Cities: 1900, 1905 and 1912

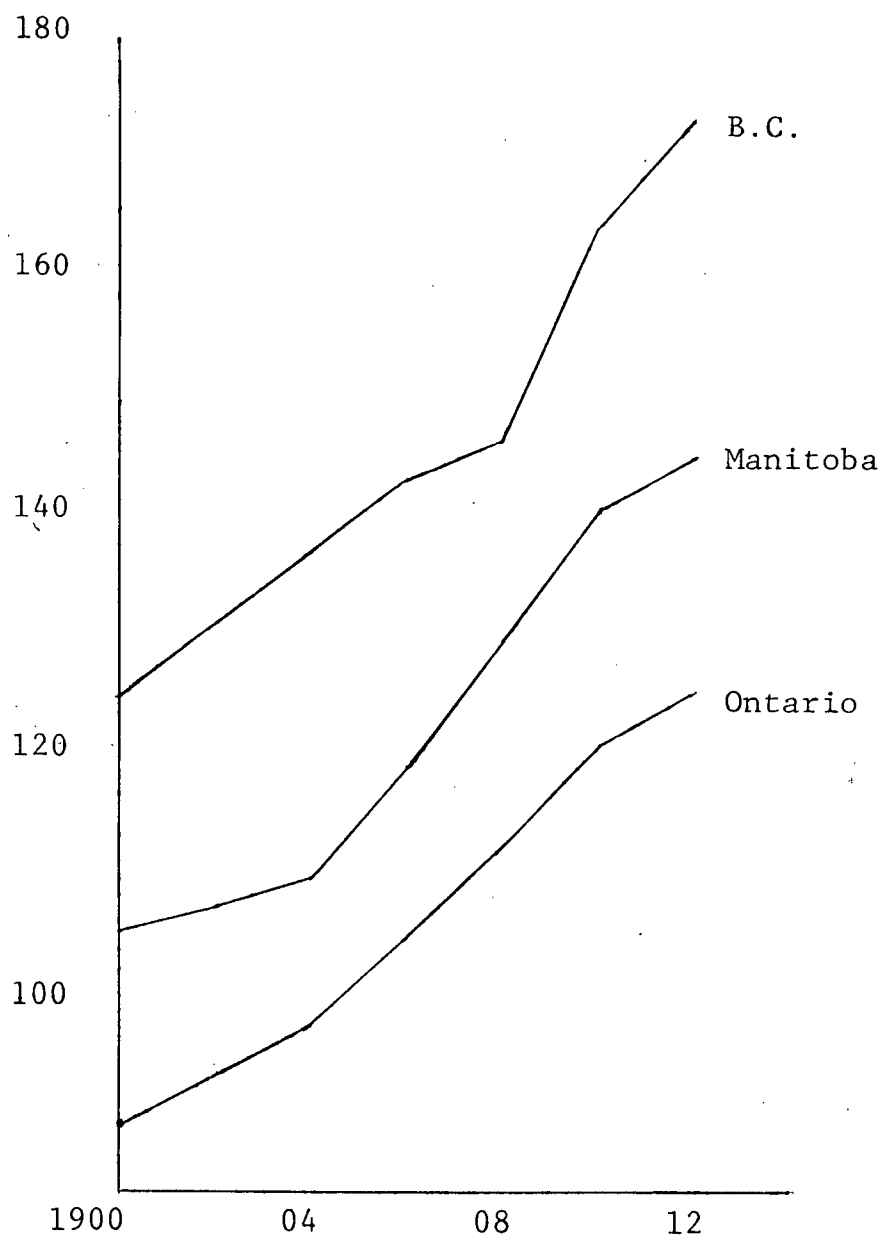
| <u>City</u> | <u>1900 Index</u> | <u>1905 Index</u> | <u>1912 Index</u> |
|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Vancouver | 6.41 | 6.90 | 8.74 |
| Winnipeg | 5.83 | 5.96 | 8.32 |
| London | 4.58 | 5.69 | 7.37 |
| Hamilton | 4.88 | 5.15 | 7.03 |
| Toronto | 5.03 | 5.54 | 7.19 |
| Ottawa | 5.10 | 5.68 | 7.25 |
| St. John | 5.22 | 6.01 | 7.92 |
| Halifax | 5.41 | 6.13 | 7.56 |

Source: Board of Inquiry into Cost of Living, Report, Vol. I.

accurately represented by the Labour Gazette--the local correspondent was denounced as a political favorite who quoted unrealistically low prices for food and housing,⁴⁵ the trends expressed by its reports were clear. With the exception of fuel, the costs of goods, services and utilities were higher in Vancouver than in any other large Canadian city. Table 3:6 (p. 71) compares Vancouver and Toronto for 1910 and 1912. By the end of the decade, food prices averaged approximately 50% higher than those in Toronto, reflecting in part, the effects of expensive transportation costs and the high demand from lumber camps and construction crews in the city's hinterland.⁴⁶ The price of coal oil, and such services as water, electricity and gas ranged from double to more than triple

Average Retail Prices in Major Cities of
B.C., Manitoba and Ontario
1900 - 1912

(Average Prices, Canada: 1900 = 100)



Source: Board of Inquiry into the Cost of Living, Report,
1914, Vol. I, p. 141.

Fig. 3:1

those in Toronto (Tables 3:5, p. 69, and 3:6, below). Electricity rates, calculated on a sliding scale peculiar to each city, are difficult to compare; nevertheless Vancouver's rates as tabled by the Department of Labour appear to be the highest urban rates in Canada.⁴⁷ Residents of Mount Pleasant were paying almost three times as much for their electricity as residents of comparable neighbourhoods in Winnipeg and Toronto.

TABLE 3:6. Prices of Staple Commodities, Vancouver and Toronto - 1900, 1905 and 1910

| | 1900 | | 1905 | | 1910 | |
|----------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| | <u>Vancouver</u> | <u>Toronto</u> | <u>Vancouver</u> | <u>Toronto</u> | <u>Vancouver</u> | <u>Toronto</u> |
| Beef | .12 | .10 | .15 | .14 | .15 | .08 |
| Eggs | .35 | .22 | .35 | .26 | .65 | .55 |
| Cheese | .22 | .14 | .22 | .15 | .20 | .17 |
| Milk | .08 | N/A | .10 | .08 | .11 | .10 |
| Bread | .04 | .03 | .04 | .03 | .06 | .03 |
| Coal oil | .29 | .15 | .29 | .15 | .35 | .18 |
| Fuel* | 6.50 | 4.50 | 6.50 | 5.50 | 7.50 | 5.50 |
| Rent** | 13.30 | 9.50 | 20.00 | 14.00 | 25.00 | 16.00 |

* 1 ton of soft coal. (In Vancouver, soft wood was available at \$2.50-\$3.50 a cord).

**6 room dwelling.

Source: The Labour Gazette, Vol. X, pp. 916-17; Vol. XII, pp. 808-09; and Report of the Board of Inquiry (1915), Vol. I, pp. 182, 215, and 474.

Gas rates likewise, were the highest in Canada.⁴⁸ In addition, Vancouver homeowners faced higher taxes and financing costs than their counterparts in Toronto. Mortgage interest rates

ranged from half a percentage point higher in 1901 to as much as three percentage points higher than Toronto interest rates in the 1909-13 period.⁴⁹ The Vancouver mill rate remained consistently higher also: in 1910 it stood at 20 mills, in comparison to 17.5 for Toronto and 10.8 for Winnipeg. The cost of housing however, produced the widest difference in the cost of living for the city's wage earners.

TABLE 3:7. A Comparison of Water Rates in Three Canadian Cities, 1900 - 1909

| <u>Water rates:</u> | <u>1900</u> | <u>1905</u> | <u>1909</u> |
|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Vancouver | | 1 family house \$6.00 | |
| | | Bath add 3.00 | |
| | | W.C. " 4.00 | |
| South Vancouver | | | 1 family house \$10.00 |
| | | | Bath add 3.60 |
| | | | W.C. " 4.20 |
| Toronto | 4 rm house \$1.50 | | 4 rm house 2.00 |
| | Add. rm .25 | | Add. rm .50 |
| | Bath 1.25 | | Bath 1.25 |
| | W.C. 1.25 | | W.C. 1.50 |

Source: Board of Inquiry into Cost of Living Report,
Vol. I, pp. 389-397.

Housing Costs

After 1900, housing, the largest component of living costs, showed the greatest rate of increase. Although Vancouver has been described as a city of homes, a significant proportion of the population rented rather than owned their homes. In the East End and Grandview the proportion of tenants on the voters' list nearly doubled from 20.7% in 1904 to 38.0% in 1911. In Mount Pleasant, the proportion increased from 15.0 to 25.5%, and in the West End the number of tenants at 48.0% of all voters may have surpassed the number of home owners in 1911 (absent land owners were included on the lists).⁵⁰ In the city as a whole, 25.0% of all registered voters were not property owners. The proportion of renters to home owners was probably much higher. Temporary residents and newcomers to the city were excluded from the voters' list by a rent qualification,⁵¹ and an unknown number of wage earners, doubled up in single family homes or occupying cabins behind them, were left off voters' lists.⁵²

During the 1880s and early 1890s rents in Vancouver were high;⁵³ they fell back during the depression of the mid 1890s. After 1900 however, rents ranged between 30-50% higher in Vancouver than Toronto; furthermore a Department of Labour housing survey of 1903 reveals that artisans in Toronto expected a higher standard of housing for their rental dollar than did workers in Vancouver.⁵⁴ Toronto workers expected

to find a "6-7 room house near the street car or workplace" while the Vancouver workers surveyed, replied that they expected to rent a "4-5 room cottage" where available.

In both cities the demand for rental housing exceeded supply, a condition which apparently grew worse as the decade progressed. Rising rents were of course, the product of rapidly rising land costs, and in 1905, Vancouver rents began to rise more rapidly than those in other Canadian cities (Fig. 3:2, p. 76). As early as 1902 the city building inspector was alerting the mayor to the housing shortage in Vancouver.⁵⁵

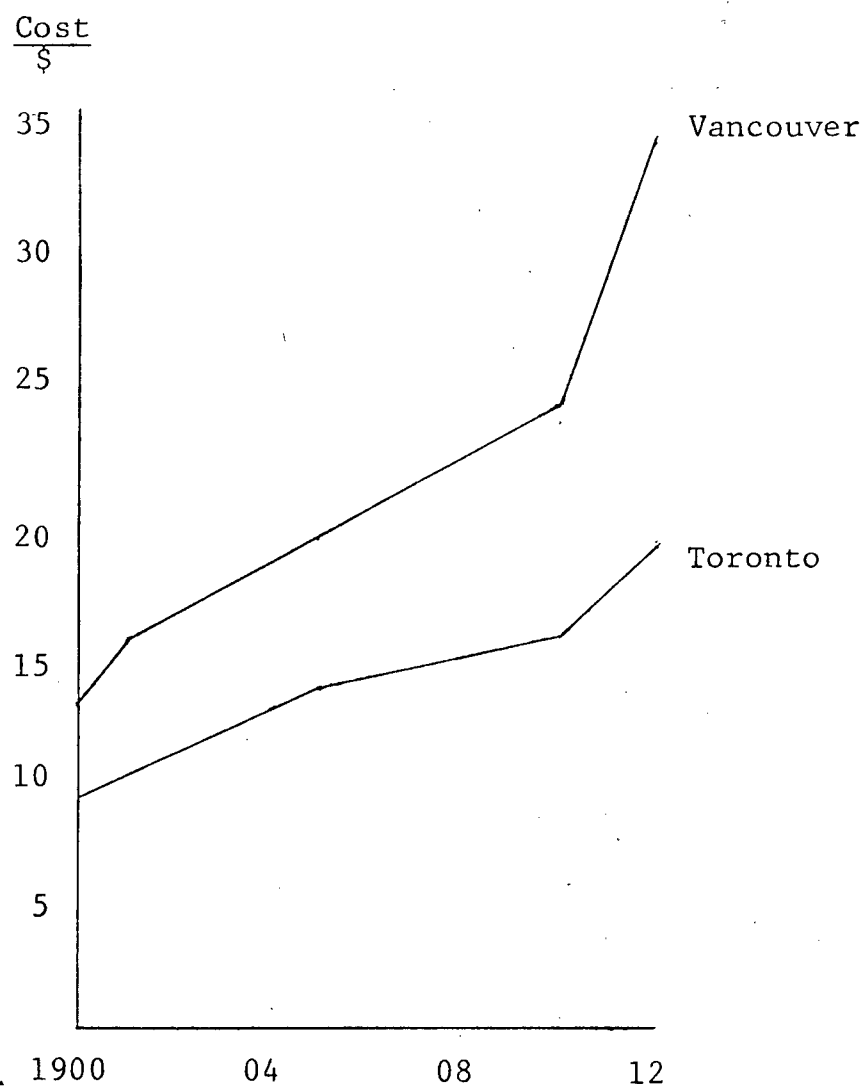
The demand for rental accommodation increased along with the rise in rents as the cost of home ownership climbed. By 1907 local papers and trade journals were remarking upon the big demand for rental properties in the city.⁵⁶ In 1910, the Labour Gazette reported that "a large number of ... workmen sublet part of their house to roomers in order to keep up with their rent."⁵⁷ In a similar vein, immigrant families in the East End and Grandview districts of the city crowded their recently purchased homes with as many as ten boarders, or rented out "cabins" squeezed on the back of 33' and 25' lots.⁵⁸ In 1911 the city's medical health officer reported on the "urgent need of accommodation for the working classes."⁵⁹ The shortage of rental housing in Vancouver was acute and reflected the very high cost of residential land in the city.

For wage workers, the purchase of a home became increasingly difficult as land prices soared after 1905. Between 1905 and 1910, the price of a 33' lot in the city increased by

as much as 100%; in the sparsely populated suburbs outside the city limits, land prices increased at least fivefold (Table 3:8). Meanwhile wage raises averaged 15% over the decade 1901-1911 (Fig. 3:3, p. 78). The rising cost of land was reflected in new house construction which by 1905, was proceeding more rapidly in the middle class suburbs than in working class areas of the city.⁶⁰ The construction of blue collar homes suffered a further setback in the recession of 1907-08.⁶¹ A large supply of undeveloped residential land (see Chap. IV) and locally manufactured building supplies did little to keep housing costs down. At the onset of the 1909-12 real estate boom, most residential land sales were being made to speculators rather than potential home owners.⁶² By 1911, house prices in Vancouver ranged from 60-70% higher than prices in Winnipeg, and 120-150% higher than those in Toronto (Table 3:6, p. 71). In the fall of 1911, residential lots in working class areas of the city were not even selling to speculators.⁶³

Prices shown in Table 3:8 were obtained from the weekend editions of The Vancouver World for May-June and September-October. In each case, prices quoted were the lowest found for that particular locality. (South Vancouver prices will therefore reflect the price of land in the southeast corner of the municipality.)

Rental Costs in Toronto and Vancouver: 1900 - 1912



Source: Board of Inquiry into Cost of Living, Report, 1914, Vol. I, p. 474 and Labour Gazette, Vol. X, p. 917; XI, p. 887; and XII, p. 809.

Fig. 3:2

TABLE 3:8. Prices of 33' Lots in Working Class
Areas of Vancouver, 1903-1911

| | <u>1903</u> | <u>1905</u> | <u>1907</u> | <u>1909</u> | <u>1911</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Mt. Pleasant \$ | 75.00 | 150.00 | 300.00 | 500.00 | 1,500.00 |
| Grandview | 50.00 | 100.00 | 325.00 | 625.00 | 1,200.00 |
| Hillcrest (D.L. 301) | 60.00 | | 300.00 | | |
| Cedar Cottage | | | 300.00 | 350.00 | |
| South Vancouver | | | 100.00 | 250.00 | 500.00 |
| Hastings Townsite | | | 175.00 | 250.00 | 900.00 |

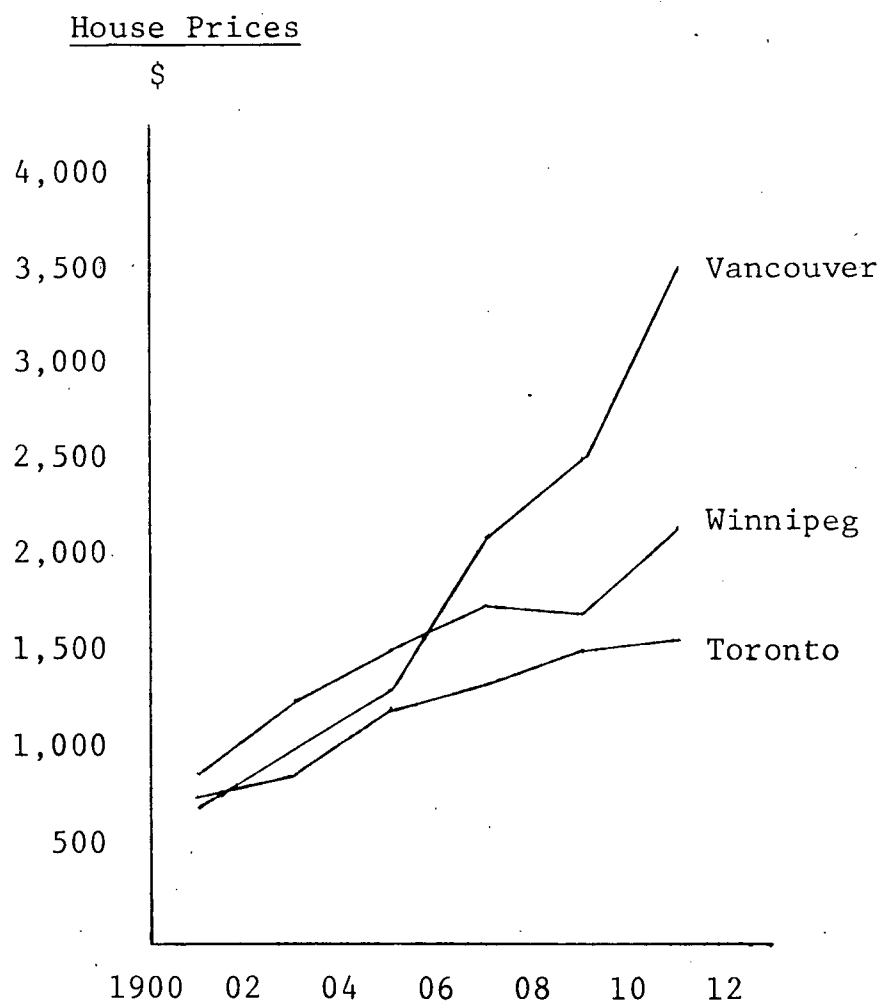
TABLE 3:9. Price Ranges for Workingmen's Houses
in Vancouver and Suburbs, 1901-1911

| | <u>5 Rooms</u> | <u>6 Rooms</u> |
|------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1901 \$ | 550.00 - | 850.00 - 950.00 |
| 1903 | 550.00 - 1,200.00 | 1,000.00 - 2,250.00 |
| 1905 | 825.00 - 1,200.00 | 1,400.00 - 2,600.00 |
| 1907 | 1,850.00 - 2,650.00 | 2,200.00 - 3,300.00 |
| 1909 | 2,200.00 - 3,000.00 | 2,500.00 - 3,500.00 |
| 1911 | 3,000.00 - 4,000.00 | 3,500.00 - 5,000.00 |

Source: Prices were obtained from the weekend editions of The Vancouver World for May-June and September-October.

Evidence from newspaper ads has a number of limitations. First, very few ads for workingmen's homes appeared in the earliest years of the decade; more appeared later, but these still represented a small fraction of the real estate

House Prices in Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto:
1901 - 11



Source: Table 3:10, p. 79.

Fig. 3:3

market. Secondly, prices quoted were asking prices and may not necessarily have reflected selling prices. Most ads contained little information about the houses offered for sale; rarely was the street address or lot frontage identified. Houses in the East End, Mount Pleasant and Grandview fell into the same broad price range; however by the end of the decade Grandview prices were a little higher than those in other areas, while South Vancouver prices were a little lower. In Grandview these higher prices reflected relatively higher land costs and the tendency of developers to build more substantial homes in this area.

TABLE 3:10. Prices for Workingmen's Homes in
Three Canadian Cities, 1901-1911

| | <u>Toronto</u> | <u>Winnipeg</u> | <u>Vancouver</u> |
|------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1901 | \$ 600 - 900 | 750 - 900 | 500 - 950 |
| 1903 | 750 - 1,000 | 1,000 - 1,500 | 550 - 1,200 |
| 1905 | 900 - 1,500 | 1,200 - 1,800 | 800 - 1,800 |
| 1907 | 1,000 - 1,600 | 1,500 - 2,000 | 1,800 - 2,500 |
| 1909 | 1,200 - 1,800 | 1,200 - 2,000 | 2,000 - 3,000 |
| 1911 | 1,200 - 1,800 | 1,750 - 2,500 | 3,000 - 4,000 |

Source: Real estate ads, May and October for the years listed, appearing in: The Vancouver Daily World, The Manitoba Free Press and The Daily Mail.

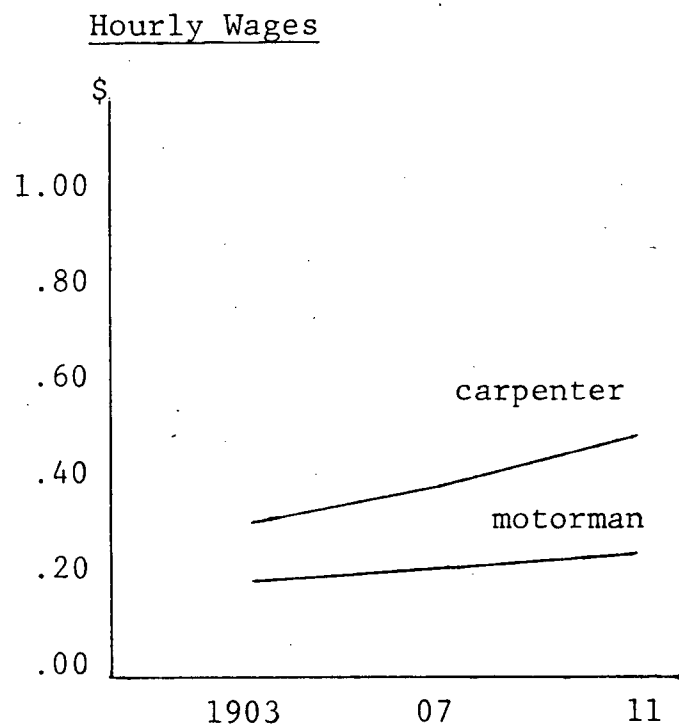
The price ranges in Table 3:9 apply to houses that were identified as being for the wage earner and/or, located in a working class suburb.

Vancouver and Winnipeg houses had 5-6 rooms and were detached dwellings. In Toronto, houses were brick, attached, or brick front cottages, semi-detached and detached-- 6-7 rooms were common. In all cities, houses of 4 rooms or less, "cabins" or "shanties" were not included in the Tables. In this category of housing, prices ranged from a low of \$750.00 in Toronto to \$2,500.00 in Vancouver in 1911 however their appearance on the real estate pages was most infrequent. Fig. 3:3 (p. 78) compares the rate of rising house prices in the three cities.

Conclusion

Vancouver's newness, its large tracts of unsettled suburban land, and its future potential suggested by its rise in population from tenth to fourth place among Canadian cities between 1901 and 1911, signalled, on the surface, a place of special opportunity for the ordinary man. Availability of land however, was not necessarily the same as accessibility, and the economic realities which confronted workers who arrived in Vancouver clearly defined and confined their opportunities for acquiring property. A surplus of unskilled labour and, in construction, semi-skilled and skilled labour, the scarcity of secondary industry in the city, and the volatile nature of the lumber industry contributed to frequently high levels of unemployment. The advantage of comparatively high wages

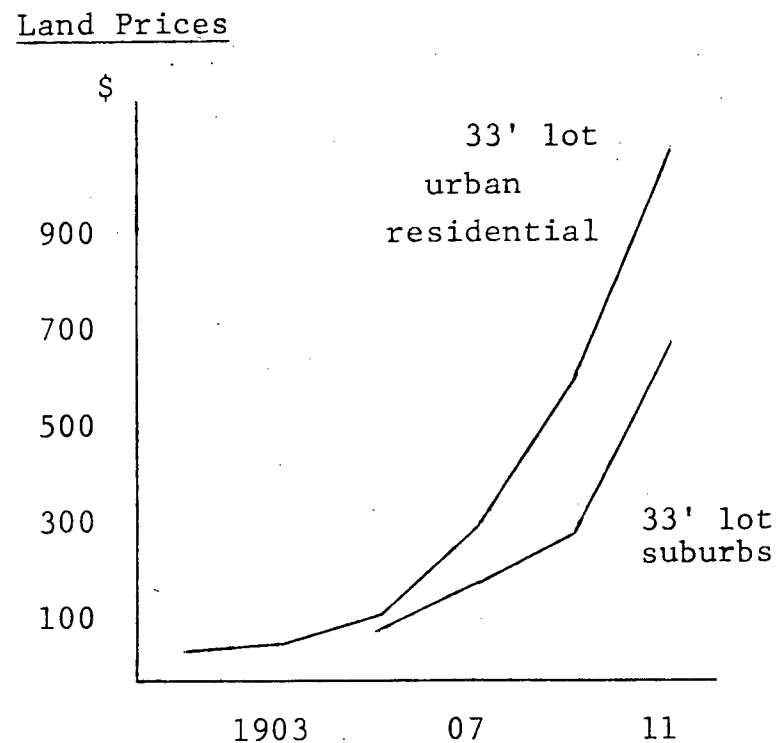
Wages for Motorman and Carpenter,
Vancouver: 1901 - 11



Source: See Table 3:8, p. 77.

Fig. 3:4

Lot Prices in Vancouver
1901 - 11



Source: See Table 3:3, p. 65.

Fig. 3:5

was offset by the high cost of living and especially the cost of housing in the city (Figs. 3:4 and 3:5, p. 81). In 1915, remarking on Canadian cities in general, the Department of Labour noted that houses occupied by wage earners and artisans showed the greatest rate of increase of all urban property, and that suburban land, "cornered by real estate agents and speculators" had been artificially increased in value beyond the workingman's means.⁶⁴ Over the decade 1901-1911, house prices had doubled in Toronto and risen approximately two and a half times in Winnipeg; in the largest jump of all however, prices had increased from 400-600% in Vancouver (Tables 3:9 and 3:10, pp. 77, 79). Moreover, the effects of land speculation in Vancouver were exacerbated by poorer job opportunities and higher living costs than those found in cities such as Winnipeg and Toronto.

If opportunities in Vancouver were not as favourable as some migrants may have hoped for or later observers supposed, nevertheless many wage earners were settling in the city and moving to its suburbs. The next chapter will look at two suburbs in some detail to discover how economic conditions for workers in Vancouver were reflected in the rate and kind of suburban settlement and also, more broadly, to reveal the dynamics of urban growth in areas of the city commonly overlooked in studies of urban development.

NOTES

Chapter III

¹Vancouver's early economy is discussed in some detail by L.D. McCann, "Urban Growth in a Staple Economy: The Emergence of Vancouver as a Regional Metropolis, 1886-1914," in L.J. Evenden, ed., Vancouver: Western Metropolis, (Victoria: Univ. of Victoria, 1978) and R.A.J. McDonald, "City Building in the Canadian West," B.C. Studies, No. 43, Autumn 1979, pp. 3-28.

²Demand from the expanding lumber market was apparently not consistent, and one large establishment, Hastings Mill, closed down in 1904 because of "unfavourable market conditions." Labour Gazette, Vol. IV, p. 1120.

³See for Example, Labour Gazette, Vol. IX, p. 1207 or Vol. XIII, p. 846.

⁴Labour Gazette, Vol. IV, pp. 1120 and 1225; Vol. V, pp. 255, 602, and 832; Vol. VI, p. 54.

⁵Their employer, the C.P.R., apparently learned its lesson, subsequently substituting "cheap" white labour from Quebec for construction of the Opera House, an extension to the Hotel Vancouver and the Post Office. Galois, "Social Structure in Space," Ph.D. diss., S.F.U., Burnaby, 1979, p. 373.

⁶Labour Gazette, Vol. VII, p. 531.

⁷Vancouver Social Survey of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, (Vancouver, 1912).

⁸Diary of E.G. Baynes, 1889, priv. ms. and George Hardy, Those Stormy Years, (London: Laurence and Wishout, 1956), p. 27.

⁹Excerpt from a letter written by F.M. Black, a 21 year old Scotsman living in Vancouver, 1891. William Black, TS, PABC.

¹⁰I. Abella and D. Millar, The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century, (Toronto: Oxford U. Press, 1978), Introduction.

¹¹The Province, Oct. 15, 1907.

¹²"Memoirs of Dorothy Blakey Smith," Vancouver Historical Society, Newsletter, November, 1973.

¹³Terence McGovern, It Paid to be Tough, (London: J. Long, 1939), p. 96.

¹⁴Robert Galois discusses organized labour's hostility towards national immigration policy. Galois, "Social Structure in Space," ch. IV. See also The Trades Unionist, February 1908 and The Vancouver World, "A Page for the Wage Worker," December 26, 1908.

¹⁵Premier's Papers, Sec. 20, File 520, Dec. 27, 1909, PAPBC.

¹⁶B.C. Magazine, October, 1912, p. 726.

¹⁷Vancouver News Advertiser, June 25, 1892 (cited in Galois "Social Structure in Space," p. 422).

¹⁸VNA, February 6, 1894.

¹⁹Labour Gazette, Vol. VIII, p. 788. One monthly tally showed 75% of the city's carpenters were idle.

²⁰Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 922.

²¹Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 589.

²²Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 1369; Vol. XII, p. 538.

²³Ibid., Vol. XIII, pp. 846 and 1071; Vol. XIV, pp. 36 and 785.

²⁴H.J. Boam, British Columbia, (London: Sells, 1912) p. 268. The significance of this report lies in its appearance in a prestigious volume of the province's history.

²⁵Diary of E.G. Baynes, 1889, priv. ms.

²⁶Galois, "Social Structure in Space," p. 354.

²⁷Labour Gazette, Vol. III, p. 517.

²⁸The average carpenter, plumber or electrician was reported to calculate his annual income on the basis of eight months employment. Labour Gazette, Vol. I, pp. 572-577.

²⁹Accounts of strike activity are found in monthly reports of the Labour Gazette, 1901-05 and The Department of Labour, Annual Reports, 1906-11.

³⁰Newcomers were likely to accept their working conditions since to strike was not only to risk economic hardship in the short run, but threats of dismissal or possibly arrest and deportation. Many wage earners did not have the experience and consequently the confidence to push for their demands. One dock worker recalled his early years in Vancouver, c. 1905-08, "oh, it was hard to find employment ... wages were very low." Charles Mattison, B.C. oral history transcript 115, tape 1, track 1.

³¹"Charles Burns," Add. Mss. 54, PACV; B.C. Sessional Papers 1894-95, p. 594 (also cited in Galois, "Social Structure in Space," p. 456).

³²Labour Gazette, Vol. IV, p. 771.

³³Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 788. ³⁴Ibid., Vol. VII, p. 531.

³⁵Board of Inquiry into Cost of Living, Report, Vol. II, 1915, pp. 445-557. Calculations are my own.

³⁶Op. cit., Vol. I, Appendix 7.

³⁷Piva made this finding for Toronto in the same period. M. Piva, The Working Class in Toronto, p. 47.

³⁸Labour Gazette, Vol. I, pp. 572-577.

³⁹The Independent, August 24, 1901, p. 1.

⁴⁰Piva, Op. cit., p. 47.

⁴¹Piva argues that the best method for uncovering real wages is to divide total annual wages by the number of employees. Piva, The Working Class in Toronto, p. 30.

⁴²Vancouver had little or no industry in such areas as textiles, clothing, and food which employed large numbers of women workers in cities such as Winnipeg and Toronto.

⁴³The Independent, Aug. 24, 1901.

⁴⁴Op. cit., September 7, 1901. The region in question is not specified and may refer to the British Columbia Lower Mainland, or the province as a whole.

⁴⁵The Vancouver World, "A Page for the Wage Worker," December 26, 1908.

⁴⁶Labour Gazette, Vol. X, p. 1125. Milk prices were about the same in both cities--however Toronto's milk supply was regulated by the Board of Health while Vancouver's was not.

⁴⁷Board of Inquiry, Report, Vol. II, pp. 400-417.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 324-326 and pp. 331-332.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 721-722.

⁵⁰Vancouver Voters Lists, 1904 and 1911.

⁵¹The Western Wage Earner, June 1909.

⁵²Labour Gazette, Vol. IX, p. 691. Reports citing the severe shortage of rental accommodation appear as far back as 1904 in the Labour Gazette.

⁵³Robinson and Co., Listings. A 6 room house rented for \$20.00 a month in 1890; no particular area of the city is identified.

⁵⁴Labour Gazette, Vol. V, pp. 367-380.

⁵⁵Letter to Mayor and Aldermen, January 5, 1902, in City Permits, Building Inspectors Report, PACV.

⁵⁶Lumberman and Contractor 3, Dec. 1906, p. 11 and Labour Gazette, Vol. VII, p. 153.

⁵⁷Labour Gazette, Vol. XI, p. 182. Home buyers were also renting out rooms in order to keep up with mortgage payments.

⁵⁸D. Marshall and C. Itter, "Opening Doors," Sound Heritage, Vol. VIII, no. 1 and 2, p. 33.

⁵⁹Medical Health Officer's Report, City of Vancouver, 1911, p. 14.

⁶⁰Labour Gazette, Vol. V, p. 832.

⁶¹Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 1074.

⁶²Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 952.

⁶³Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 245.

⁶⁴Board of Inquiry, Report, Vol. I, p. 21.

IV. THE GROWTH OF WORKINGMEN'S SUBURBS: HILLCREST AND GRANDVIEW

Introduction

Vancouver's suburbs began to attract a small number of residents by the end of the 1890s, but land costs in the outlying areas of the city remained relatively low during the first years of the century. Settlement progressed more rapidly after 1904 when the population growth of Vancouver began to accelerate. The price of residential land near the downtown core began to rise beyond the reach of the wage earner, and the expansion of Chinatown along with an influx of European immigrants to the area east of Gore Avenue, altered the status of the East End, an area formerly dominated by skilled artisans of British descent. Workingmen increasingly sought homes in the sparsely settled suburbs to the east and south.

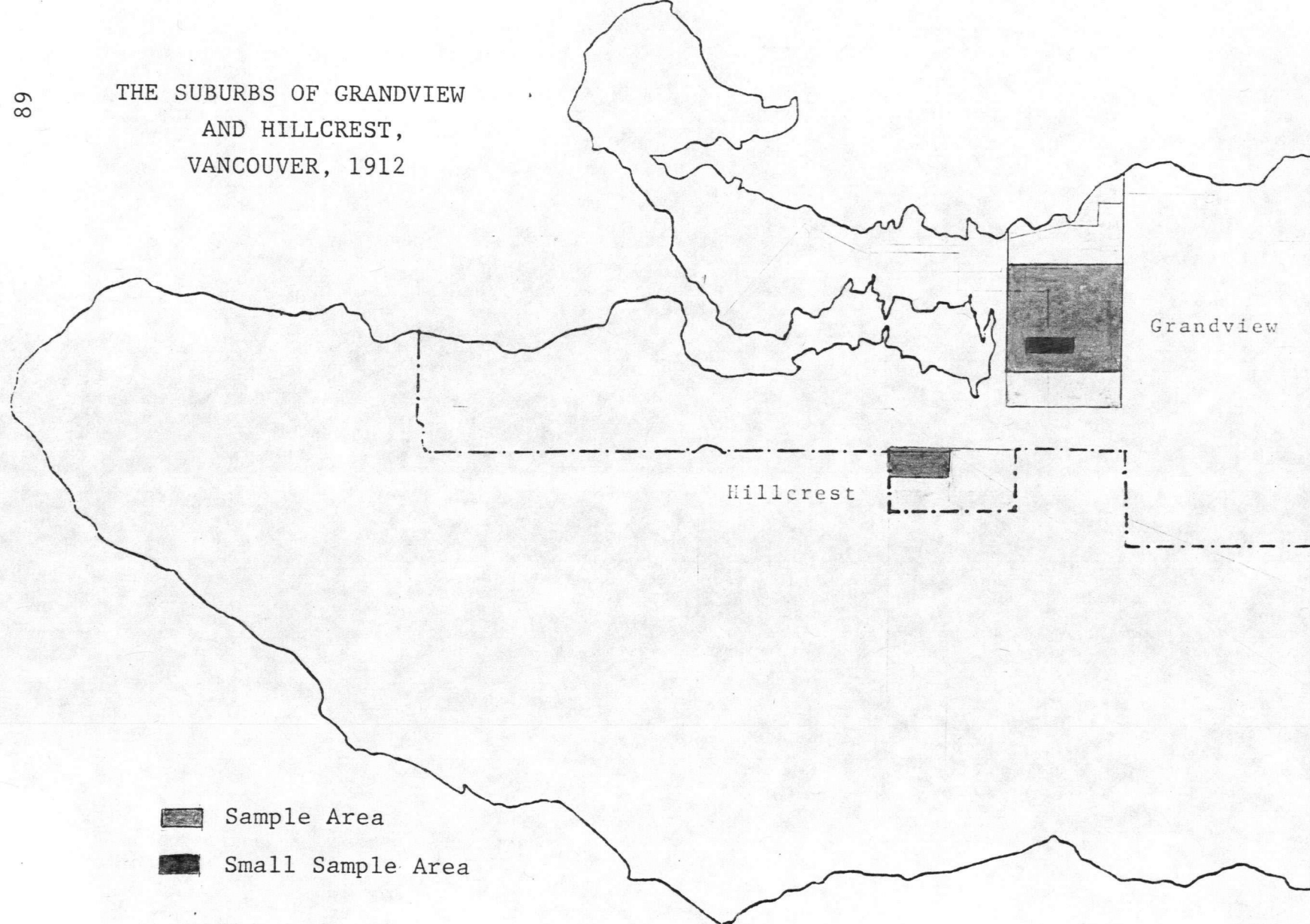
In order to narrow the focus on the wage earners' experience in the city, two blue collar suburbs, Hillcrest and Grandview, were chosen for closer examination. A prime consideration in the choice of Hillcrest was the availability of assessment rolls, lacking for other areas of Vancouver (Hastings Townsite excepted). Furthermore, Hillcrest's site, on but outside the city limits, its cheaper land, centrally

located and well serviced by public transportation, provided an almost ideal situation for blue collar suburban growth. The choice of Grandview for the second study area reflects several considerations. Settlement here, which began in earnest in 1904, was of long enough duration to reveal changes by the end of the boom years, yet unlike the longer settled Mount Pleasant, Grandview did not experience the encroachment of industry with its complex effects on nearby residential use. Both areas contained some large and expensive homes, but their numbers were less significant in Grandview than in Mount Pleasant. Finally, directory entries for Grandview, located inside the city limits are much more complete than are those for South Vancouver, a sprawling area of mixed blue collar and middle class settlement.

Hillcrest

Before the 1909-12 boom, Hillcrest was a semi-rural area with scattered clusters of workingmen's homes; the area stretched south from Mount Pleasant to approximately 33rd Avenue in the municipality of South Vancouver (Map 4:1, p. 89). The northern half of Hillcrest, D.L. 301, remained under provincial jurisdiction until annexation to the city in 1911. In 1890, D.L. 301 had been subdivided by the owner, a wealthy New Westminster merchant, Henry Edmonds,¹ to coincide with the incorporation of his Westminster and Vancouver Tramway Co.

THE SUBURBS OF GRANDVIEW
AND HILLCREST,
VANCOUVER, 1912



MAP 4:1

whose interurban car line would cross the district a year later. Initially, Edmonds offered about 60% of the lots in the district for sale, reserving the remaining land most of which lay adjacent to the Tramway line or along the main road, Westminster Avenue (Main Street) for himself and a few business associates (Map 4:2. p. 91). The two block wide strip of land which abutted Westminster Avenue occupied the highest ground in the district, and with its sweeping mountain view, contained the area's prime residential land.³

Through the 1890s land sales were slow, reflecting the current depression. At the end of 1896, approximately half the district was owned by the English based Bank of British Columbia. In the 1880s and early 1890s the bank had made many loans secured by local real estate; during the ensuing depression, property such as that found in D.L. 301 was seized by the bank from customers who had defaulted on their loan repayment. The bank which had recorded no land assets on its 1891 balance sheet, recorded property assets of £70,000 in 1900, assets which did not include the bank branches themselves, but represented the additional lands acquired in the cities of Portland, Tacoma and Vancouver, where the bank operated. Edmonds retained about 15% of the district's land in his own name and through his real estate firm, Edmonds and Webster.² The remaining quarter of the district was owned by a handful of settlers and small investors who typically owned between six lots to a full block each; in the northwest corner of D.L. 301 however, 50-60 landowners held title to

[illegible]*Sirudo*

Amounts shown are in U.S. dollars and cents.

Sand Boundary of the City of Lincoln.

MAP 4:2

one or two lots each.

In 1901 Yorkshire Guarantee and Securities Corporation took over all Edmonds property, and two years later, acquired a large portion of the Bank of British Columbia land,⁴ bringing their holdings to more than one quarter of the District's 127 blocks. The Corporation's property interest in the area coincided with its financial backing of the tramway company, now under new ownership.⁵ Another 40-45% of the land in the district was divided about equally between the B.C. Land and Investment Agency and two private investors, Horne and James Adams, a Vancouver wholesaler.⁶ Land holdings of both these men were spread throughout the district. The remaining quarter of land in the district was divided among small investors and a growing but still very small number of settlers. In almost equal proportions, these blocks of land were divided among six or fewer property owners, 6-12 owners, and a dozen or more owners. Approximately 30% of these ratepayers appear to have lived on their land.⁷ Residents of the district were largely blue collar workers and, to a lesser extent, small farmers and market gardeners.

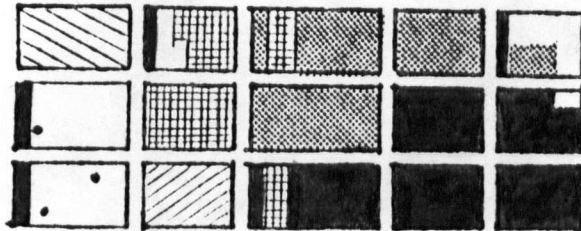
Ownership patterns changed substantially between 1904 and the end of 1909. In 1910 James Adams remained the only large land owner with eight blocks; while in scattered parcels, a dozen others owned partial or occasionally, full blocks of land; most lots in the district were now owned individually and 40% of the ratepayers were now residents in the area. The proportion of residents in agricultural occupations had

declined, as the number of white collar workers and small businessmen had increased. About two-thirds of the total population remained blue collar workers.⁸ In recognition of the district's evolution to city suburb, many were now agitating for annexation to Vancouver.

The assessment rolls for the northern half of Hillcrest (D.L. 301) provide information about settlement features and land owning patterns. Changes in land holding between 1897-1910 are shown for a 15 block sample area in Maps 4:3-4:5 (p. 94). In 1897, major land owners, in descending order, were: the Bank of British Columbia, Edmonds and Webster, financier J.W. Horne, and a teamster and a retired logger from Mount Pleasant. The remaining 48 lots belonged to small investors living in the city, and in a few cases outside the province. Only three property owners actually lived in the area. By 1904 the Yorkshire Guarantee and Securities Corporation replaced Edmonds and Webster as land owner, and the Bank of British Columbia had sold its holdings to five city businessmen. Following the new demand for suburban property, J.W. Horne had sold off a block of his land. Settlement was still very sparse, building stood on less than 10% of the lots.⁹ In 1910, investor James Adams was the sole large property holder in the area. Most ratepayers owned one 33' or 25' lot, a minority held 2-3 lots, and a few shared title to a single lot. Yet, into the second year of Vancouver's much touted boom, over two-thirds of this centrally located "suburb" remained undeveloped, and was recalled by one

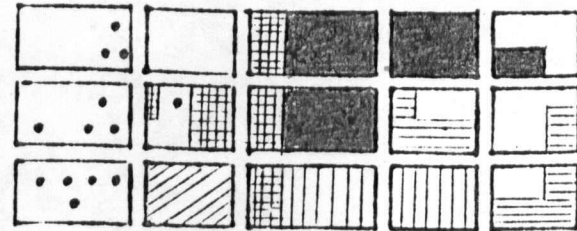
HILLCREST LANDOWNERS

1897



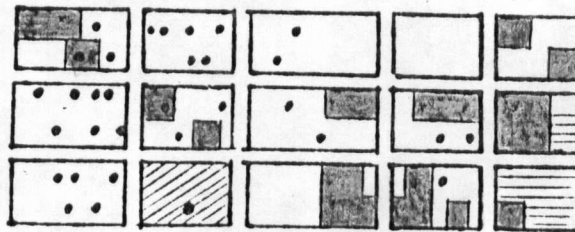
Map 4:3

1904



Map 4:4

1910



Map 4:5

Maps 4:3 - 4:5

Resident landowners

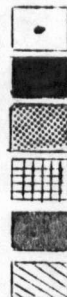
Bank of B.C.

Edmunds & Webster

J.W.Horne

Yorkshire Guarantee & Sec.

G.A.Owens



J.G.Griffith

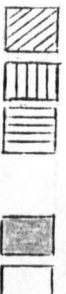
James Adams

J.A.Barrett

Other landowners :

3-8 lot parcels

1-2 33' lots

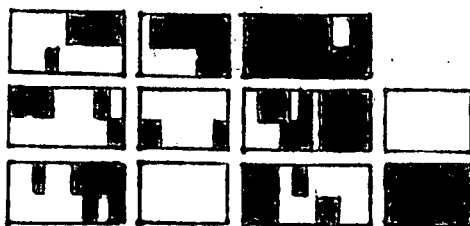


resident as "a wild place very sparsely settled up."¹⁰

At the end of the decade Hillcrest roads were neither graded, nor, with the exception of the two main streets in the area, paved. In the centre of the district, blocks were commonly divided into 25' lots, upon which stood two story houses to the north, and smaller cottages to the south. The setback of houses appear to have been fairly uniform but the front yards, especially of the larger houses, were miniscule. The present day pattern of housing stock in Hillcrest suggests that most residential development occurred in clusters, or more accurately, short strips of 4-6 houses, interspersed with blocks or partial blocks of uncleared lots.¹¹ Among the houses that survive today, common features include narrow, steep front steps, above ground basements, and, in the larger homes, attics. Narrow wood siding and wood shingles were popular exterior cover, gingerbread trim was favoured by some owners, especially on smaller homes and cottages.

The assessment rolls provide two significant measures of speculation in suburban land: property turnover and non-resident ownership. Until 1910, land turnover in D.L. 301 was only moderate. In the 14 years, 1897-1910, fewer than half the lots in a ten block sample changed ownership more than twice.¹² Turnover was highest (three to six occasions) for the lots originally held by land brokers, Edmonds and Webster, Yorkshire Guarantee and Securities Corporation and J.W. Horne (Map 4:6, p. 96). More conclusive evidence of land speculation in Hillcrest is found in the large proportion of

HILLCREST
Lots With Highest Turnover
1897 - 1910



MAP 4:6

non-resident land owners.

Reflecting a period of steady urban growth, the proportion of rate payers who lived on their land rose from 12% in 1897 to 31% in 1904 (Table 4:1). In the following six years, population growth in Vancouver accelerated, producing a rising demand for suburban lots which was reflected in the fourfold increase in the number of property owners in the Hillcrest sample. As the concentration of land ownership

TABLE 4:1. Land Tenure in Hillcrest Sample--
Main St. to Fraser between 16th
and 19th Avenues

| | <u>1897</u> | <u>1904</u> | <u>1910</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Total property owners | 35 | 48 | 164 |
| Resident owners | 3 | 15 | 36 |
| Residents in city directory | 1 | 21 | 86 |
| Resident owners in city directory | 1 | 12 | 28 |

broke down, new opportunities for land ownership opened up to those who could afford the rising land prices. The increasing numbers who bought lots in Hillcrest however, did not immediately become settlers. In fact the minor proportion of ratepayers who actually lived on their property declined from 31% in 1905 to 22% in 1910. It is impossible to say what proportion of lots were purchased for future use and which for speculative investment. Certainly an increasing number of properties were being rented out; while over half of the residents listed for the Hillcrest area in the 1904

TABLE 4:2. Occupation Status of Lots, D.L. 301,
Vancouver, 1912

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| Resident owners | 716 | 73.4% |
| Tenants | <u>259</u> | <u>26.6%</u> |
| Total residents | <u>975</u> | <u>100.0%</u> |
| Resident owners | 716 | 56.6% |
| Absent owners | <u>549</u> | <u>43.4%</u> |
| Total owners | <u>1,265</u> | <u>100.0%</u> |
| Occupied lots | 975 | 53.0% |
| Unoccupied lots | <u>866</u> | <u>47.0%</u> |
| Total lots | <u>1,841</u> | <u>100.0%</u> |

Source: City of Vancouver, Voters' List 1912.

There is some discrepancy between the number of lots listed in the assessment rolls and the number depicted on the Plan of Subdivision of Lot 301. The total here represents the lowest figure so the proportion of occupied lots might be slightly lower.

directory are listed on the assessment rolls, less than one-third of the names in the 1910 directory could be identified as taxpayers. The line between the small investor/speculator and the settler was not a fixed one, nevertheless the significant number of rented properties in the area indicates that a number of land owners were profiting as landlords. The discrepancy between the number of resident owners in the assessment rolls and those whose names reappear in the city directories may be due to more than the laxity of the directory canvassers. The number of resident owners may be high

since names followed by a location such as 'Hillcrest' were given the benefit of the doubt and counted as residents. At least some of the residents appearing in the directory may have been purchasing their homes but have missed being placed on the assessment rolls. Property transfers were alleged to be very slow at the time.¹³

As Vancouver's boom years drew to a close, Hillcrest had become a recognized workingman's suburb with its annexation to the city. Just over half the lots in the district were now occupied: over one quarter of these residents were not home owners, representing a proportion of tenant voters lower than existed in the East End and Grandview, but matching the rate for Mount Pleasant, to the north, and in the city as a whole (See Chap. III). Absentee land owners now made up the minority of owners, although, at 43% of all ratepayers, their numbers were still significant.

There is no clear way of distinguishing between land purchased for speculative investment and land purchased as a potential home site. Frequently both motives overlap; nevertheless the high percentage of absent property owners (as high as 90% in the 1890s and dropping to half that proportion by 1912) in D.L. 301, suggests that suburban land in blue collar districts of Vancouver was a popular investment for residents from other areas of the city. In 1904, absentee land owners made up 26% of all owners in Grandview and 29% of the owners in Mount Pleasant. (In contrast, the proportion of absentee land owners was 5% in the elite residential

area of the West End.) In the working class municipality of South Vancouver the proportion of absentee land owners was higher. Voters' lists for 1912 show that 40 to 45% of all land owners lived outside the municipality.¹⁴ In the absence of assessment rolls however, the rate of absentee land owners gives only a general indication of the amount of land tied up by speculators/investors.

Grandview

Grandview was opened for settlement in 1891 when the Fairview beltline extended streetcar service on a spur line along Harris Street to Clarke Drive. Two years later hourly streetcars ran along Venables Street and down Park Drive to the city limits, greatly expanding the area convenient for settlement. Another dozen years passed before the district's population was sufficient to warrant inclusion in the city directory. The first suburban homes were built on the skid-roads used by early loggers to snake out their trees, or on the banks of the creek beds. Few roads were built before the 1909-12 land boom; until then a network of footpaths offered the principal method of communication between houses and streetcar stop. Contemporary wage earners described Grandview as,

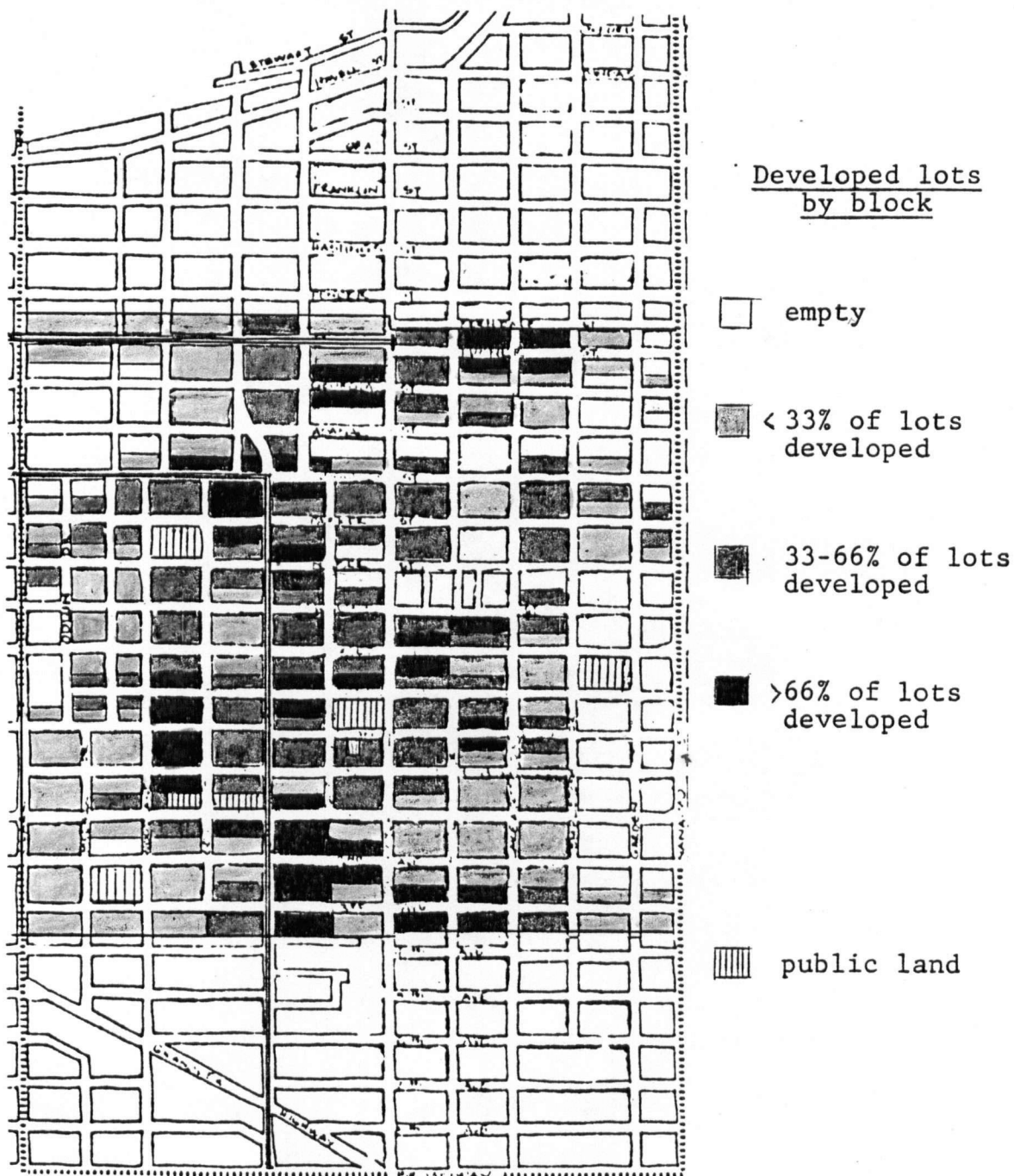
... all trees and logs lying on top of one another and buried--awful place.¹⁵

A wilderness ... stumps, stones, humps and hollows were everywhere; only a few streets were opened; none were graded and macadamized. Sidewalks, where there were any, were of the 3 plank variety and at night a solitary electric light at Venables and Park Dr. lighted the whole district.¹⁶

The growth of Grandview's population from approximately 250 households in 1904 to over 1700 in 1912, is not remarkable. Vancouver's population more than tripled from 34,000 to about 110,000 during those years and the demand for workingmen's housing was very high. Given the area's proximity to work places on Burrard Inlet and False Creek, and the presence of two streetcar lines, Grandview's development seems to have been only moderate. A close look at the street directories reveals that residential growth was not steady over time. A few blocks were almost fully built by 1907, while close by, other blocks remained empty until 1910. In general, population growth slowed down all over the district in the recession years 1907-08.

The pattern of settlement in Grandview suggests that, the wide availability of residential land notwithstanding, the choice of a lot was narrowly circumscribed by the decisions of local developers/speculators. By 1912, Grandview was less than half settled (Map 4:7). Fewer than 15% of its blocks were fully or "almost" fully developed. In over half (57%) of the blocks, less than one-third of the land was built. Yet higher density land use in the form of rooming houses and a few tenements in the north of Grandview and at least half a dozen apartment houses to the south reflected the

GRANDVIEW, DENSITY OF SETTLEMENT - 1911



MAP 4:7

growing need for inexpensive accommodation in the city. Scattered over the suburb, about 50 houses stood vacant; this rather high figure suggests that houses were not selling very rapidly, surely a consequence of their price in a city where the demand for housing was so high. In the western half of Grandview, small cottages stood on 25' lots, on rough dirt roads that rose steeply and abruptly off the False Creek flats. Little of this housing remains today. More of the original housing stock can be found in the area east of Victoria Drive and north of Grant where blocks were commonly divided into 33' lots, and houses as far north as Venables were often quite large and of a quality superior to those found in other working class areas of the city.

As prices for suburban property rose over the decade so did the socio-economic status of Grandview residents. A sample of 232 residents from an eight block area in the centre of the suburb was checked for occupation 1904-13 inclusive.¹⁷ Prior to 1910, over 80% of the people living in Grandview were blue collar workers; in the period 1910-13, the proportion of blue collar workers dropped to just over 60% of all residents while the proportion of white collar workers and entrepreneurs rose 2.5 times during the same period, from 14% in 1904-09 to 34% in 1910-13.¹⁸ In 1912 the centre of Grandview remained culturally homogeneous, however Italian and Chinese families had begun to move to the cheaper land on the western fringe and the more sparsely populated eastern fringe of the area.



Source: Vancouver Public Library.

Figure 4:1

Unlike Hillcrest, Grandview appears to have quickly established its identity as a distinct suburban district. Residents shopped along a commercial ribbon which ran down Park Drive (Commercial) and supported two schools, four churches (Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and Roman Catholic) and a community hall. Among these institutions, only the schools involved a large porportion of the people.¹⁹ Grandview Methodist, the oldest and largest of the four churches recorded 280 parishioners for 1912 only a fraction of whom attended church on a regular basis.²⁰ The church's importance likely lay in its symbolic role as community anchor, and in its function as a social outlet for the wives of local wage earners. Similarly, fraternal organizations like The Grandview Lodge of the Odd Fellows, had very small memberships. Among the 39 members listed for 1910, just over one-third actually lived in the Grandview area; the majority lived several miles distant in surrounding suburbs and in some cases, downtown. The Grandview Ratepayers Association was organized by the area's leading residents to pressure city hall for local improvements, but membership was not large.²¹ The small number of residents involved in community organizations reflected both the recency and the temporary nature of much settlement in Grandview as well as the importance attached to privacy by some residents. The family of Joseph Schell, a C.P.R. conductor who moved to the city from Ontario in 1910, expressed a common sentiment in their distaste for "too much familiarity with the neighbours."²²

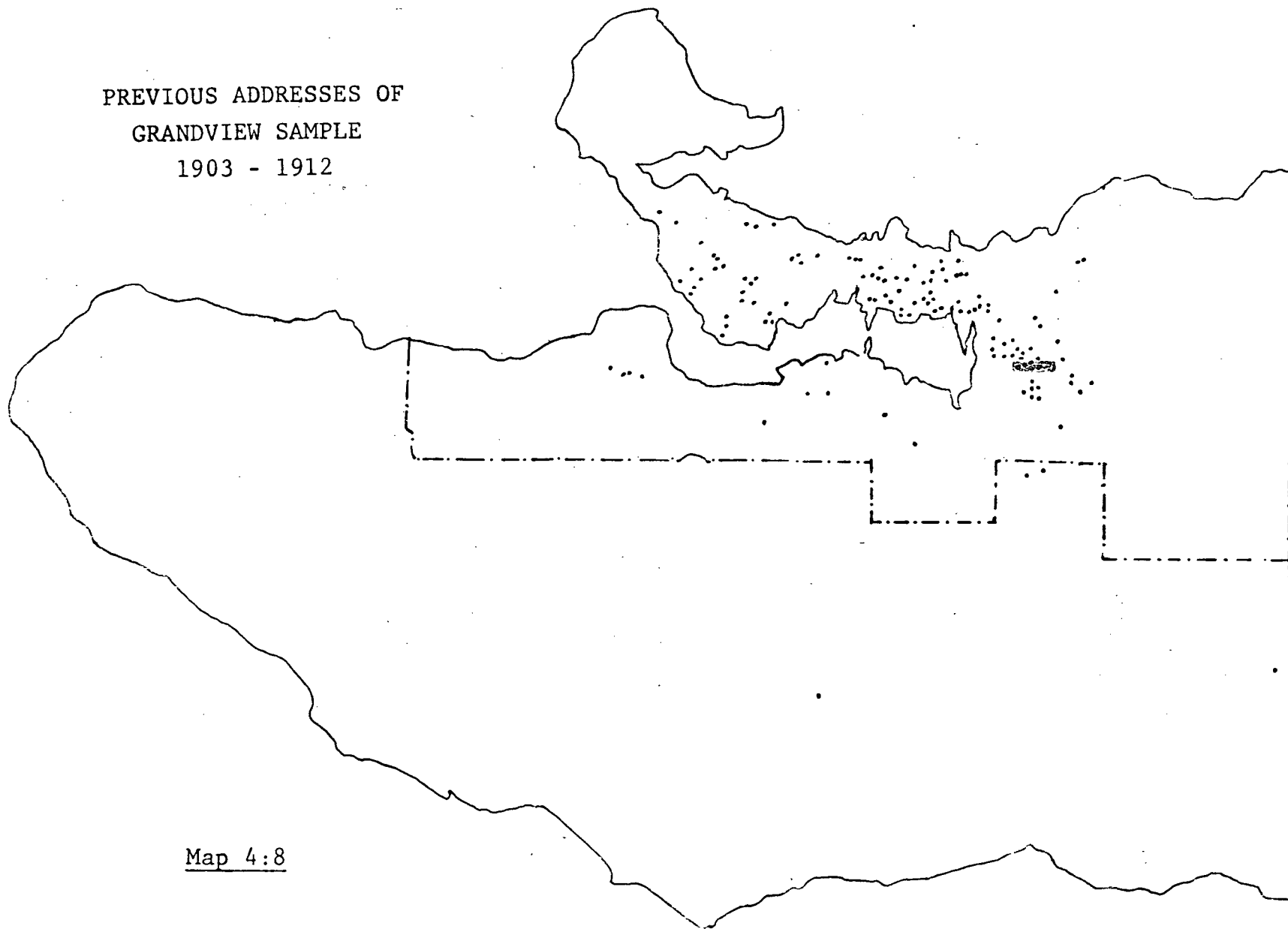
Grandview was subdivided in 1888, but its population grew very slowly until 1905. After two years of population surge, growth slowed until 1910-13. The majority of residents were Canadian born²³ and had already lived elsewhere in the city prior to their move to the sample area bounded by Woodland Drive, Grant, Victoria Drive and Gravely Street (Map 4:8, p. 107). Among the 228 families and individuals moving to this area in the ten years 1904-13, 128 (56%) were located at another city address prior to their move. Table 4:3 shows the previous location of incoming residents. Another 5-10% of newcomers to the sample area had likely lived in the city

TABLE 4:3. Former Address of Grandview Residents, 1904-12

| | |
|-------------------|----------|
| Downtown/Yaletown | 27 |
| East End | 35 |
| West End | 18 |
| Grandview | 33 |
| East side suburbs | 12 |
| West side suburbs | <u>4</u> |
| Total | 129 |

for a year or longer but were missed by directory canvassers, while a similar proportion, living with family or friends in the city would have been excluded from the directory. Thus as few as one quarter of the residents had chosen Grandview for their first home in the city. Almost half (48.4%) the

PREVIOUS ADDRESSES OF
GRANDVIEW SAMPLE
1903 - 1912



Map 4:8

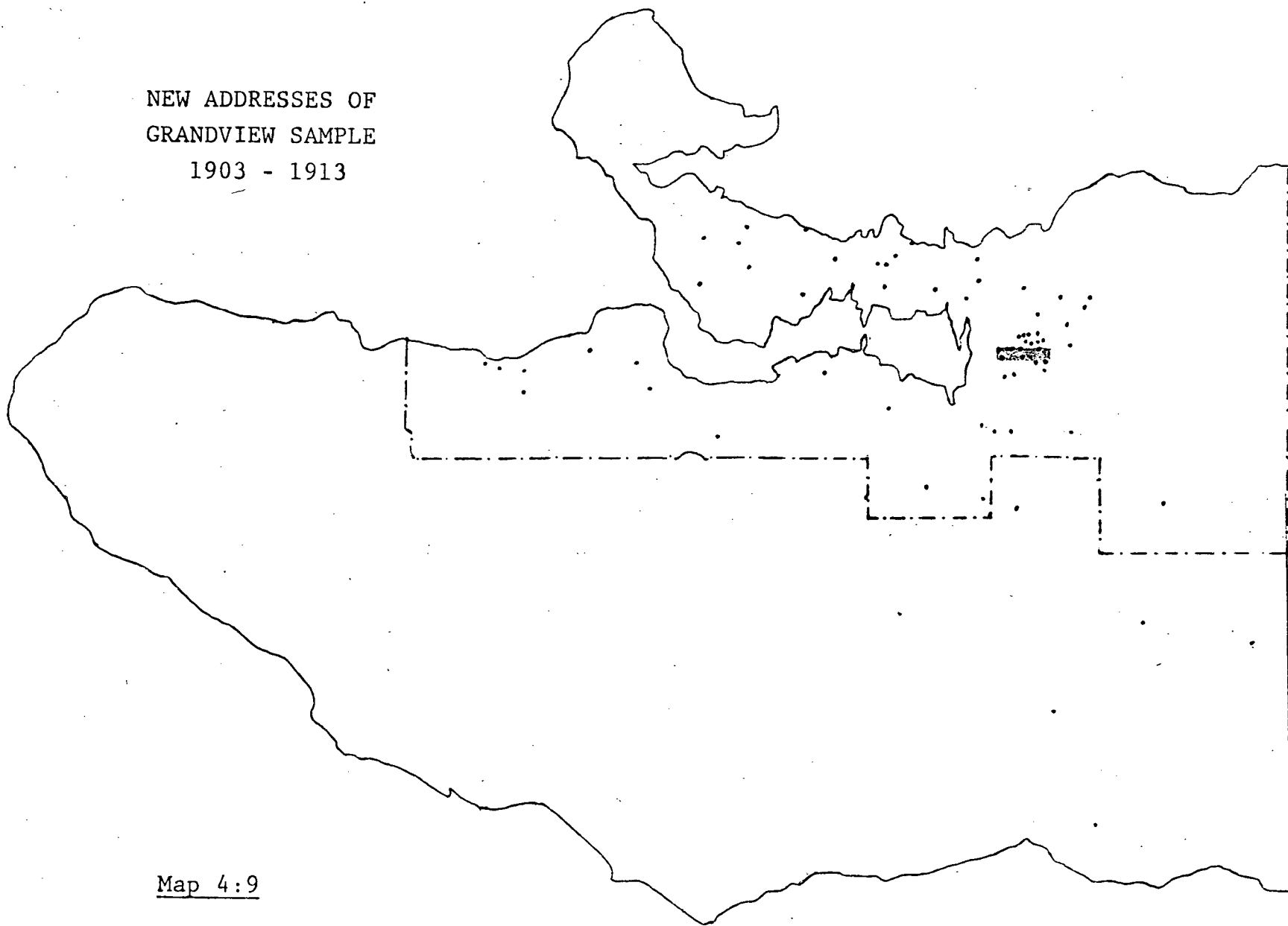
newcomers to the sample area with a previous city address, had come from the downtown core area or the city's oldest residential area in the East End. These areas were generally the first homes of migrants to Vancouver, particularly blue collar workers. The rapid physical growth of the downtown area beginning after the turn of the century, the influx of single men and non English speaking families seeking housing near the city core, and the movement of Chinatown eastward following the racial disturbances of mid-decade, were all encouraging established wage earners to move out to the suburbs. As many as one quarter of residents however, were making a second or even third move from within the Grandview area; the large majority of these moves were three blocks or less. Whether through attachment to the new neighbourhood, economic consideration or a combination of the two, many residents had clearly put down roots in the suburb. The movements of one miner and surveyor, Roger Pratt, illustrate this form of attachment to place. Pratt arrived in Vancouver in the early years of the century, and rented a cabin in the 1400 block Grant, just above the False Creek marsh. In 1907 he moved to property which he had purchased, two blocks east; a year later he made another purchase, moving one block further east, and, in 1910, he made his fourth move in Grandview, this time three blocks south!

Despite the propensity of Grandview residents to remain in the area as a whole, the turnover of residents in the individual blocks was high. Among the 187 households

recorded for the sample area, 1904-12, two-thirds (66.8%) moved on to new homes by 1913. Approximately 40% of these 125 families and individuals left the city.²⁴ The remaining 74 households resettled elsewhere in the city or in the municipality of South Vancouver (Map 4:9, p. 110). Once again the tendency of people to remain close to their old neighbourhood was strong. Over half of those who could be traced were found in Grandview or the adjacent blue collar area of Mount Pleasant. A substantial minority (24.6%) however, had moved into the downtown peninsula, evidence that the dynamics of urban population movement was not necessarily a simple one way process. The soon to be entrenched east-west social division of the city is reflected in the relatively few moves (under 10%) to suburbs on the west side of the city. The equally small number of moves to the working class municipality of South Vancouver is more difficult to explain. Possibly the advantages of such a move, either in terms of cheaper land, accessibility to the city centre or the availability of rental accommodation, were simply not sufficient to attract many Grandview residents. Comparison of the occupations of the households who moved with those of the total sample, revealed few differences; for all occupational groups the ratio of movers to stayers remained about 2:1.

Questions about intraurban mobility inevitably lead to questions concerning housing tenure. The names of the 218 residents who lived in the eight block sample area between 1904 and 1913 were checked against the city voters' lists

NEW ADDRESSES OF
GRANDVIEW SAMPLE
1903 - 1913



Map 4:9

for at least two consecutive years during the period of residency in Grandview. A fairly large minority (31%) of residents' names never appeared on the voters' lists; this is not surprising given the newness of the community and the temporary nature of many people's settlement. Among the 150 names found on the lists, almost half (73) listed themselves as tenants, leaving the rate of home ownership at just over 51% of the population appearing on the voters' lists.²⁵ On the reasonable assumption that non voters were more likely to be tenants than were voters, then well over half the population in the eight block sample area of Grandview did not own their own home; the proportion of tenants to owners was much lower in the early years, rising rapidly after 1909. The high mobility rate for Grandview residents reflected the large numbers of renters who outnumbered home owners 2:1 among those who left the sample area in the 1905-1913 period.

Conclusion

Vancouver's large tracts of suburban land were not rapidly covered with inexpensive, self-owned family homes. Before World War I, many wage earners rented their homes, while other residents purchased lots in the suburbs as future homesites or speculative investments. These groups need not have been mutually exclusive, nevertheless the high numbers of renters, escalating land prices and volatile employment

market together suggest that home ownership was not accessible to every worker who came to the city. The study of Hillcrest and Grandview demonstrates that the settlement of workingmen's suburbs was neither uniform over space nor constant through time, reflecting swings in the local economy, and the decisions of developers and investors as much as the demands of the city's wage earners themselves. Despite the shortness of their settlement, areas like Grandview and to a lesser extent, Hillcrest, underwent subtle social changes over the decade 1904-1914. At the beginning of the decade settlers were almost exclusively blue collar; increasingly they were joined by the lower middle class as land prices increased beyond the means of unskilled or semi-skilled workers at the end of the decade. Over the same period, land use density increased significantly resulting in small apartment blocks and tracts of cottages on 25' lots standing in counterpose to the empty blocks of tree stumps and forest that lay near by.

The residents of Hillcrest and Grandview reflected variable experiences in the city. Clearly some wage earners, particularly those who purchased their land before 1909, were living in quite attractive homes on small lots, and a few were participants in the boom of 1909-12, having fortuitously purchased a second lot earlier. Less fortunate wage earners rented their suburban homes, and after a short residence, some left the city to find opportunity elsewhere. The majority however, were buying or planning to buy, very modest frame

homes on narrow lots. But for the salubrious climate, life for the working man in Vancouver differed in no important respect from the lives of workers in most Canadian cities.

NOTES

Chapter IV

¹Edmonds pre-empted D.L. 301 in the 1870s, paying \$1.00 an acre for the land in 1881. Henry Edmonds, Add. mss. 54, PACV.

²Victor Ross, A History of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Vol. 1. (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1920), pp. 332-350.

³The earliest date that ownership of the reserved land can be verified is for 1896. Vancouver Suburban Lands, Assessment Rolls, 1897.

⁴The remainder of the Bank of British Columbia's property was sold to large investors such as J.W. Horne, and in a few cases, reverted back to crown land.

⁵Patricia Roy, "The B.C. Electric Railway Co. 1897-1928," Ph.D. diss., U.B.C., 1970, pp. 35-40.

⁶Yorkshire Guarantee and Securities Corporation was overwhelmingly the largest investor in Vancouver Suburban Lands. The index to taxpayers for 1906 shows that its combined holdings in D.L. 301, Hastings Townsite and unspecified "Group I" lands were almost triple (by value) of those of the second largest land owner, B.C. Land and Investment Agency. James Adams was third largest land owner, followed by another local financial institution, Vancouver Land and Securities Corporation. Vancouver Suburban Lands, Assessment Rolls, 1906.

⁷Rate payers whose given address coincided with the location of their property as well as those whose address was given as "Hillcrest" were assumed to be living on their land.

⁸Occupations were not stated on the assessment rolls but were taken from the city directory. Suburban residents were under represented in the directories of this period,

therefore figures for occupational groups do not provide a fully accurate representation of the situation:

| <u>Hillcrest sample area</u> | <u>1904</u> | <u>1910</u> |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Blue collar | 12 | 50 |
| Agriculture | 4 | 4 |
| Small business | 0 | 7 |
| White collar | 2 | 14 |
| Professional | 0 | 1 |
| Retired | 2 | 11 |

⁹The 1904 Directory lists 21 houses and one business in this area of 277 lots.

¹⁰17th Avenue, Add. mss. 54, PACV.

¹¹This pattern of residential development is consistent with early photos of other working class areas of the city, notably Mount Pleasant and Grandview.

¹²Vancouver lots now turn over, on average, once every seven years. Allowing a shorter time span for the city's formative period, turnover can be gauged from the available assessment rolls. In the eleven block sample, 45% of the lots (92/205) changed hands three or more times in the 14 year period.

¹³The Province, Dec. 4, 1912, p. 32.

¹⁴South Vancouver, Voters' List, 1912, PACV.

¹⁵Mrs. J.D. Cameron, an early resident is quoted in Grandview, file 181, Add. mss. 54, PACV.

¹⁶Mr. J. Bennett, ibid.

¹⁷The sample area encompassed the 1500-1800 block Grant and Gravely Streets.

¹⁸Occupations of Residents of the 1500-1800 block Gravely and Grant:

| | <u>1907</u> | <u>1909</u> | <u>1912</u> |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Agriculture | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| Blue collar | 17 | 31 | 27 |
| Entrepreneurs | 1 | 4 | 10 |
| White collar | 1 | 4 | 11 |
| Professional | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total known occupations | <u>21</u> | <u>42</u> | <u>59</u> |

¹⁹B.C. Annual Report of Schools, 1913, Government of British Columbia, 1913.

²⁰Methodist parishioners represented about 5% of the total population in the Grandview area. Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Church, Toronto, 1912.

²¹E. Odium, a large property owner in Grandview since the mid 1890s initiated the association's formation in 1909.

²²Schell's daughter recalled her mother's warning in an interview with the writer, December 1979.

²³The Marriage Register of the Grandview Methodist Church, 1908-1913, provided a sample of 184: 52% were Canadian born, 36% British born, 9% U.S. born and 5.5% European born.

²⁴Directories for the succeeding three years were checked for subsequent moves within the city.

²⁵A small number of these people may have been renting business premises in Grandview while living in other wards of the city, however every attempt was made to include only those names which could be identified as residents from the directories.

V. CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored facets of Vancouver's early residential development from the stand point of wage earners' opportunities and experiences in the city. It has focussed on the availability of land for housing, the economic constraints to land purchase, and the kind and pace of settlement in two blue collar suburbs in order to assess the impact of urban expansion on opportunities for the common man. Implicit in this inquiry has been an assessment of early Vancouver as a place which offered superior opportunities of property mobility for wage earners. At its most fundamental level, property mobility represented the transition from tenant to home owner, a transition of particular significance for that 37% of the population (1911) born in Britain and Europe where opportunities for property ownership were severely restricted for the urban wage earner. Furthermore Vancouver's abundance of undeveloped residential land meant the potential for better housing and greater choice of home site. For the wage earner however secure employment and good wages, fundamental to the acquisition of property, could not be taken for granted.

Vancouver was not a city of superior opportunity for everyone: several important factors in the city's development

reduced opportunities for the workingman. The city's rapid growth as the terminus of the C.P.R. created a boom in which a handful of British Columbia's most prominent businessmen quickly assembled urban land. There was little room left on the ground floor of city building for men without surplus capital. Although the land boom collapsed in the depression of the 1890s, wage earners who faced severe wage cuts or no jobs at all were not generally the beneficiaries of cheaper land prices. New investors quickly stepped in to buy up the land of those who could no longer afford to hold it. A gradual return to prosperity following the Klondike gold rush and mining discoveries in British Columbia's interior at the end of the decade, brought a new and temporary stability to Vancouver's land market. Between 1898 and 1905, land prices rose only slightly and the largest land company operating on the city's east side, The Vancouver Improvement Co., did a steady, if unremarkable business, selling small residential lots. Nevertheless, in the blue collar suburbs, south and east of False Creek, most lots were still being sold to investors in parcels of one or several blocks.

The rapid surge in population growth beginning after 1904, coupled with anticipation of the benefits to come from the completion of the Panama Canal, created a tremendous land boom in Vancouver, attracting a myriad of promoters, dealers, and investors who drove land prices higher than those in Winnipeg, Toronto and most other Canadian cities. Between 1905

and 1911, residential lots within the city limits multiplied ten to twelve times in value, while lots in the outlying suburbs increased five or six fold in price. In 1905, house prices in Vancouver's blue collar suburbs differed little from those in Winnipeg or Toronto, but, by 1911, house prices were almost double those in Winnipeg and more than double those in Toronto. In the boom of 1909-1912, the arrival of building co-operatives, shoe string finance companies and a host of "get-rich-quick" schemes to house the worker, signalled the high demand for modestly priced housing. The failure of most of these enterprises and the subsequent collapse of the land market, ended Vancouver's second great land boom and a decade of rising land prices whose rate would be unmatched for another 70 years.

When employment opportunities are examined in tandem with land and housing costs, Vancouver's reputation as the city of opportunity must be modified. The high cost of living and, for most, job insecurity offset some of the benefits of living in a young city with plenty of land for residential development. Urban employment was concentrated in the volatile lumber and construction industries where seasonal layoffs and cyclical slumps were the rule. Furthermore, a surplus of unskilled, semi-skilled, and in the case of construction, even skilled labour, together with the absence of significant secondary industry, limited economic and occupational mobility amongst the work force, and ultimately

the settlement of blue collar suburbs. Michael Piva has argued that the structure of Toronto's economy, in the same period, benefitted workers relative to other industrial centres¹: as a port and service and commercial centre, Vancouver's economy cannot be interpreted in the same beneficial light.

After 1904 however, the pressure of population growth began to fill Vancouver's blue collar suburbs. Settlement was not uniform: some blocks filled up with workers' cottages, while adjacent blocks remained empty. Proximity to the streetcar line did not always determine which blocks filled up first. By 1910, small apartments and multifamily units associated with the pedestrian city, surrounded the streetcar stops in suburbs like Grandview and Hillcrest. Suburban settlement was new but the turnover of cottages in Grandview reflected the increasing proportion of renters in the area as much as it did the fluid suburban land market.

Yet the dynamics of urban growth cannot be fully understood by examining the structure of land and labour markets. Turn of the century Vancouver was an urban frontier. Pacific port and terminus of a continental railroad, separated from the rest of the nation by the barrier of a great mountain range, the city was remote and unique, the epitome of the new urban order to be found in the west. For the migrant wage earner as for the middle class entrepreneur, subjective perceptions about the city's potential may have been more important than objective economic realities in shaping his experience in the city.

If the city of Vancouver stoked men's expectations, prevailing social beliefs guided their expression. The motor of American individualism is almost a cliché, nevertheless the complex social and psychological factors which motivated settlers and shaped their perceptions still need recognition. To a considerable extent, the wage earner's values centered upon the home as haven of security for the family and source of autonomy for the breadwinner. In this context, home ownership in the suburbs satisfied the worker's aspirations for landed status in an idealized (and newly popularized) "garden" setting which the advent of the streetcar had made possible by providing the vital link between work and distant home. The streetcar however, did not provide homes; only hard work, accepted with fatalism or practiced with fervour,² turned aspirations into the accomplishment of home ownership.

The acquisition of land and home however, was not easy. Even when they perceived opportunity in the new city and were endowed with what J.M.S. Careless has called "a special strain of individualism,"³ early settlers worked hard, even struggled, to realize their goals. In the 1880s and 1890s some wage earners worked 60 hour weeks, and accepted additional financial help from relatives to make land ownership possible.⁴ For example, a young carpenter's apprentice from a farming village in Essex bought his first house in 1899 with the aid of gifts of money from England after a full decade of residence in the city. Arriving in Vancouver in the same year as the apprentice from Essex, after a short

residence in Ontario, a carpenter and his brother from Heckney Fields, London, purchased a small lot in the East End in 1890. The house they soon built was rented out for seven years, while the carpenter lived in a tiny cabin at the back of the property until he could afford to occupy his house. A mill worker, born in Ireland, spent seven years in the Vancouver area before achieving a position as supervisor in a local mill in 1893; he then purchased a 3-room cabin and lean-to on a narrow lot off a skid road in the still forested Grandview area. The cabin burned to the ground and was painstakingly rebuilt, then enlarged, piecemeal, over many years. Recalling their experience settling in Mount Pleasant in the 1890s, the wife of a silver gilder from Toronto concluded that her husband "never worked a single day in his life" by comparison with the struggle he had on their arrival in Vancouver.

In an uncertain environment where land prices rose rapidly, then dropped as precipitously and in which jobs were plentiful one year and scarce the next, some wage earners lost hard earned properties or their jobs; others slid down the occupational ladder. Two Grandview home owners for example, listed as "labourers" in the directories after 1900, had been a "fireman" and "mill foreman" when they acquired their properties in the 1890s. In Vancouver where rents were very high and the employment market erratic, property ownership was the key to economic survival for many wage earners. When one Grandview sawmiller's wages would spread no further, the large Canadian born family of one mill worker who had arrived

in Vancouver, 1889, moved to South Vancouver to clear and farm a small parcel of land; failing to become self-sufficient they sold their property at a loss and returned to the city to be closer to employment for their 14 and 15 year old children. An unknown number of other wage earners were forced to send their children out to work at an early age to maintain the family home in a manner reminiscent of families in Thernstrom's earlier Newburyport.⁵ One senses that many of the ordinary folk of Vancouver spent little time in celebration of the city's progress and advancement; rather, economic survival in an environment over which they had little control, was probably closer to the surface of their concerns.

The experience of wage earners in the early years of the city was not, of course, all of a kind. For some, good timing and a keen sense of the land market's potential led to real economic advancement. The activities of one teamster, Edward Warner may be no more typical of wage earners' experiences than the fortunes of those considered above, but they do illustrate the possibilities that were open to some individuals who arrived on the eve of the city's incorporation. In 1885 Warner purchased a lot and cabin east of the Granville Townsite; in 1891 he traded 25' of his East End lot for an acre of land on the North Arm of the Fraser, in the future Municipality of South Vancouver. During the depression he cleared his land with a span of mules, then traded both land and animals for a block in Hillcrest. In 1908 Warner sold the Hillcrest property for \$1,500 and retired

to South Vancouver.

Other early arrivals such as Walter Terryberry a driver who owned a tiny gingerbread cottage in the East End and purchased a second lot in Grandview 1909, and James Wilson a machinist who roomed in the West End before moving to Grandview in 1904, and purchasing a second lot in Hillcrest in 1906, realized in a small way, the property owning opportunities presented by the particular circumstances of Vancouver development. But both Terryberry and Warner were established in the city before 1900, and made their land purchases during the intervals between recession and boom. Timing was a critical factor in defining the workingman's experience in the city, and in numerous other towns and cities of the west, a similar fortunate proportion of wage earners were likely repeating the same modest successes. In Vancouver, some artisans crossed the line between landowner and land agent. In 1909-1912, the land boom mentality was so pervasive that a few skilled workers abandoned their crafts to market suburban property. Among several dozen small real estate agents in Grandview were a tailor and a mechanic who moved from their downtown lodgings to set up business in the suburbs. As the boom collapsed, both left for South Vancouver, and each returned to his former occupation.

This thesis has attempted to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality, questioning the claims of booster literature that shaped both the contemporary vision of Vancouver and that of later interpreters. Pre war Vancouver was not

a city of unique opportunity. As much or more than other Canadian cities, Vancouver suffered from rapidly rising land costs and wages which failed to keep pace with the cost of living. Furthermore, employment opportunities were frequently inferior to those in central Canada. Although residential land was proportionately and to some degree, more accessible to the city's small population than it was to the larger populations of industrialized central Canadian cities, such differences narrowed rapidly as land prices climbed in the mid 1900s. By 1911, between one quarter to one third of the city's suburban wage earners did not own their homes. While Vancouver did not have slum housing on the scale of that found in Toronto or Montreal, between 10-15% of the city's population lived in crowded, frequently substandard housing in Chinatown and the immigrant quarter of the East End.⁶

By 1912 Vancouver's distinctiveness lay in its natural surroundings rather than in the morphology of its streetscape. In the broad pattern of its urban form Vancouver resembled countless other cities of western North America where most urban growth had occurred after the arrival of the streetcar, and indeed, many older cities where modern improvements in urban transportation had broken the bounds of the pedestrian city. Wood frame cottages on tiny lots sat side by side--a variation but hardly a drastic departure from workingmen's bungalows in Winnipeg or even the rows of brick front "semi-detacheds" on the long narrow lots of suburban Toronto. Building materials, styles and facades differed to some degree,

but these were superficial variants on deeper structural commonalities. Rather departure lay in the presence of the rain forest, the rough and quasi rural setting of Vancouver's blue collar suburbs and, by comparison, the salubrious west coast climate. To view the greenness of Vancouver's working class suburbs as an expression of unique attachment to family and garden is to mistake the context of physical setting with subjective will.⁷ Suburban "gardens" took the form of stump strewn lots or tiny vegetable plots squeezed into the family's back yard.

To move across a continent, to settle in a young city remote from an older, familiar urban order, to face uncertain employment conditions, in short, to take a risk--these actions reflected the spirit of individualism. Land and housing choices, initially greater than those in older cities, because of the coincidental incorporation of the streetcar with the city itself, were nevertheless constrained by the actions of investors and speculators attracted to Vancouver at the same period. Opportunities varied. The urban landscape like the urban economy was evolving and changing: in this state of flux lay both the chance for advancement and for failure. The physical availability of land, alone, was insufficient to define a new urban order. The capitalist land market constricted the supply of land and the service based urban economy was not versatile enough to provide abundant job opportunities.

In the Vancouver suburbs of Grandview and Hillcrest the breezes seemed fresher and the landscape, notwithstanding the stumps, was greener than in the suburbs of Toronto or Winnipeg, but housing was hardly superior nor lot sizes much less mean than those in most other Canadian cities. The abundance of land did not result in a new form of property distribution any more than it resulted, as J.M.S. Careless has noted, in a greater manifestation of popular democracy.⁸ The abundance of land in Vancouver, as in most cities of the North American west, continued to mean first and foremost an abundance for those with capital and an understanding of where to invest it.⁹

NOTES

Chapter V

¹Michael J. Piva, The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), p. 171. Piva argues that the concentration of high wage industries in printing and publishing, and iron and steel manufacturing together with low seasonal employment, benefited Toronto wage earners.

²Conservative clubs were the most popular political associations in "blue collar" South Vancouver. Vancouver socialists comprised a very small (albeit noisy) minority of the population. See editorials in The Greater Vancouver Chinook, Library of the B.C. Provincial Legislature, and A.H. Lewis, South Vancouver, Past and Present, (Vancouver: Western Publishing Bureau, 1920).

³J.M.S. Careless, "Aspects of Urban Life in the West, 1870-1914." In The Canadian City, eds. Gilbert Stelter and Alan Artibise. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 136.

⁴Very little data on the experiences of early workers, particularly that relating to housing acquisition, is available for early Vancouver. The experiences related here have been taken from the transcripts of interviews between the city archivist, Major Matthews, and city pioneers, c. 1935, Add. mss. 54 PACV; and the Diary of E.G. Baynes, 1889, privately owned. Information appearing in Directories of Voters' Lists has been added where appropriate.

⁵S. Thernstrom, Poverty and Progress, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 137.

⁶Vancouver, Social Survey of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, 1912.

⁷Anne Buttimer argues geographers must be wary of treating space (e.g. landscape) as an expression of human experience rather than simply as context. A. Buttimer "Grasping the Dynamism of Life World" AAAG, 1976, pp. 277-292.

⁸J.M.S. Careless, "Urban Life in the West," p. 132.

⁹S.B. Warner, Jr., The Urban Wilderness, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 19.

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