

living on furby

narratives of home,
winnipeg, manitoba,
1880 – 2005



DAVID G. BURLEY
MIKE MAUNDER

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Winnipeg Inner-City Research Alliance
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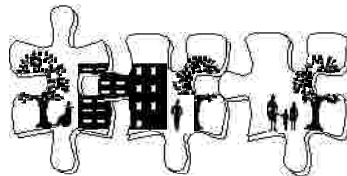
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WINNIPEG INNER CITY RESEARCH ALLIANCE



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Living on Furby

This study addresses the possibilities and experiences of home among the residents of one city block in what has become part of the inner-city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Over the century and quarter from its first development to the early twenty-first century, the block of Furby Street between Broadway and Portage Avenue typified many of the trends in what are now downtown neighbourhoods. From a street of mostly comfortable and respectable middle- and upper-middle class homes in the first part of the twentieth-century, by the end of the century this section of Furby had come to be stereotyped as part of “Murder’s Half-Acre”, a district of large houses that had been divided into rental suites and rooms accommodating highly transient residents and a location of serious problems of drug traffic, substance abuse, and gang activities.

The housing and the people are considered in relationship, as changing interactions, in which people perceive dwellings as opportunities for home. Of concern are the ways in which the long-term cycle of housing and neighbourhood development, maturity, decline, and revival created a changing residential built-environment within which households, families, and individuals developed strategies not just to obtain shelter, but also to secure the emotional and psychological satisfaction that comes from realizing their concept of home. The problem, then, asks how did different groups of

people interact with a changing neighbourhood? How did changes in the housing stock of the street affect the shelter strategies of residents? How did the changing characteristics of housing and residents affect the quality of neighbourhood life?

In pursuing answers to these questions, the research has taken multiple methodological approaches, combining investigation in newspapers, tax records, and city directories with oral history interviews with twenty-seven former residents of the street. Obviously, the latter research is temporally limited, but an attempt was made to form information from various sources into narratives of home that placed the time spent on Furby within a larger life history and that tried to interpret the meaning that home had for people over time. From the original survey of the street in the 1870s to the early twenty-first century, five periods can be observed, each with distinctive patterns in the quality of housing, housing tenure, and household and family structures, and experiences of home.

First, up to World War One, the block housed stable middle- and upper-class families, many of whom owned their residences, but more of whom did not. Ownership seemed less essential for home than it became in the last half of the twentieth century. The bourgeois concept of home—patriarchal but socially aware in its way—was expansive in its inclusion of non-nuclear family members at certain

stages in the family life cycle and more restricted in its boundaries as families grew and needed more space.

Second, after the first war and into the second, residential accommodation on Furby Street reflected the problems of the housing shortage that beset the city generally. The substantial houses and good neighbourhood presented investors with opportunities for what one realtor described as “high-class rooming houses” and what a former tenant called “rooming homes”. But, as high residential mobility demonstrated, for many dreams of home were difficult to attach to a particular place and became part of the complex frustrations of the Depression-era.

Third, from the mid-1940s into the 1970s the block was revitalized as home ownership reached unprecedented levels, surpassing the national average. Working-class and mainly first- and second-generation immigrant families perceived an opportunity to finance ownership by taking in roomers. Their willingness to compromise nuclear-family privacy was more than economic necessity, and was also a variation on older immigrant practices of mutual self-help and ethnic sociability, which were resources for minorities adapting to a new society.

Fourth, in the 1980s and 1990s rooming houses proliferated on the block. The tenants, all poor or low-income and many single mothers and Aboriginal, were often transient, always looking for some accommodation that was cheaper, cleaner, and more spacious. When they found a place that worked for them, they stayed for several years, but when they moved, they moved frequently. For them, home was movable and depended more on sustaining personal connections with family, kin, and friends than on settling down in a particular space. Their small successes occurred pri-

vately, while their visible poverty and transience made it easy for observers to include them among the too common social problems of the inner-city—crime, gang activity, arson, violence, sexual exploitation, destitution, homelessness, and so on.

Fifth, from the 1990s into the new century, community-based organizations, supported by government-funded programmes, have acquired and rehabilitated many run-down houses on the block, converting them to subsidized low-income housing and housing for university students. A few newcomers, home owners and improving landlords, have also bought property on the block. The vital community life, downtown living, and a desire to contribute personally to the improvement of the inner city have made seeking a home on Furby a political statement. But neighbourhood renewal has often left few places for the poorest of the poor.

Viewing many inner-city neighbourhoods, one might too easily imagine a history of decline, of houses once comfortable, even grand, and deteriorating over time into slums. Looking instead at houses as accommodation for people, all hoping for some experience of home, produces multiple narratives and none of the singular linearity of decline. Aging houses have afforded changing opportunities to secure homes, with varying forms and meanings, and in so doing their occupants have asserted, some times in the face of adversity, a profound human dignity. No single form of home has predominated on the block and the houses have over time supported very different homes. Policies assuming the normality of the nuclear family and the exceptionality of other possibilities are grounded in ideologies rather than in what has been the historical experience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study had its origins in the deep commitment of Paul Chorney and Mike Maunder to the community of West Broadway in Winnipeg. For years, they have participated in a wide range of enterprises aimed at improving the quality of life for people in their neighbourhood. Reflecting on what had and had not happened, they concluded that a history, focused on one of the more notable blocks in the area, would put contemporary changes into perspective. Mike Maunder, a member of the Board of Directors of Westminster Housing Society, persuaded the Society to sponsor this project within the framework of the Winnipeg Inner-City Research Alliance (WIRA). Tom Ford, Charles Huband, and Ian Skelton of Westminster Housing have been particularly supportive.

WIRA has funded studies that bring together members of the community with university researchers. When Mike and Paul approached me, I doubted the possibility of ever finding sufficient material for a history that extended much beyond the recent past. As well, I wondered whether we might even find very many people willing to offer interviews. I was wrong on both counts.

Many of the interviews would have been impossible to arrange were it not for the deep roots of Paul and Mike within the community. Their connections and the confidence that residents have in their

commitment to the neighbourhood, in their respect for its residents, and in their integrity were responsible for some remarkable interviews. Interviews with former residents, tracked down in various ways, proved equally as revealing of life on one block. Without the generosity of those who shared their experiences, this study would have been impossible, and we are most grateful to all who volunteered.

We also were fortunate in recruiting the research assistance of two talented people. Ian Keenan, a student in History at the University of Winnipeg, has many accomplishments. As a former television cameraman, his technical experience proved invaluable in making it possible for us to video-record the interviews. He participated in several of the interviews and also contributed perceptive analyses of directory data. In more ways than can be recounted, his engagement made a difference in the success of this project. So too did the contributions of Carey Sinclair. Her connections with several Aboriginal people who had lived on the block made interviews possible, and her own perspective as an Aboriginal parent living in Winnipeg informed her participation in and review of interviews and benefited our broader interpretations of them.

As always, the staff of the City of Winnipeg Archives responded creatively to requests for help. Jody Baltessen and Evelyn West deserve particular thanks.

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David G. Burley, 23 April 2008

INTRODUCTION

“The House of Everyman”

“The house of everyman is to him as his castle and fortresse,
as well as his defence against injury and violence, as for his repose.”
— Sir Edward Coke, 1604

A man’s house is his castle. Home sweet home. Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home. Home is where the heart is. You can never go home again. A house is not a home. Homeowner. Homemaker. Homesick. Homeless.

Commonplace, even clichéd, as such words and phrases might be, they touch a particularly intimate and personal spot for many of us. The memories of the homes that nurtured us, and which we have had to leave, and the hopes for the homes we wish to secure provide bearings and purpose for the most personal connections that we develop with families and friends.¹ Those places and times where we can let down our guard, step aside from pretense and posture, and be authentically who we are and safely confide our greatest ambitions and fears, grant us an individual and communal comfort beyond the material qualities of the physical space that we cultivate for those purposes. Homes are the changing intersections of our selves with the sheltered spaces in which we express our identities most intimately and share the loving comfort of friends, kin, and family. Seldom permanent through our lives, homes move from place to place, the new places always measured against the former, as we strive to reproduce or

improve upon what we once held. Home is an ideal.

In practice, however, the ideal is not necessarily benevolent or even merely benign. The goal may be elusive, always just beyond reach, despite the sacrifice and striving for it, and, when achieved, never quite commensurate with its anticipation. Home incompletely realized can be frustrating and, because of its deep association with self, can be personally damaging. As well, as Sir Edward Coke’s early seventeenth-century epigram² above implies, home has conveyed gendered benefits: a man’s castle for defence and repose, his property, can become a wife’s confinement, isolation, and subordination. That patriarchal authority can extend to children and others who, while under his roof, must accede to his will. One man’s castle, both physically in the politics of space and ideologically in the values it asserts, may be another’s prison. For some, then, home has been a mixed personal experience.

Finding physical space is both the starting point in trying to gain the ideal home and a potential source of frustration. Home often is a compromise between aspirations and spatial possibilities.

1 Tony Chapman, “There’s No Place Like Home,” *Theory, Culture, Society* 18 (2001): 138.

2 Sir Edward Coke, *Reports, 1600-1615* (London, 1738), V, 91b, cited in Joseph Rykwert, “House and Home,” *Social Research* 58 (Spring 1991): 53.

Historically in Canada accommodation has generally been secured in private markets. Even when the state has intervened, its housing policy has preferred, as historian John Bacher has argued, "keeping to the marketplace" as much as possible.³ As a result, the dynamic for growth in housing stock has been a combination of new speculative or custom building for middle and upper income buyers and what might be termed regulated deterioration for those with lower incomes. In this process, policy makers have assumed that the movement of higher income families into new houses would open up shelter in older residences for those with lower incomes. Municipal building regulations, in concert with the self-interest of public and private mortgage lenders and the insurance industry, would assure that aging residences did not deteriorate below socially acceptable and financially viable standards. The lesser interest of speculative builders in housing for lower income groups left few choices for families on tight budgets. As historian Richard Harris has discovered, many working-class families were able to reduce their dependence on markets by self-building their homes on the least expensive land in suburban real estate markets with minimal or laxly enforced building codes.⁴ Or so the process went through much of the twentieth century.

The quality of much of the older housing in Canadian cities did suffer, however, and continues to suffer from this process.⁵ Because of the visceral as-

sociation of house with home, concerns about the deterioration of housing extend urgently to worries about the possibility of home. Moreover, characteristics of home lived in middle- and upper-income houses, secured in private shelter markets, have established standards by which the well-being of lower-income home life, vulnerable in the private market or dependent upon subsidized shelter, is evaluated in public policy and public opinion.

The deteriorating housing of Winnipeg's inner city at the end of the last century provoked public concern for the individuals and families who found shelter there. Neighbourhoods, once home to middle- and upper-income families, had become tracts predominantly of rental housing and rooming houses for poor and low-income families and individuals. In response government programmes promoted housing rehabilitation, offered some inner-city residents the rare chance to own their home, and tried to reduce the burdens of homelessness among those least able to secure shelter even in a subsidized housing market. The concentration on housing, however, ought to be accompanied with an appreciation of the meanings and the experiences of home.

For all of the physical problems associated with inner-city housing, many people had always endeavoured to secure their own ideas of what constituted a good and satisfying home, and for those with the least incomes old and often poor quality housing was an affordable opportunity to find a home. To observe that people made the best of the limited choices that presented themselves should not be interpreted as naïve romanticism about the weight of poverty. For some the experiences of poverty have been overwhelming, desperate, and destructive. On the other hand, many confronted their

3 John Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

4 Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy, 1900 to 1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

5 Kevin Brushett, "Blots on the Face of the City: The Politics of Slum Housing and Urban

Renewal in Toronto, 1940-1970," PhD thesis, Queen's University, 2002.

circumstances with a profound dignity, responsibility and care for family and friends, and a modest satisfaction with what they could accomplish and control. Such victories have not been blind to injustices and inequalities and have for some encouraged engagement with community development and social action. More importantly, attention to what people have done in the politics of their daily lives makes it impossible to equate the quality of housing with the quality of home.

In order to explore these themes more deeply, this study addresses the possibilities and experiences of home among the residents of one city block in what became part of the inner-city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Over the century and quarter from its first development to the early twenty-first century, the block of Furby Street between Broadway and Portage Avenue typified many of the trends in what are now downtown neighbourhoods. From a street of mostly comfortable and respectable middle- and upper-middle class homes in the first part of the twentieth-century, by the end of the century this section of Furby had come to be stereotyped as part of "Murder's Half Acre", a district of large houses that had been divided into rental suites and rooms accommodating highly transient residents and a location of serious problems of drug traffic, substance abuse, and gang activities.

The study does not concentrate on the housing and the people separately, but considers the interaction of people with their dwellings and neighbourhood. Of concern are the ways in which the long-term cycle of housing and neighbourhood development, maturity, decline, and revival created a changing residential built-environment within which households, families, and individuals developed strategies not just to obtain shelter, but also to secure the emotional and psychological satisfaction that comes from realizing their concept of home. The problem,

then, asks how did changing groups of people interact with a changing neighbourhood? How did changes in the housing stock of the street affect the shelter strategies of residents? How did the changing characteristics of housing and residents affect the quality of neighbourhood life?

Buildings on the block and the individuals and families who lived in them existed through life cycles, and the intersection of phases in those residential and personal cycles have influenced the quality of life and the quality of home in the neighbourhood. Individuals and families at different stages in their lives possess the need for and capacity to secure different types of accommodation, the availability of which depends upon the aging and renewal of the housing stock. Explanations for both the decline and the revival of the neighbourhood reside at the intersection of these cycles and were very much associated with changing possibilities of home.

From its initial survey in the 1870s to the early twenty-first century, five periods can be observed, each with distinctive patterns in the quality of housing, housing tenure, and household and family structures. Through each of the periods, housing, as well as families, moved through a cycle of aging.

First, from the mid-1880s, when the first houses were constructed, to World War One, the block housed stable middle- and upper-class families, many of whom owned their residences but more of whom did not. Residential mobility in and out of the neighbourhood—to be expected through all periods—reproduced the characteristics of the families and houses across two generations. Genteel and polite as the families and households were, and committed to bourgeois privacy and the distinct masculine and feminine spheres of responsibility and engagement, the separation of private and public was not rigid and complete. The qualities as-

sociated with their home, especially the sanctity of the nuclear family, the nurturing of children, and assistance for those of one's kind, stimulated the women of Furby Street to promote an expansive social and moral reform concern for those in the city unable or unwilling to achieve, or even aspire to, such a home. By the First World War, the young families who had moved onto the block at the turn of the century were growing up; sons went off to war; and reform optimism, both stimulated and disillusioned by war, confronted the intense class polarization that erupted in a six-week-long general strike in 1919 and raised the spectre of revolution. Residences in the new suburbs, at a greater geographical and social distance from the downtown, somehow now seemed safer and more suitable for middle- and upper-middle class homes.

Second, after the First World War and through the Second War, residential accommodation on Furby Street reflected the problems of the housing shortage that beset the city generally. The substantial houses and good neighbourhood presented investors with opportunities for what one realtor described as "high-class rooming houses" and what a former tenant called "rooming homes". Frequently, owners leased their converted single-family properties to resident managers who then furnished and decorated the premises and rented rooms, occasionally with board. Single women, widowed or unmarried, became more numerous as householders and "rooming home" keepers. Residential transience, much higher than at any other time except the late twentieth century, revealed insecurity, first in the 1920s as individuals and families tried to find something better and then in the 1930s as many could not hold on to what they had. In such circumstances, home could scarcely be associated with possession of a stable space; the space to be had was temporary, remained small,

and was compromised with shared common areas.

Third, from the mid-1940s into the 1970s suburban development proliferated in Winnipeg and other Canadian cities.⁶ The spatial extension of the city and the excitement of home ownership after the frustrations of the interwar and war years have distracted attention from the profound changes in many older, downtown neighbourhoods. A significant decline both in demand for rooming accommodation and in the quality of the houses, due to decades of wear-and-tear, reduced their appeal as investments and made them attractive to immigrant and working-class families who did not want or could not afford new houses in the suburbs. The size of the houses on Furby Street meant that the new owners could finance their purchases by renting out rooms, often to tenants from a similar ethnic background. Home ownership on the block reached its highest level. Houses were both residence and business, and home was expansive, not private, and closely involved in ethnic communities. The aging of this post-war generation of homeowners coincided with a downturn in the value of inner-city real estate and left owners and their heirs with few options.

Fourth, in the 1980s and 1990s rooming houses—an often inaccurate category defined by municipal regulations to apply to houses with a single entry, even if the building included self-contained multi-room suites rather than single rooms and shared kitchens and bathrooms—proliferated on the block. Some were run for a time by the children of post-war owners. After their parents had died or moved into other accommodation, disposing of the family home was a problem, both financially and emotionally. Holding on to the site of

6 David Burley, "Winnipeg's Landscape of Modernity, 1945-1975," in *Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945-1975* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 29-85.

childhood memories and also hoping for some profit from a rental property, however, proved a patrimony of mixed blessing. The spread of inner-city poverty in the last two decades of the century changed the nature of rooming houses and rendered them a poor investment for owners not prepared to squeeze all that they could from properties as they decayed and degraded. When heirs did in the end sell the family home, sadly it was with a sense of relief. The tenants, many of whom were single mothers, who rented rooms or suites on the block were often transient, always looking for some accommodation that was cheaper, cleaner, and more spacious. When they found a place that worked for them, they usually stayed for several years, but when they moved, they moved frequently. For them, home was movable, often fragile, and depended more on sustaining personal connections with family, kin, and friends than on settling down in a particular space. Their small successes occurred privately, while their visible poverty and transience made it easy for observers to include them among the too common social problems of the inner-city—crime, gang activity, arson, violence, sexual exploitation, destitution, homelessness, and so on. Indeed, there were on the block those whose poverty, poor mental health, and dependence on alcohol or drugs effectively left them homeless, even if they had a roof over their head. But there were also others for whom holding their loved ones together demanded a commitment that asserted an essential human dignity and a generosity of spirit far beyond their limited means.

Fifth, during the 1990s and into the first decade of this century a growing number of community development organizations and government programmes addressed the physical deterioration of Winnipeg's inner-city, including the Furby neighbourhood. They also sought to embed neighbourhood firmly within understandings of home. Initiatives aimed at

housing rehabilitation—some successful, some failures—did improve the quality of the housing stock and community life on the block; indeed, few blocks in the city attracted the varied attention received by Furby Street. A few homeowners remained or moved onto the block, but much of the accommodation became low-income, subsidized housing or, in a few cases, renovated, private rooming houses. The new residents did find something they had not enjoyed for some time, if ever: a safe, clean, affordable place to live. But many of the former residents moved on again.

THE IDEA OF HOME

The importance that home has come to hold in Western understandings of self is manifest in the range of multidisciplinary perspectives on its meaning. As well, home has become inextricably entwined as a problem in studies of property ownership, gender relations and family politics, and government's efforts at social engineering. An assessment of the extensive literature on home is far beyond this study and the intent here is only to identify general issues that inform this inquiry and to which this study might modestly contribute.

Studies of home in its several dimensions have fallen into an interpretive polarity. On the one hand are those studies that observe the qualities of home and their pursuit as normative and as inherent human needs, necessary for psychological well-being. Hence, homelessness, for example, presents much more than a problem in providing shelter for those who for whatever reason have temporarily or permanently no decent, socially recognizable place to live. Most troubling are the social disconnections and psychic alienation that that absence is taken to connote. On the other hand, historical and contextual studies often have contended that difference should not be considered deficiency or

deviation. An appreciation of possibilities and strategies reveals the ways in which different groups and individuals have constructed their homes at different times to achieve a variety of ends, occasionally in ways that might not be recognizable according to normative criteria of home. Arguing for the social construction of the meaning of home, however, does not mean that the poor choose to live as they do or that the weak and the ill would not prefer a suburban bungalow. Rather, making the best of adversity demonstrates how the least advantaged construct their own homes.

The meaning of home has deeply engaged those interested in environmental psychology. As Jean Moore has explained in her review of the literature in this field, one line of the earliest lines of inquiry has attempted to construct hierarchies of meanings, categorizing and ranking various criteria to describe the intentions, interactions, and emotions that people develop between themselves and their places of residence. Jerome Tognoli, for example, offered five central characteristics of home: centrality, that is a relatively permanent primary territory over which exclusive personal control and use are exercised; continuity, that is the association of stability and security with a place of return; privacy, as well as a feeling of refuge and regeneration, deriving from control of access to intimacy; self-expression and personal identity, which is especially important during childhood, but also comes to be associated with important and meaningful life experiences; social relationships, especially emotionally satisfying relations with family, friends, and associates, extending beyond the house to the neighbourhood.⁷ Founded on these

meanings, researchers have derived various theories of place to explain the transactional process whereby people become attached to, identify with, and express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with particular places as homes. Such approaches necessarily explore the interaction of objective characteristics and subjective evaluations and the tensions that exist, and the extent of their resolution, between physical environments and emotional reactions.⁸ Moore has contended, however, that as important as these studies have been in refining the conceptualization of home and the processes whereby individuals interact with a place, they have too often been limited by the middle-class subjects that they have commonly studied, at the expense of the experiences of the working-class, women, the elderly, and the powerless who might reasonably develop more negative associations with home.⁹

Historical studies, by their nature, can be sensitive to the changing and contextual dimensions of concepts of home, even if they have not always acknowledged the class, gender, and age boundaries within which they have sometimes implicitly framed their conclusions. Most suggestive has been Witold Rybczynski's *Home*. "Domestic well-being," he has contended, "is a fundamental human need...deeply rooted in us," which finds its expression in the pursuit, cultivation, and indulgence of "comfort".¹⁰ If the need is

7 Jerome Tognoli, "Residential Environments," in *Handbook of Environmental Psychology*, D. Stokols and I. Altman, eds. (New York: Wiley, 1987), 655-90; Jaime Horwitz and Jerome

Tognoli, "Role of Home in Adult Development: Women and Men Living Alone Describe Their Residential Histories," *Family Relations*, 31 (July 1982): 335-41; Jeanne Moore, "Placing Home in Context," *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 20 (2000): 210; Sandy G. Smith, "The Essential Qualities of Home," *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 14 (1994): 31-3.

8 Moore, "Placing Home in Context," 210-11.

9 Moore, "Placing Home in Context," 211-2.

10 Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 217-25, 230-2.

inherent, its fulfillment has been changeable—but not infinitely so. At any time, a “demonstrable consensus” has existed about what is comfortable. Consensus has exercised restraint on possibilities, at the same time as it has imposed an uncomfortable conformity. The commercialization of comfort, by architects, interior designers, household economists, and other domestic experts, has driven a process of continuous displacement of old comforts, at the same time as its disconnections have provoked a nostalgia for the lost comforts of the past. For Rybczynski, the recursive rejection of, yet longing for the past is at the core of comfort as a modern concept of home.

In the meaning of home, the modern dialectic between past and present is paralleled with the tension between public and private. The line between the latter dichotomy not only demarcates the limits of control over space, but it also bifurcates the human subject. Who are we when we are at home? As Rybczynski asserted, the association of home with domestic comfort was only possible with “the emergence of something new in the human consciousness: the appearance of the internal world of the individual, of the self, and of the family.”¹¹ While attributing the historical formation of home as domestic comfort to the rise of the European, and subsequently western, bourgeoisie, Rybczynski hesitated in going one step farther to acknowledge the historical formation of a bourgeois consciousness—the bourgeois subject—around the distinction between public and private and its reproduction in domestic comfort. The house that became the bourgeois home, then, formed and expressed an identity that located a consciousness and imagination in space. Essential to that locating, as historian Peter Ward has asserted, has been the pursuit and achievement of physical pri-

vacy for individuals with domestic space and for the domestic space of families from outsiders.¹²

In this locating, as Gaston Bachelard has explained, the house lays the foundation of those childhood memories that inform aspirations for home and the sense of loss or homesickness.¹³ Those memories of former homes and the attempts to recapture, build upon, or go beyond them later in life and in new places inspire occupants to become the authors of their residential spaces. The house itself becomes a text for home. Kathy Mezei and Chiara Breganti contend, “The exterior facade and style along with the interior decoration, furniture, style, and layout of houses compose a semiotic system that signals status, class, and public display and creates meanings that observers, visitors, and the public may interpret and read.”¹⁴ Within sets of symbols—some socially recognizable and others understood by the initiates of the group in which membership is claimed—people can choose, from what they can afford, those things that write their identities on the places that they occupy. In the choosing, life becomes an art, even in the most mundane of actions.¹⁵ The satisfaction that can come from working on a home and improving it, a type of performance art, can make families reluctant to move into newer places, according to architects Avi

11 Rybczynski, *Home*, 35-6

12 Peter Ward, *A History of Domestic Space: Privacy and the Canadian Home* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 4-6.

13 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, 1994), xxxii.

14 Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti, “Reading the House: A Literary Perspective,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27 (2002): 840. For another literary perspective see, David Crouch, “Writing of Australian Dwelling: Animate Houses and Anxious Grounds,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 80 (2004): 43.

15 For example, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 169-225.

Friedman and David Krawitz, even when they possess the financial resources to do so.¹⁶

Homes also get located symbolically within neighbourhoods and thereby have meanings attached to them by residents, as well as outside observers, based on the perceptions and memories of the neighbourhood. Shops, restaurants, institutions, and public places, even boulevards and alleys, impart meanings as well. From the outside, as scholars such as Kay J. Anderson, Alan Mayne, and Judith R. Walkowitz have argued in very different studies, some areas, especially poorer, ethnic neighbourhoods, have seemed exotic, fearful, and dangerous morally and physically.¹⁷ In such places, observers could scarcely imagine that homes of the proper sort could exist. And perhaps they were correct. But homes of different forms and cultural construction, embedded in neighbourhoods with different social structures and practices, offered opportunities for meaningful, if at times stressed and troubled, lives. Within such neighbourhoods, as Elijah Anderson discovered in his classic study of a South Side Chicago barroom and liquor store, residents developed and, through their choices of associations, enforced their own standards of "decency".¹⁸ Those standards were not completely auto-

nous from the dominant culture, however. As anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell has argued about the Jewish "ghetto girl" of New York City's Lower East Side, the insider construction of negative stereotypes that resembled external criticism served to defend a community troubled by its economic vulnerability and cultural loss.¹⁹ Similarly, Suzanne Morton's study of the Richmond Heights suburb of Halifax in the 1920s demonstrated how a vital working-class culture in the neighbourhood fostered an alternative perspective on gender roles, at the same time as economic insecurities worked to reinforce existing patriarchal and paternalist power relations. At times, men's "anger and frustration usually voiced against capitalism was...directed towards wives and girlfriends."²⁰

The cultural texts of neighbourhoods have also been subject to re-writing, as older families and groups move out and as new ones move in. As Alexander von Hoffman has contended in his history of the Jamaica Plains neighbourhood of Boston, presumptions about the vitality of neighbourhood life in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American cities convinced planners and reformers from the interwar years through the 1960s and beyond to advocate neighbourhood revitalization as the cure for the broad range of social ills that had contributed to the deterioration of the inner city.²¹ In the

16 Avi Friedman and David Krawitz, *Peeking through the Keyhole: The Evolution of North American Homes* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-University Press, 2002), 169.

17 Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

18 Elijah Anderson, *A Place on the Corner* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 207-16.

19 Riv-Ellen Prell, "The Ghetto Girl and the Erasure of Memory," in *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections*, H.R. Diner, J. Shandler, and B.S. Wenger, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 94-6.

20 Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 152-3.

21 Alexander von Hoffman, *Local Attachments: The Making of an American Neighbourhood, 1850 to 1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 246-8.

process the memories of former neighbourhoods may well re-write the past at the same time as they interpret difference as diminution.

Like images of the ideal neighbourhood, assumptions about the benefits of one style of home, the bourgeois home, have influenced public policy. Its twentieth-century symbol, the owner-occupied single-family detached dwelling, has inspired government housing policy and more generally the expectations for the ordering of daily life held by a range of social institutions from schools to social agencies. The bourgeois home has become culturally hegemonic and so has come to exercise active and passive forces on other forms.²²

As John Bacher has interpreted the evolution of Canadian housing policy to the 1990s and Jill Wade the campaign for social housing in Vancouver to 1950, the Canadian state remained resistant to arguments from housing activists that the private shelter market failed to provide decent housing for low-income Canadians. Not until the post-Second World War era did the state allocate significant resources to housing forms that did not conform to this model, and even then it was with reluctance.²³ Their interpretations, however, located government hesitation in liberal capitalist ideology without considering how a bourgeois ideal of home and home ownership fitted into that ideology.

Following the line of argument ad-

vanced above, one might argue that part of the appeal of home ownership has derived from the opportunity for greater authorial control, either starting with the relatively blank page of the new house or treating the re-sale house as a palimpsest, a parchment to be scraped and re-written. To modify Rybczynski somewhat, the need for creative authorial expression, in making life an art, might well be “a fundamental human need”, but to understand and seek its fulfillment through holding private property in one’s residential accommodation has been a historical product. Its roots stretch down to the seventeenth century at least and the theory of possessive individualism, as outlined by political theorist C.B. Macpherson. Individualism’s “possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them....The individual, it was thought, is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession.”²⁴ A home and its ownership then can be seen as an assertion of a family’s freedom.

Historians who have attempted to explain the twentieth-century growth in Canadian home ownership have identified, among other factors, the profound “will to possess”. Michael Doucet and John Weaver in their study of Hamilton attributed the origin of that will to Old World “radical assaults on tenancy—a legacy of feudalism”. The possibilities of holding property in home ownership and the pursuit of the masculine ideal of independence drew immigrants to North America and justified the assumption of significant debt and a life’s dedication to repayment.

22 Architects Avi Friedman and David Krawitz have pondered the implications of what they interpret as changing definitions of family and a wider variety of household: what effects will these social changes have upon the postwar association of home with ever larger suburban houses. *Peeping through the Keyhole*, 188-9.

23 Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*; Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919-50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

24 C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 2-3.

"Apparently the psychic satisfaction of owning," Doucet and Weaver have speculated, "was profound enough to propel home buying through mortgage finance at a cost...50 per cent higher than the rent for a comparable house" in some circumstances. "A house brought membership in a particular social world."²⁵ Richard Harris, sharing Doucet's and Weaver's appreciation of the compelling desire for owning "the ideal of the family home", has also revealed the personal and family costs that could be assumed. Studying self-built housing in suburban Toronto, he has explained that the ideal attracted working-class families to peripheral areas of the city where inadequate transportation could complicate the journey to work and isolate women trying to make a home in thinly developed areas. As well, scrimping and putting all that one could into a house deprived a family of savings in the event of a recession, which might not just throw wage earners out of work but also depreciate the value of the family's principal asset, its home.²⁶

Even in the more prosperous suburbs of the 1950s and 1960s, home ownership could prove a mixed blessing, especially for wives. As Veronica Strong-Boag has argued, the women who lived there readily acknowledged the improved quality of housing and the advantages, as she saw them, for raising children. However, many

also lamented and occasionally rebelled against the spatial division of gender roles that kept them in the home at a distance from urban services and amenities, away from employment opportunities, and responsible for making their home function smoothly and provide respite for their husbands and children.²⁷

Harris's judgement of working-class self-building as "a tragedy" must remind us that reality does not easily materialize from ideals. Indeed, as much as the ideal requires space for its expression, compromises and changes always qualify the satisfaction that individuals and families can derive from their house as home. Moreover, as Friedman and Krawitz have reminded us, home is movable and on average every person moves twelve times in his or her lifetime.²⁸

This study then is an examination of the search for possibilities, how the houses on one city block, as they aged and changed not always gracefully, held opportunities for successive generations of occupants. What can we discover about their ideas of home and their evaluation of their attainment?

RESEARCHING THE HOMES OF FURBY STREET

Researching the history of an area as small and ordinary as a single city block seemed a bit quixotic at the outset of this project. How could very much ever be discovered about residents who for the most part lived their lives away from public view? How could interpretive conclusions be derived from a focus too obviously narrow and specific to support generalizations about larger contexts? In the

25 Michael Doucet and John Weaver, *Housing the North American City* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 164-5, 181 *passim*.

26 Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs*, xi, 86-7, 246-56. The debate over the financial advantages of home ownership for working-class families, often a yes-or-no decision, ought to be posed instead as a problem in deciding between economic and emotional benefits. See Doucet and Weaver, *Housing the North American City*, 170-1, and Matthew Edel, Elliott D. Sklar, and Daniel Luria, *Shaky Palaces: Homeownership and Social Mobility in Boston's Suburbanization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

27 Veronica Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945-60," *Canadian Historical Review* 72 (1991): 471-504.

28 Friedman and Krawitz, *Peeping through the Keyhole*, 166.

end these limitations hopefully are the strength of the study. If a few experiences of these people can be glimpsed, then so too the lives of us all will likely leave discoverable traces for those in the future to ponder. If those traces prove intermittent and too limited for generalization, then broader interpretations may become unstable. In particular, the narrative of inner-city decline, extrapolated from the physical decay of the contemporary built environment, must be qualified by impressions from the lives of the people who inhabited those neighbourhoods. Yet, the diversity of those experiences, even when perceived on such a small scale as a city block, frustrates the articulation of a counter-narrative. What the research for this study has uncovered, using a range of sources and methods, is that housing of whatever quality has afforded opportunities for different sorts of people at different times to try to secure their home. They may have emplotted their successes, frustrations, and failures in taking those opportunities as critical points in the narratives they constructed about their own lives, but those larger and longer life histories usually extended well beyond their time on Furby Street. And so, from this perspective the history of a block in physical decline captures traces of moments in the lives of people, whose previous experiences formed hopes for their time on Furby and whose subsequent experiences were informed by the memories of the good and bad about their time on the street.

Identifying residents of the thirty-six detached and semi-detached dwellings on the block and finding out something about them proved to be both easier and more frustrating than expected.²⁹ Starting

29 In the planning stage of the project, we had intended also to examine apartment building tenants. However, as the research progressed we discovered that more than enough infor-

with lists of names from city directories, municipal tax assessment rolls, and voters' lists, the challenge was to contact those who were still alive and use other sources to uncover what we could about those who had passed away. The research methods and sources then were diverse and varied depending on the period, although written records were used throughout.

Collecting names was not a mere mechanical exercise in transcription. The city directories proved particularly problematic.³⁰ As a form of social surveillance, they recorded information according to interests and preconceptions of the company that compiled them and its perception of what most interested its subscribers. Throughout their publication history, from 1874 to 2000, their greatest concern was to enumerate heads of household, who most often were men. The names of wives were recorded inconsistently and incompletely, often just by attaching "Mrs." to a husband's name. The names of men who were not of Anglo-Celtic background also were recorded inconsistently with often imaginative but erroneous spellings. Adult children and lodgers might be listed or not and, if they were there one year, they might disappear and re-appear in subsequent years. As the houses on Furby were converted to rooming houses, this under-enumeration seriously compromised our ability to study this phenomenon. Little can be said, for example, about the turn-over in lodgers. Equally frustrating was the decision not to enumerate several of the deteriorating

mation was available for house residents and that their experiences were considerably different from apartment building dwellers. As a result, we decided to concentrate on house residents.

30 Ian Keenan, who worked intensively with city directories for this project, offered perceptive reflections on their strengths, weaknesses, and biases. Thank you, Ian!

rooming houses of the late 1980s and 1990s, understandable as the reluctance of canvassers to approach some places might be. The directories' biases of class, gender, and ethnicity constitute significant obstacles for the study of inner-city neighbourhoods.

At first we expected that the research would rely mainly on oral history interviews and we doubted our ability to discover much about the earlier era. Some long-term residents still live on the block, while people in the neighbourhood knew where former residents now lived. In many instances, intermediaries played an important role in winning the confidence and sparking the interest of past and present residents and were especially helpful in arranging interviews with people of Aboriginal ancestry. A supportive article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* in August 2005 generated a great deal of interest and provoked several people to offer us their memories of the block.³¹ Other former residents we surprised with unexpected telephone calls requesting interviews. In the end we had to stop seeking contacts, even though possibilities remain, because, we feared, the research might be endless.

Written records surprised us in what they revealed. A searchable electronic database containing issues of the *Winnipeg Free Press* from 1874 to 1970 returned numerous reports on the activities of residents and surprisingly useful minutiae, ranging from advertisements offering rooms to notices of tea parties.³² Some residents, men and women, achieved local prominence in the years through the First World War, and their political and organizational activities were noted in the press.

Others at various times did something or said something or had something happen to them that got reported. Some obituaries were detailed. Also many minor passing references, when accumulated, created a larger impression. These newspaper references generally marked the unexpected and casual traces that daily lives left on the public record.

Such traces are just that, the fleeting appearances of many people caught in records that survive and difficult to assemble as evidence of lives. We have tried to restrain our impulse to generalize from them, just as we have similarly hesitated in going too far on the basis of oral history interviews. As fruitful as our interviews were, they often lasted only an hour or two, with some being even briefer.

Where possible, one or sometimes two of us talked with people prior to the interview to build a rapport and to identify potential areas for discussion. If they agreed, we video-recorded the interview; if not, we left the lens cap on the camera and captured just the audio. In a few cases, particularly over the telephone, we only made notes as we talked. Video interviews have proved fruitful, yet delicate, in preserving the stories of residents, not just in words, but also in body language, expression, and reaction to the interviewer. Some were recorded in people's residences and document how people lived in their homes. We soon realized that our interviews were the unexpected inquiries of strangers and they too only captured traces of lives lived. Our interviews were conversations. Like conversations they had their own ebb and flow as issues engaged both parties, as awkward gaps occurred when the next question did not immediately come to the interviewer's mind, and when the narrator did not understand or did not want to answer. Willingness to help but a reluctance to be intimate, on the one hand, and a polite respect not to embarrass but a wish to

31 Alison Mayes, "Remaking 'Murder's Half Acre': The Furby Project," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 7 August 2005, b1.

32 The *Winnipeg Free Press* is the most extensive of the three Canadian newspapers included in the database of NewspaperArchive.com.

know, on the other hand, both stretched and restrained the boundaries of the conversation. Photographs, ones that we had taken of the street and those that residents volunteered to show us, opened lines of conversation and bridged some of the awkwardness.

In our conversations, Furby residents revealed piece-by-piece aspects of their life histories of home seeking. We wanted to establish the sequences in their shelter, the strategic concerns that led to staying and moving, and how living on Furby fitted in with their past and future housing experiences and ambitions. We also wanted to discover what meaningful accomplishments they associated in their memories about the places where they had lived.

The conversations of course took their own directions and did not naturally conform to any explicit narrative emplotment from past to present. People do not always express their memories sequentially, but remember in flashes, or perhaps iteratively back and forth. Indeed, our interest in photographs and tours of houses encouraged stories about lives

rather than a single life story. We live in time, but we do not always use chronology to discipline our memories when we converse.

The construction of narrative histories of home, chronological and sequenced by the family and life cycle transitions, has been our intervention in presenting what we have learned. It might be described perhaps as a form of “creative non-fiction”, ordering events to communicate them more effectively. More usefully it has been an analytical method through which we can understand what others have experienced. Inevitably narrative as a method of analysis reveals gaps, intervals and explanations which those whom we interviewed left empty. In some instances they offered clarifications later; in other instances they bluntly or indirectly offered no more.

We have chosen not to interrogate those gaps too rigorously out of respect for our narrators. Our readers, however, are free to interrogate our lapses and in the process, we hope, form their own evaluations of the search for and experience of home on Furby Street.

First Families — and After

A TYPICAL FAMILY?

William J. “Big Bear” McLean and his nine adult, unmarried children moved onto Furby Street in 1906. Their home was one-half of a three-storey semi-detached rental property recently finished by local builders, Ford and Foster, for W.T. Place, a city merchant.³³ Their half, at 276 Furby, was a single-family unit, while the other side, 278 Furby, was divided into two suites.

Winnipeg was growing rapidly in the early twentieth century, from 42,000 people in 1901 to 136,000 in 1911 and almost 180,000 by 1921. House building on Furby Street had picked up by the middle of the first decade of the century, as had construction generally in Winnipeg during the real estate boom that peaked in 1906, faltered the following year, and recovered through until 1913. The block was no longer on the very edge of the prairie, as it had been when the first houses had been built there twenty years earlier, but it still had a mature suburban character and a few vacant lots that provided play areas for neighbourhood children.³⁴ The elm trees that lined the boulevards and had been planted in yards had grown a few

feet higher, but they did not yet provide much shade and on the hot summer days people sat on their front porches to enjoy the breezes as the evenings cooled down. Wooden board-walks were a welcome improvement along the street and residents could walk up Furby to Portage Avenue to catch a streetcar to go downtown. A few stores had located out that far on Portage, but the main commercial and financial district remained closer to Main Street, although the opening of the new Eaton’s department store four blocks west of Main and Portage would soon redirect business development westward.

Moving to Furby was a step up for the McLeans. On his retirement with pension from the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1892 at age fifty-one, McLean, his wife Helen, and their twelve children had rented a semi-detached home in Point Douglas on the Red River. By the end of the century, that neighbourhood was changing dramatically with industrial development and migration. Noise, dirt and dust, and people with foreign languages and customs made Winnipeg’s earliest neighbourhood less attractive to middle-class families. As well, the McLean family itself had changed: Helen had died in 1899, and three of the children had married and moved out. For William and his other children, the time seemed right to look for another residence.

William McLean was also embarking on his second career. Born on the Isle of Lewis in the Scottish Hebrides in 1841, he

33 City of Winnipeg Archives, Building Permits, Application for Permit to Build, [276-278 Furby Street,] no. 648, 20 April 1906.

34 James H. Gray spent part of his childhood in this general area of the city and offers evocative memories of play and other activities. *The Boy from Winnipeg* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), 13.



Fig. 1.1. William J. McLean of the Hudson's Bay Company

had come to Rupert's Land in 1859 to work for the Hudson's Bay Company. After several years at Upper Fort Garry, he was sent north to Fort Simpson (now in the North West Territories) and subsequently served as Chief Trader at several posts in what is now Saskatchewan and at Fort Alexander in Manitoba. At his retirement, he was Chief Trader at Lower Fort Garry in charge of the Lake Winnipeg District. A fur trade family, the McLeans had developed close relationships with and respect for Aboriginal peoples. William's wife, Helen, had Aboriginal ancestry, and from their years in the north and on the prairies the family spoke Cree and Saulteaux. Indeed, Helen and most of her children had applied for

and received Métis scrip, the Canadian government's payment in recognition of Aboriginal status. As well, in 1909 William and Helen's daughter, Amelia Paget, published a sympathetic portrait of Aboriginal life, entitled *The People of the Plains*.³⁵ The McLeans, as historian Sarah Carter observed, did not acknowledge their Aboriginal heritage, but older Winnipeg families recognized the McLean children as "half-breeds".³⁶ For his part, William McLean preferred to explain how he earned his nickname: during the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 his family was trapped at Fort Pitt where he was Chief Trader and were taken into protective custody by the Cree leader, Big Bear.³⁷

Because of his knowledge of the north and its peoples and his facility with Aboriginal languages, in 1906 McLean was hired by the Department of Indian Affairs as an assistant pay officer, responsible for travelling to northern reserves to distribute the annual treaty payments and for forwarding supplies to the Indian agencies. In 1908 he helped with the signing of Treaty 10 in northern Saskatchewan and the following year was promoted to pay officer responsible for the Aboriginals in that district. He also took on the payments in the James Bay district in 1910 to 1912. William McLean continued to work

35 Amelia Paget, *The People of the Plains*. (Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004).

36 Sarah Carter, "The 'Cordial Advocate': Amelia McLean Paget and *The People of the Plains*," in *With Good Intentions: Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal Relations in Colonial Canada*, ed. C. Haig-Brown and D.A. Nock (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 200-1.

37 "McLean, William James," *Biographical Index, Hudson's Bay Company Archives*; Robert Watson, "Late Trader W.J. McLean," *The Beaver*, Outfit 260 (December 1929): 315-6. Sarah Carter, *Captive Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 62-7, 116-24.

and travel extensively in his work until he was eighty-two years, when he rather reluctantly retired. "I don't know what I will do with myself as a man of leisure," he admitted to a news reporter.³⁸

From his first retirement, "Big Bear" was a notable figure around Winnipeg. As one journalist remarked, "He is still the epitome of the old school of the Hudson's Bay Company, often remarked upon the streets of the city that sprang from Old Fort Garry—straight as a ramrod, faultlessly groomed and with the stride and smile of a youth."³⁹ Befitting the depth of his roots in Canada's North West, he was active in the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba and for several years was president of the Red River Old Timers' Society, an organization for those who had lived for twenty-five years in the area. Its annual ball, which as historian Jim Blanchard explained brought together a more socially diverse group than normal at society events, was a highlight of the winter social season.⁴⁰ Often asked about his experiences in the fur trade and in particular his encounter with his namesake, William responded, "Big Bear never both-



Fig. 1.2: Children of William and Helen McLean, 1895

ered me....The only thing he came to me about was to write the Great White Mother herself. He was sure she would see the Indians' case and be fair."⁴¹

On Furby Street William lived with nine of his twelve children, all adults between twenty-one and forty-two years of age in 1911 when the Census enumerated them. His eldest two daughters, Elizabeth and Helen, aged forty-two and thirty-two years respectively, reported no occupations and probably managed the household. (Elizabeth subsequently worked as librarian at the Christian Science Reading Room.) His five sons and other two daughters were employed mostly in various forms of office work, the exceptions being John who was a civil engineer and Frederica who was an artist. With William's savings and pension, their household income probably exceeded \$7000—a considerable amount, but not huge for such a large family.

William McLean remained at 276 Furby until 1915 or 1916. By then several more of his children had married and moved out. As well, two sons left for

38 Province of Manitoba, Legislative Library, Manitoba Biography Vertical File, "McLean, W.J.", W.E.I. "'Big Bear' McLean," [unidentified newspaper clipping], 21 October 1924, and "'Big Bear' McLean, Pioneer Factor, Dies," [undated newspaper clipping]. "Winnipegger Back from James Bay," *Manitoba Free Press*, 19 September 1910; "Says Churchill Is Best Harbor on West Coast of Bay," *ibid.*, 24 Nov 1910, 2.

39 "W.J. McLean," *The Beaver*, 2 (December 1921): 6.

40 "Old Timers Hold Banquet," *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 Feb 1907, 20; "Historical Society," *ibid.*, 15 March 1907, 9; "Red River Old Timers Organize," *ibid.*, 17 December 1910, 21.; Jim Blanchard, *Winnipeg 1912* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005), 255-6.

41 W.E.I. "'Big Bear' McLean."



Fig. 1.3: William McLean with his grandson on the front lawn at 276 Furby

military service overseas. Duncan, for some time past a member of the militia, enlisted in 1914, became Lieutenant Colonel of the Winnipeg Royal Rifles, and was injured during a gas attack in France in 1918. Hunter Murray was conscripted in 1918. As with the move to Furby Street, family changes occasioned residential changes. In 1915 McLean decided to rent a smaller two-storey, detached house at 259 Clare Street in the new subdivision of Riverview.⁴²

The McLeans had much in common with their neighbours on Furby Street. The families on the block were by no

means homogenous in their ethnic, class, and family backgrounds and circumstances, but neither were they representative of the diversity of Winnipeg's growing population. The city's housing market was becoming increasingly sorted out socially, economically, and ethnically in the last decade of the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth centuries, and Furby Street, like the rest of the city's west end south of Portage Avenue, was becoming a comfortable and respectable middle-class, British-Canadian neighbourhood.⁴³

FIRST HOUSES, FIRST BUILDERS

An 1874 map first represented the area of Winnipeg that became Furby Street. Published around the time of Winnipeg's incorporation as a city, the map was an imagined possibility, intended to attract the speculative interest of investors hoping to profit from the economic growth of the western frontier. At that time, and for some time to come, however, few Winnipeggers found the edge of the prairie an attractive location for their homes. Not until early in the next decade were the first few houses built on Furby Street between Broadway and Portage Avenue, and not until the second decade of the twentieth century had the block filled up with houses.

In the late nineteenth century, real estate development aimed at presenting investment opportunities to those with a bit of money to risk.⁴⁴ Depending upon their funds and the temptations of the market, speculators picked one or two lots here, several more in another survey, and perhaps a more expensive plot where interest seemed to be growing. Spreading their

42 Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 7037-33, Attestation Papers Duncan J. McLean, 23 September 1914; Box 7042-39, Particulars of Recruit, Hunter M. McLean, 7 May 1918. [Available on-line at Library and Archives Canada, Soldiers of the First War: <<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/cef/index-e.html>>]

43 Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), 148, 168-9.

44 Jim Blanchard has provided a revealing account of the real estate market in pre-war Winnipeg. *Winnipeg 1912*, 169-88.

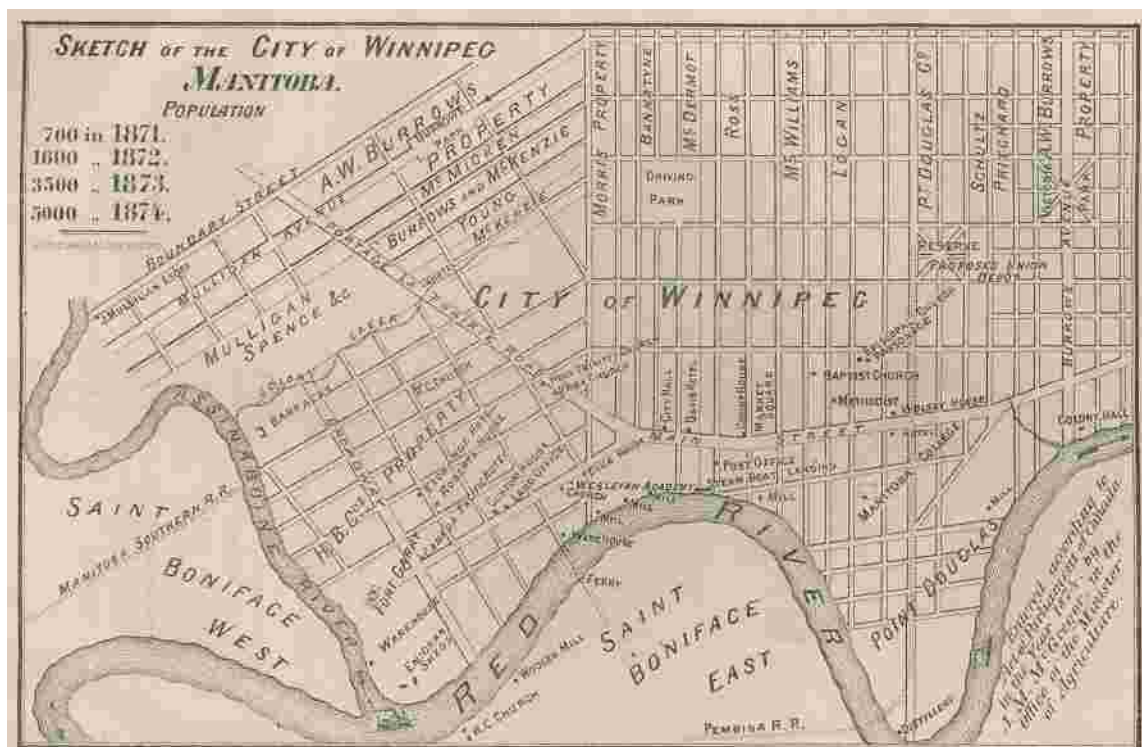


Fig. 1.4: A sketch of Winnipeg in 1874 by George B. Elliott. The streets in the upper left quarter of the map were imagined approximations of the intentions of real estate promoters. Furby Street, when it was developed, was approximately where Mulligan Avenue is shown.

investments across the map, like placing bets on several numbers at the roulette table, they hoped to see their land appreciate in value as others developed property nearby their holdings. The effect in Winnipeg, where the real estate market heated up through the late 1870s, peaked in 1881, and crashed—or, perhaps more literally, drowned—in the spring floods of 1882, was to fragment and to distribute real estate ownership widely.

One of the early owners of land in the city's west end eager to tempt investors was James Mulligan, who owned lot 79 in the Parish of St. James, which included the west side of Furby Street, and lot 78 to the west. A long-time resident of the Red River settlement, Mulligan had purchased lot 79 in 1856 from Edward Sharpe, a Chelsea pensioner, but had done little to improve the land and probably used it

only for grazing. He secured government confirmation of his title in 1873.⁴⁵ By the early 1880s, Mulligan had sold off much of his land and all of the lots on the block of Furby under study. Indeed many of the Furby lots had already changed hands several times.

The eastern side of the street, lot 80 in the Parish of St. James, developed more slowly. Its pre-Confederation owner, Charles Land, did not subdivide his land into lots. By 1874 it had passed into the hands of A.W. Burrows who registered the first survey of the parish lot. Despite the early survey, only a few of the lots on Furby were sold until the market neared

45 Library and Archives Canada, Dominion of Canada, Department of Interior Records (RG 15), Manitoba Act Files, vol. 169, file MA 10493, James Mulligan, Application for Patent to Lot 79, Parish of St. James, 23 April 1873. "A Pioneer's Prosperity," *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 May 1881.

its peak in 1881.

Very few of those who purchased lots on Furby Street in the 1870s and early 1880s had any intention to build houses on them. They hoped to buy cheaply and sell dearly, and some did. City tax assessments probably underestimated the market value of real estate, but the movement in assessed values from year to year gives some indication of the inflation in the real estate market. One typical lot on Furby Street owned by James Mulligan in 1879 was valued at \$100. Charles W. Allen, a local newspaper reporter, purchased it that year, and its assessment the next year remained the same amount. By 1881, as the market started to heat up, the City assessor judged that its value had doubled. Allen sold the lot to George Murray, a builder, who at the height of the speculative market in 1882 paid taxes on its \$800 assessed value. In three years, then, real estate values on Furby had increased eight-fold. With the collapse of the market, the City lowered Murray's assessment to \$500 in 1883, \$300 in 1885, and \$200 in 1891. Whether or not Murray's investment grew or shrank is entirely hypothetical, of course, because he did not sell.

George Murray, who owned two lots, and his associate Kenneth McKenzie, who owned six, built the first houses on the block in the mid-1880s. Both were contractors, immigrants from Scotland, and in their mid-forties when they invested in Furby real estate. McKenzie had arrived in Canada in 1871, more recently than Murray who had immigrated at age eighteen in 1854. Whether or not they had intended to move onto the block when they bought their lots in 1881-2, both had built residences by the time the city compiled the 1884 assessment roll. George Murray built a two-storey, six-room dwelling at 260 Furby for his wife, Alice, and himself. If the Murrays had any children, none still lived with them when they moved onto the block, but they did regularly employ a

servant and in 1911 took in a niece, Georgina Fisher, who had emigrated from Scotland two years earlier. Besides his contracting business, Murray was a landlord, building houses and renting them until he could sell them or holding them so that their income might support his family and finance his other construction projects. In 1901 he owned six rental properties, including a two-unit semi-detached building at 288-290 Langside Street and houses at 331 Smith Street, 57 Charlotte Street, 222 Princess Street, and 338 Selkirk Avenue; as well, he owned ten and a half building lots. On one of these, next door to his residence, he built a two unit, semi-detached residential building in 1905, which he rented out until his death in 1912.⁴⁶

Kenneth McKenzie and his wife Sarah at first lived next door to the Murrays at 254 Furby, a two storey, six-room wooden house. Like many other houses built into the 1880s, it had no basement and rested on timber sills. In 1900 McKenzie built a two-storey, five-room addition to the original house, increasing its floor space to nearly 2000 square feet, and at the same time put a stone foundation under the entire edifice—all at a cost of \$1500.⁴⁷ The family had lived at 254 Furby for only a year or two after its construction, while McKenzie built a smaller two-storey, four-room house next door at 248 Furby. After their only child, Finlay, was born in 1890, McKenzie added two more rooms.

Their first home, McKenzie rented out over the next thirty years to a succession of families headed by business and professional men: in 1891 Alexander Dawson, a barrister, and his family resided

46 CWA, Building Permits, Application for Permit to Build, [262-6 Furby,] no. 621, 28 April 1905; "Old Timer Dead," *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 August 1912.

47 CWA, Building Permits, Application for Permit for Alterations etc., [254 Furby Street,] no. 94, 7 May 1900.

at 254 Furby; in 1901 John C. Waugh, an insurance agent, lived there, as in 1911 did George J. Stewart, the superintendent of the Massey-Harris agricultural implement agency in Winnipeg, and in 1917 William T. Allison, a professor of English at Wesley College. In 1889 McKenzie also built a two-storey, eight-room house at 274 Furby, which he rented to Thomas Laidlaw, a school principal. By 1901, besides his own house and the two rental houses on Furby Street, McKenzie owned a six-unit terrace or row house at 241-251 Garry Street and another house at 59 Charlotte Street. He also owned eleven building lots and 260 acres of farmland.

Murray and McKenzie owned the only four houses on the block in the 1880s. Another six were built by 1895. But the boom years from 1896 to 1906 saw the most construction activity with twenty-two houses, three of which were multiple family units. Thereafter, only two more houses were built, making thirty-four houses on the block.⁴⁸ The only other residential construction on the block before World War One were four apartment suites above stores in the Shipley Block on the south-east corner of Furby Street and Portage Avenue erected in 1906.

The houses on the block were large, and several had additions after their initial construction. All were two or two and a half storeys, and in 1901, the only year for which complete data are available, the nineteen residences averaged nine rooms in size. Expressed another way, nine had ten or more rooms. The houses that were constructed thereafter were at least as large as the average, if not larger.

48 Two houses were constructed at 260 Furby Street. The first built by George Murray was demolished to make way for the current house, which was built in 1917.

CLASS, GENDER, AND HOME OWNERSHIP

The houses built on the block of Furby Street between Broadway and Portage Avenue, as substantial as they were, were less grand than the residences of those members of Winnipeg's social and economic elite who lived nearby on Armstrong's Point or closer to the Assiniboine River in the West Broadway area.⁴⁹ A gradient of status and wealth stretched more or less incrementally downward north from the river, across Portage and beyond. The homes under study on Furby Street gave shelter to families, like the McLeans—the respectable and, for the most part upwardly mobile, middle and upper middle class.

The census taken in 1911, supplemented with information from the Henderson's Directory and the municipal tax assessment roll for that year, provides a snapshot—clearer for some than others—of the social and economic standing of the forty-one households on the block.⁵⁰ Thirty-eight households had male heads, while widows headed three. Nineteen men were self-employed in business, professionals, or management roles in large commercial and industrial corporate enterprises. Four doctors, for example, lived on the block, each combining their residences and offices. George J. Stewart at 254 Furby was western superintendent for the Toronto agricultural implement company, Massey-Harris, while I. Walter Martin at 270 Furby was the western vice-president with Tilden-Gurney, a Toronto stove manufacturer. As well, Alexander

49 *Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth*, 167-8.

50 Included are detached and semi-detached houses, the duplexes, and the apartment suites over the Shipley Block on the corner of Portage Avenue, which had their entrance on Furby Street. Also included is 661 Broadway, on the corner of Furby Street, since it also had an entrance on Furby Street.

Hargraft of 277 Furby was a grain merchant and partner in Hargraft and Gooderham; John A. Kent at 287 Furby was an agent dealing in rubber goods.

Another twelve, including W.J. McLean, held administrative, office, or sales jobs, for the most part positions involving substantial responsibilities. Frederick W. Clark of 266 Furby was the Registrar of Manitoba College, while Richard Breen of 308 Furby was a clerk in the Dominion Lands Office. John McVicar at 307 Furby was a commercial traveler for the Toronto agricultural implement firm, Sawyer-Massey, and Robert Creelman, who rented one unit of the duplex at 282 Furby, was the assistant general passenger agent for the Canadian Northern Railways.

Only four were skilled tradesmen or men who did manual work. For example, Peter Winning of 325 Furby had recently been promoted to locomotive engineer with Canadian Northern Railways. At 261 Furby lived the family of David Oswald, a house painter.

Three men, including McKenzie and Murray, and three women were retired and lived on their savings. The women were widows and were in somewhat differing circumstances. Those who were older and had employed children at home, were less reliant on the room and board paid by lodgers. Clara Johnston, who was fifty-eight years old, owned 288-290 Furby. She lived in the semi-detached unit at 288 with her two sons, Charles, a druggist, and Alexander, a clerk. She also took in a lodger. The other side of the building, she rented to James Norton, a wood and fuel dealer. Sarah Davidson, a fifty year-old widow, rented 274 Furby where she lived with her twenty-nine year old daughter, Edith, who was a bank stenographer. She took in two boarders. Charlotte Logan, who was just thirty-three years old, ran a boarding-house at 311 Furby to support herself and her sixteen-

year old son, John, who was a clerk, and her fourteen and eleven year-old sons, Frank and George, who were still in school. With the help of a sixteen-year old, live-in servant, she provided room and board for six lodgers.

The census provides only uneven coverage of incomes since its purpose was to explore wages and salaries of the employed, rather than the earnings of those who were self-employed. However, in several instances the enumerators recorded the information anyway. As well, they also asked people about the value of their life insurance coverage, an indicator both of what husbands and fathers could afford and of what they calculated their value to their family to be. These figures reinforce the impression that the families on the block represented the solid, respectable, middle to lower middle income strata, not really among the wealthiest, but certainly better off than the majority of the working class. Most of those with businesses or with office or corporate occupations earned approximately 150-300 per cent of men like David Oswald, the house painter, and Alexander Gray, a cooper who rented 300 Furby, whose incomes of \$900 and \$1045 respectively were typical of those employed in manual occupations. However, what was an even more notable distinction between the two occupational groups on the block was the ability of the former to purchase life insurance to protect their families. Two thirds of professionals, managers, and white-collar employees had insurance policies. Five men had policies that would pay \$10,000 or more in the event of their death; two more had policies for \$5000.

The highest of incomes and second largest life insurance policy were those of Herbert P.H. Galloway, an orthopaedic surgeon. His \$10,000, however, had to cover what must have been the substantial staffing and overhead expenses of his surgery, in his house at 661 Broadway, and



Fig. 1.5. T.R Deacon

his therapeutic gymnasium at 249 Furby.

The second highest income of \$5250 and the largest life insurance policy for \$21,000 belonged to Thomas R. Deacon, who was perhaps the most prominent resident of the block. A self-made man, Deacon had left school at eleven years of age after his father died. He helped to support his family by working as a labourer and lumberman in the logging camps and sawmills of northwestern Ontario. He saved enough money to return to school and in 1891 graduated in mining and civil engineering from the University of Toronto. Working in the Rainy River district over the next decade, he built one of the largest private engineering practices in the province, earning over \$7000 a year. In 1902 he moved from Rat Portage (Kenora) to Winnipeg to become a founding partner and president and general

manager of the Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works.⁵¹

In the pre-war railroad and urban construction boom, with the increasing demand for structural iron and steel, Manitoba Bridge grew quickly and already after its first year employed over 400 men. Deacon and Manitoba Bridge developed a justly earned reputation for opposition to labour unions. He claimed no objection to his workers joining unions and he did meet with representatives of individual trades to discuss wages, but he steadfastly refused to bargain collectively on a plant-wide or industry-wide basis and he vigorously resisted picketing. Moulders went out on strike at Manitoba Bridge as part of a broader struggle with employers in 1906; in 1910 Manitoba Bridge locked out its moulders. When his men again struck in 1917, Deacon hired an American detective agency to bring in strike breakers, obtained an anti-picketing injunction, and initiated a law suit against the union for damaging his business. The following year during an industry-wide dispute, Manitoba Bridge again obtained an injunction against picketing.⁵²

At the same time as he opposed unions, Deacon could claim to be a "progressive" in politics. He favoured an interventionist role for the state that would temper the inevitable imperfections of private enterprise and that would manage and plan those areas of social utility too important for private enterprise. He fa-

51 Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth*, 32; J.M. Bumsted, *The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919: An Illustrated History* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1994), 7, 89-90; David J. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), 25, 31, 51, 52, 107-8.

52 "[Ad]," *Manitoba Free Press*, 19 December 1910; "Will Negotiate on M'Adoo Award Basis," *ibid.*, 10 August 1918, 26; "Reply to Threat of General Strike," *ibid.*, 17 August 1918, 8; Bercuson, 15-7, 56, 74.

voured a government system of workers' compensation, something which of course would also reduce the liability of employers for workplace injuries and deaths, and he also accepted the right of government to limit prices and profits when its fiscal and tariff policies benefited business. With those principles in mind and after Winnipeg's leading businessmen prevailed upon him, Deacon agreed at the last minute in 1912 to run for mayor and to oversee the construction of the much-needed aqueduct to Shoal Lake on the Manitoba-Ontario border. During the campaign, he also declared his support for the commission form of municipal administration under which non-elected boards run by expert civil servants, rather than by politicians, were responsible for municipal functions. Like others concerned about the effects of real estate speculation, he supported the Single Tax, which proposed municipal taxes only on the value of land and exempted the value of buildings and personal property; the intent was to tax unearned increments in the value of vacant land and to encourage its development.⁵³ Deacon won the election easily and served a two-year term as mayor in 1913-4.

Under Deacon's mayoralty, the city joined with the suburban municipalities to form the Greater Winnipeg Water District Board to undertake the construction of the aqueduct and the operation of a water utility. While water was Deacon's main concern as mayor, on other occasions he



Fig. 1.6: The Deacon home, 251 Furby Street

did not forget his anti-labour convictions. Concerning the unemployed, he remarked, "Let them hit the trail. Any young man who has lived in this country with the conditions that have prevailed and cannot provide for himself for the winter doesn't deserve much consideration. If I were a young man I would take to the road with a fishing net." On his retirement as mayor, *The Voice*, Winnipeg's labour newspaper, opined, "This stern example of individualism...like most successful capitalists...pretends that he cannot understand why everybody doesn't make money."⁵⁴

The Deacons bought 299 Furby on their arrival in Winnipeg in 1902. Because Thomas was just establishing his business, they put ownership of their home in the name of Mrs. Lily Deacon, out of reach of potential creditors, should the business confront reversals. It did not, and three years later, they had a much larger house

53 "Last and Only Big Gun in Tame Election Campaign," *Manitoba Free Press*, 12 December 1912, 3.

54 "Mayor Deacon's Retirement," *The Voice*, 30 October 1914.

built at 251 Furby, this time registering it in Thomas's name. The Deacons had four children, Lester, Edith, Ronald, and Alfred. Sadly, their youngest son, Alfred, was diagnosed with polio in 1908. The presence next door of Dr. Galloway, Winnipeg's leading orthopaedic surgeon, facilitated his medical treatment and physiotherapy and inspired Alfred Deacon to pursue a career in orthopaedic surgery.⁵⁵

The Deacon family was not alone in placing ownership of the family home in a wife's name; it was the most common practice, with ten of the fifteen couples who owned residences in 1911 doing so. For them as for others, business considerations were only part of the reason for not having ownership in a husband's name and, since half of the homes in the wife's name belonged to families where the husband was not in business, other factors must have contributed as well. Their relative ages figured into the calculations of husbands and wives. In two families, wives were several years older—five and eleven years, to be precise—than their husbands, suggesting that perhaps they had brought some of their own money into the marriage and hence claimed the home as their own. In marriages where husbands were only five or six years older than their wives, ownership tended to rest with husbands. In marriages where husbands were more than six years older, their wives generally owned the home. Ownership and registering the house in a wife's name, then, reflected a sombre calculation of a husband's life expectancy and a concern that the costs of illness and death, in those days before medical insurance, could substantially di-

minish a man's estate and the standard of living of his widowed wife and their children. Keeping hold of the house, in the worst situation, made it easier for a woman who had lost her husband to earn an income by taking in boarders.

Age affected home ownership in another way: ownership became more important as couples grew older. The husbands in families who owned residences were on average fifty-six years of age, while tenants were fourteen years younger. The association with age helps to explain why rates of ownership were not higher. Only about half of the residential buildings on the block had an owner occupant and the rate of ownership was declining from fifty-five per cent in 1911 to forty-eight per cent in 1921.⁵⁶ Young couples did not aspire to purchase their homes early in their married life, as perhaps is more common among middle- and upper-income people today. In the absence of large-scale real estate development and construction companies and with mortgages not often available for long terms, house purchases were more complicated than they became after the Second World War.⁵⁷ Ownership then was not necessary for the emotional attachment that families developed for their homes, but was an important consideration for financial security.

Wives' home ownership was also consistent with the surprising extent of women's financial resources that historian Peter Baskerville has recently discovered. From rental property ownership, to small

55 Ihor Mayba, *Bonesetters and Others: Pioneer Orthopaedic Surgeons* (Winnipeg: Henderson Books, 1991), 98, 102, 112-22; "Dr. Alfred Deacon, 1929-2004," *Manitoba Medicine*, (Fall/Winter 2004): 19.

56 In calculating rates of home ownership, it was assumed that duplexes and semi-detached buildings could only have one owner.

57 John Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Michael Doucet and John Weaver, *Housing the North American City* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).

businesses and boarding-house keeping, to investments in mortgages and financial institutions, and as well home ownership, women in the early twentieth century demonstrated considerable, and previously unnoticed, entrepreneurial acumen and possessed substantial assets.⁵⁸ Baskerville's findings add to the qualifications about the restrictions that the separate spheres of bourgeois men and women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were previously assumed to have imposed on women's initiative. Rather than discrediting theories of separate spheres, however, they extend the understanding of how domesticity extended beyond the household. As such, they reinforce the older observation of Richard Sennett, in his study of late nineteenth-century middle-class families in Chicago, that wives were themselves "figures of authority" and used their prescribed domestic ascendance to stimulate their husbands' sense of family responsibility, to spur their ambitions outside the home, and to claim their household share of their husbands' income.⁵⁹

FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

Middle and upper middle-class families needed big houses in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They had more children than today—although the McLean family was large even by the standards of the day. As well, households were seldom limited to nuclear family members and often included parents, siblings, other relatives, lodgers, and servants.

The relatively small number of families on the block, at several stages in their family life cycle, makes the calculation of

family size tentative. In 1911 six of the eleven families in which at least one parent was still in his or her forties had four children still residing at home; the rest had two or three children. These families were nearing the end of their reproductive years: some might have one or two children more, while others might already have had one or two children move out. A reasonable guess might be that families would have between three and six children, with four being the most common number.

The houses on Furby, averaging nine rooms in 1911, would have given families four, five, or perhaps six good-sized bedrooms, enough to provide some privacy to parents and children. That privacy made living together more comfortable as children grew up. Sons often stayed at home until they had safely embarked upon their careers and daughters until they married. Like William McLean's sons, Nixon and Thomas Breen, for example, still lived at home at 308 Furby well into their mid-thirties in 1911. In 1909, along with their younger brother W.W. "Billy" Breen—a local sports hero and a high scoring centre for the Winnipeg Rowing Club hockey team that unsuccessfully challenged the Ottawa Silver Seven for the Stanley Cup in 1904—the brothers started Breen Motors Co. on Broadway and Sherbrook Street, one of the city's first automobile dealerships. Thomas, who had worked as a law clerk, commercial traveler, and storekeeper in Westaskawin, Saskatchewan, managed the automobile business, while William took care of the books and office work, as secretary-treasurer. Nixon remained an inactive partner, devoting his time to the Lake of the Woods Milling Company, where he worked his way up from clerk to become general manager. He also was president of the North West Fire Insurance Company and a director of Great West Life Insurance Co., the Winnipeg Electric

58 Peter Baskerville, *Silent Revolution? Gender and Wealth in Urban Canada, 1860-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill University Press, 2008).

59 Richard Sennett, *Families against the City: Middle Class Homes of Industrial Chicago, 1872-1890* (New York: Vintage, 1974). 47-8, 187-8, 205.

Railway Co., and the Manitoba Power Commission. By the time of their deaths in the 1950s, Thomas and Nixon had come, in many ways, quite a distance from Furby Street: they were among the city's most prominent businessmen and lived in the most exclusive neighbourhoods, the former living at 39 Nanton Boulevard in Tuxedo and the latter at 25 Ruskin Row in Crescentwood.⁶⁰

Daughters stayed at home as often. Unlike sons, however, they were less likely to have jobs. Whereas almost ninety per cent of sons twenty years of age and over who were still at home had jobs, only fifty per cent of daughters reported an occupation to the enumerator of the 1911 census. Mabel McVicar, whose father John was a commercial traveler, was twenty-five years old and worked as stenographer, earning \$720 a year, a good salary for a woman at the time. Olive Oswald, aged thirty-one years, was paid more as a schoolteacher with a salary of \$900. Twenty-six year-old Grace Mitchell, whose father ran a tailoring business, worked only part-time as church organist for \$300 a year. On the other hand, Edith and Mabel Breen, thirty-five and twenty-eight years old respectively, did not report an occupation. Sisters and brothers also differed in that daughters were more likely to live with their parents after marriage. All four of the married couples who in 1911 lived with parents resided with the wife's family.

The decision to live with the wife's parents does suggest the importance of women's ties in determining household membership. The practice also hints at intergenerational gender tensions. A new wife found the prospect of remaining in the household where she had learned and

shared the domestic routine less intimidating than staying home with the woman who had raised her husband. On the other hand, a new husband had to confront in-laws well-placed to scrutinize his prospects and his ability to provide for their daughter. The need to stay with parents admitted that a young man had not yet secured the ability to support a family.

The kinship connections of relatives also showed the importance of women's ties. Four of the six households that accommodated close relatives took in the siblings or parents of the wife, most often sisters. Sisters could rely on their sisters, and parents on their daughters. Brothers looked after younger brothers.

There were only a few cases, but the presence of non-nuclear family members of different sorts was common on the block. One in four households in 1911 sheltered married children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, fathers—but no widowed mothers, perhaps because unlike widowers, they were presumed able to look after themselves, even if that meant taking in lodgers. If one adds to households with relatives those that took in lodgers and those with resident servants, then nearly sixty per cent of households had in them at least one person who was not a member of the nuclear family.⁶¹

The intimacy and privacy of domestic environments that we now associate with contemporary middle-class life did not exist in an unqualified way in the early twentieth century. The relatively large physical space of the houses on Furby made easier the interaction of relatives, lodgers, and servants, all living under one roof. But that interaction changed

60 "N.J. Breen Dies at Age 82 in Winnipeg," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 27 December 1954; "Thomas G. Breen, Pioneer Auto Man," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 April 1957.

61 To sum the extent of household "extras", four households sheltered married children, two with grandchildren; six had relatives resident; nine took in lodgers; and eleven employed resident servants. Forty-two households, excluding Manchester and Canada Permanent Club.

through the family life cycle: as children arrived, non-nuclear family residents departed.

The single exception to family households, the Canada Permanent House Club at 262 Furby, remained consistent with the occupational character of the block's residents. Operating for eight or nine years until the end of the first war, the Club was probably organized by William Cockburn, an accountant with the Canada Permanent Mortgage Company, to provide accommodation for about seven young men. Most were well-paid employees of the company, but several worked for other financial or commercial businesses. "Clubbing" together to share expenses, with a combined income in 1911 of about \$9000, the young men could support a comfortable lifestyle and hired Maw Ong, a forty-one year old Chinese immigrant, to be their cook and house manager..

SOCIAL REFORM, WOMEN, AND ONE HUSBAND

In her presidential address to the 1907 convention of the Winnipeg branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Mrs. Elizabeth Chisholm reported that she had set aside one room of her new Furby Street home as a depository for literature on the social and moral problems that engaged the union. Her home was pledged to the temperance cause.

The Chisholms were a well-known family in Winnipeg. Arriving in Winnipeg with her parents in the late 1870s, Elizabeth Goodfellow, as she then was, had taught school for several years in Point Douglas, Winnipeg's oldest neighbourhood, before marrying James Chisholm. James, an architect, had left Ontario for Winnipeg in 1877 and designed a number of the first commercial buildings in the prairie city. After the city's real estate boom collapsed in 1882, contracts were

more difficult to win, and in 1888 James left his family in Winnipeg to find work in St. Paul, Minnesota, and later Superior, Wisconsin. By the turn of the century, Winnipeg was booming again and he returned to open James Chisholm and Son, Architects. In its second Winnipeg incarnation, the Chisholm firm designed quite a few commercial, residential, and institutional buildings, but most noteworthy, for this study anyway, were Young Methodist Church (1906-11) at 222 Furby Street and the Shipley Block, a commercial and residential building on the southeast corner of Furby and Portage Avenue.⁶² In 1906, when these two Furby buildings were under construction, James bought the large white, frame house at 294 Furby. As Methodists, James and Elizabeth must have felt humble satisfaction when they walked down the street to worship in a building of his design.

Elizabeth Chisholm dedicated herself to the temperance and the women's suffrage movements. As a young woman, she joined a number of Methodist organizations, the Ladies Aid Society and the Missionary Society, as well as getting involved the W.C.T.U. from its beginnings in the city in the early 1880s. Over a quarter century, Chisholm served in a variety of executive positions including president of the Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Dominion organizations. Like others in the W.C.T.U., Elizabeth Chisholm was most concerned about the health and well-being of children and she remained convinced

62 "Building Enterprise of the Churches," *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 December 1906, p. 41; "Young Methodist Church Is Rejuvenated," *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 March 1911, 44. James Chisholm and Sons were also the architects for another building of interest to this study, the Olympia Hotel, completed in 1914. Joseph Panaro, later of 260 Furby Street, was one of the partners in that enterprise. "New Olympia Is Splendid Hotel," *Manitoba Free Press*, 19 November 1914, 16.



Fig. 1.7. The Chisholm home, 294 Furby Street

that alcohol presented the most serious danger to them. Asserting that relatively more “drunkards” lived in Manitoba than in any other province, she urged women to become “a great moral fact in the regeneration of the world” and to fight a “peaceful warfare against the slavery that shackled body and soul”. Most needed were changes to “parent culture” and, if parents themselves would not change, then women needed to find ways to intervene. “The work of the W.C.T.U.,” she explained, “must deal primarily with the child and since the State has the only agency in child protection women must have a voice in the framing of the laws to protect their own.”⁶³ The linkages among social, moral, and political reforms were clear to her: alcohol needed to be eliminated in order that children could be raised in morally upright families; the end to alcohol and the protection of children and the family could only be secured through the political participation of women and the extension of suffrage to them. When ill-health in the late 1910s forced her and her husband, James, to winter in California near two sons, she

63 “W.C.T.U. Convention Opened Yesterday,” 15 May 1907, 5.

investigated the women’s movement there and reported on American developments to her colleagues when she returned to Winnipeg.⁶⁴ Her approach to women’s rights and social reform, which historians have termed “maternal feminism”⁶⁵, was shared by other notable women

activists on the block and supported, most often tacitly, by their husbands.

As comfortable as Furby Street was, its middle- and upper-middle class residents could not help but be aware of the realities of urban poverty and polarising class relations in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Even though their homes offered a domestic refuge from public life, many of the women on the block engaged in a variety of reform causes, combining participation in club meetings and public assemblies with opening their residences for meetings and fundraising events, such as “silver teas”. In doing so, they claimed a role in reforming society that they grounded in their caring and nurturing capacity as women, so effectively evident in the best middle-class and upper-middle-class families.

Elizabeth Chisholm’s neighbours on Furby Street, Charlotte Galloway and Lily Deacon, shared her concern for the well-being of Winnipeg’s children and families. And like her, they grounded their reform

64 “Pray While Men Vote,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 July 1903, 2; “Mission Meeting Comes to Close,” *ibid.*, 24 May 1912, 9; “Honored by Templars,” *ibid.*, 14 June 1913, 9; “Pioneer Woman Dies at Santa Monica, Cal.,” *ibid.*, 7 July 1925, 4.

65 Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred: The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

activities in the women's societies of their church.⁶⁶ Unlike Chisholm, who attended Young Methodist Church just down the street, Galloway and Deacon were members of Broadway Methodist Church. Going a bit farther to church, about a mile away, also expressed their sense of a higher social status, since at Broadway they worshipped beside others of their denomination who belonged to Winnipeg's elite. They shared Chisholm's concern for the well-being of Winnipeg's children and families, but they also espoused other reform causes that reflected their class background.

Lily Deacon's major commitment was to the Mothers' Association, to which she contributed through the 1910s, serving as its president in 1915. The group sponsored a Day Nursery on Stella Avenue in the North End as part of its educational programmes for working-class mothers. Potential supporters were assured, however, that most of the thirty-five infants and children cared for in 1913 were there only for the short-term, while their mothers took temporary employment "to tide over some crucial financial stage at the home". The few children there longer offered useful examples of the benefits of the nursery's good mothering. The mother of "little Peter, a bright, happy little Polish baby" had sought help after "his father [had] grown tired of his responsibilities" and abandoned her and their two children. After six months of care, Peter had "developed into a fine happy, healthy, wee laddie, a regular little sunbeam, always greeting the ladies with one of his bright sweet smiles." The exceptional case, a Polish family, associated child neglect with the growing immigrant presence in Winnipeg.⁶⁷

Her interest in the health of children led Deacon to serve as judge in the baby contest sponsored in 1914 by the Free Dispensary and Milk Depot. Prizes went to a variety of categories of infants, all of whom were judged not just on being "plump and pretty", but also "on the condition of heart, lungs, and other internal workings".

As president of the Mothers' Association, Deacon urged women of her class to be "extravagant" in hiring help since many young women were desperate for work. She also persuaded the Local Council of Women in 1915 to establish an Employment Bureau. The Bureau attempted to connect servants with mistresses, in the city and rural areas, and reported that "many of these positions have wages attached."⁶⁸ While the Bureau did help unemployed women find work, it also allowed middle-class women to believe that they were being benevolent in providing work for their servants.

That self-interest was also evident in Deacon's involvement with the Women's Civic League of Winnipeg, of which she was Honorary President in 1913, no doubt an appointment made in deference to her husband's mayoralty. A spin-off of the Political Equality League, the pro-suffrage pressure group, the Civic League sought to educate and mobilize women on a range of municipal issues, from the school board to public health and matters concerning the Winnipeg General Hospital. Its membership rules, however, demonstrated its qualified acceptance of democratic rights. All women interested in municipal politics were invited to join, but

Free Press, 28 May 1910, 9; "The Day Nursery," *ibid.*, 8 March 1913, 47; "Personal and Social," *ibid.*, 8 January 1915, 9.

66 "Rainbow Bazaar," *Manitoba Free Press*, 11 November 1912, 9; "Women's Council Annual Meeting," *ibid.*, 27 April 1918, 8.

67 "Among Women's Organizations," *Manitoba*

68 "Employment Bureau Remains Open," *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 November 1914, 9; "Says Explanation Would Enlighten," *ibid.*, 30 January 1915, 22; "Local Council Has Splendid Meeting," *ibid.*, 28 April 1915, 3.

only those who were property owners and therefore possessed the municipal franchise—4000 in Winnipeg—could cast votes on League decisions. The defenders of this restricted membership policy argued that the League’s credibility in urging municipal reforms required that its members meet the same standards as those with whom they were dealing at City Hall.⁶⁹

Charlotte Galloway shared many of Deacon’s reform concerns. In 1919 the next-door neighbours sponsored a fundraising ball at the fashionable Royal Alexandra Hotel to support the Day Nursery.⁷⁰ As well, both were founding members of the Children’s League of Happiness in 1915 and the Broadway branch of the League met from time to time in Galloway’s home. The organization’s goal was to cultivate among well-to-do girls between the ages of four and sixteen years old “the idea of service through working for those who have not been provided for so abundantly”. At regular meetings, the girls were told about real cases of hardship to encourage them to make donations and to raise money. Besides contributing to the Belgian Orphan Fund, the League supported local medical and public health causes and, reflecting her husband’s medical specialization perhaps, established its own Cripple Fund “to help take care of crippled children.”⁷¹

More prominent in reform causes than Deacon, Charlotte Galloway became president of the Local Council of Women in 1915. An umbrella organization for a wide range of middle-class women’s organizations within the city, the Council promoted a range of women’s social concerns, although it eschewed controversial causes, such as suffrage, lest its positions fracture the facade of solidarity.⁷² During her presidency, the Council took up issues of general middle-class interest. A series of lectures on “household science” appealed to those who looked to science and technology to industrialize the household, as it had the factory, and render it more efficient. As well, useful information presented to immigrant and working-class women would help stretch incomes and contribute to the Canadianization of foreign households.⁷³ To inspire middle-class women, the Council organized an information session at which “the advance guard of women in official life” explained their work in such areas as the Civic Charities Bureau, the Board of Education, and the administration of widowed mothers’ pensions.⁷⁴ In another initiative, Galloway proposed that women with some financial experience might advise widows on investing insurance benefits or other sums of money.⁷⁵ Another interest for Galloway was the redemption of women offenders: she lobbied for women police officers, special courts for women, and programmes for women in prison.⁷⁶ As well, Galloway called for the Council to “investigate suspicious-looking advertise-

69 “Winnipeg Women Form Civic League,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 11 November 1913, 9. Nellie McClung and Frances Beynon, active in the suffrage movement, also were involved in the Civic League.

70 “Social and Personal,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 October 1919, 6.

71 The League attracted the participation of some of the most prominent wives in Winnipeg, most notably Mrs. Ethel Nanton, wife of the wealthy financier Augustus M. Nanton. “Personal and Social,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 12 February 1915, 9; 22 February 1915, 5; 25 February 1915, 5; “Happiness League Doing Good Work,” *ibid.*, 22 September 1915, 5.

72 Esyllt W. Jones, *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 188n24.

73 *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 October 1915, 3.

74 “Tell of Work in Public Service,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 26 March 1915, 7.

75 “Local Council Has Splendid Meeting,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 April 1915, 3.

76 “Police Commission Chief States View,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 November 1915, 4.

ments", pressed the City to standardize the labelling and weight of bread, and served on the community committee that advised the City's film censor.⁷⁷

As a doctor's wife, Galloway took great interest in medical and public health issues. She helped out with the fundraising activities of the Children's Hospital, a philanthropic institution, supported financially by the City, that was located in the immigrant and working-class North End of Winnipeg.⁷⁸ But she worried that more thorough inspection of immigrants was needed to deal with the growing problem of the "mentally deficient". As well, she advocated for the pasteurization of milk and actively participated in the Anti-Tuberculosis Society, serving as its president in 1920.⁷⁹

Perhaps the hortatory, but non-judgemental public statements generally expected from upper-middle-class club women and the non-confrontational stance of the Local Council of Women muted the social analysis that motivated Charlotte Galloway's social activism. She may not have agreed with her husband, but no doubt husband and wife often discussed the problems that troubled them both. Dr. H.P.H. Galloway did not have a prominent public profile beyond his professional reputation. But on occasion as a leader within the medical profession, his opinion was sought and he offered a much more cutting critique than his wife ever would have dared to utter.

Busy as his practice was, Dr. H.P.H. Galloway occasionally found time for

public causes, some of which drew upon his professional standing.⁸⁰ A member of Broadway Methodist Church, he held a social gospel commitment. He served as a lay member of the committee established by the Ministerial Association to prepare for an evangelist campaign in 1907.⁸¹ As well, he offered his professional perspective on "The Relation of Economic Problems to Health and Disease" in a lecture given to The People's Forum in 1915. The meetings of the Forum, organized by J.S. Woodsworth, were intended to bridge the social, ethnic, and geographical distances among Winnipeg's residents and to focus their combined efforts on resolving serious problems. Performing on the Sunday afternoon programme with Galloway was Hazomir, the "Hebrew Music Society", which presented a selection of Jewish folk music.⁸² In his lecture, reported at length in the *Manitoba Free Press*, the Doctor explained that "unjust economic conditions are the cause of an appalling amount of disease and suffering, especially among little children." "Sheer poverty" made rickets—a "softening of the bones and muscular weakness...[causing] deformity and weakness"—a prevalent condition in Winnipeg. In his own charitable practice, Galloway reported that on several occasions he had needed to break and set the legs of children to correct malformation. He maintained that if half of the cost of medical treatment were spent on wholesome food

77 "Local Council Has Splendid Meeting," *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 April 1915, 3; "Women Discuss Weight of Bread," *ibid.*, 24 September 1915, 3; "Women to Aid in Film Censorship," *ibid.*, 13 October 1915, 5.

78 "For the Ladies," *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 October 1911, 56.

79 "Tuberculosis Has Grip on Manitoba," *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 January 1914, 23; "White Plague Fight," *ibid.*, 29 October 1920, 7.

80 He served on the medical board of the Children's Aid Society "J.H. Ashdown Head of Children's Aid," *Manitoba Free Press*, 2 December 1914, 16.

81 "Ministerial Meeting," *Manitoba Free Press*, 9 April 1907, 7.

82 A Jewish choral movement founded in Lodz, Poland, at the end of the nineteenth century, branches of Hazomir sprang up in Poland, Russia, the United States, and Canada. "The People's Forum," *Manitoba Free Press*, 20 February 1915, 17.

and milk then the problem could be solved. But “hard-working, honest and industrious parents in very many cases...[were] unable to earn sufficient to provide their families with the nourishing food, and roomy, well ventilated homes necessary to health.” The solution puzzled the troubled Doctor. He rejected socialism, but he did blame “the capitalist classes”. He was particularly critical of the philanthropy of the wealthy, who accumulated their fortunes in ways that caused the problems they then set out to solve through their public generosity. “Economic justice”, he opined, would remain elusive until people followed the prescription of the Great Physician: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” Galloway’s analysis proved controversial and drew a rebuke from Alison Craig, the “Women’s Page” writer for the Manitoba Free Press, who condemned ignorant parents for wasting their money on alcohol, having too many children, and joining “unemployment parades” instead of taking responsibility for their families. From others, Galloway’s argument drew a more favourable response and later in the year he was asked to repeat his lecture to an audience of his social peers at Grace Methodist Church.⁸³

MOVING ON AND OFF THE BLOCK

Of course, from the beginning, families came and went from the block; residential stability was contingent and roots did not necessarily extend deeply. The first families aged, and their children grew up and moved away, as did their parents who might no longer have needed the space. Moreover, corporate managers

could be transferred to different cities; others might decide that business or employment prospects seemed more promising in other places. Among those who stayed in Winnipeg, renters might move up (or down) in the market, buying (or renting) houses elsewhere. Owners might buy something that they judged better suited to their needs or status in some other neighbourhood. Only about a third of the nineteen families living on the block in 1901 were still there ten years later, and even fewer, just a quarter of the forty-one families, in 1911, continued in their residence until 1921.

Another way of considering residential stability is to determine the number of families who had just located on the block in the last year and the number who would leave in that year. Three, or about one of every six families in 1901, had moved to Furby Street in the last year, while five, or about one quarter, would leave that year. Ten years later the block experienced lower turnover, with only ten per cent of families having arrived in the last year and twenty per cent leaving in 1911. However, in 1921 residential mobility had reverted almost exactly to the 1901 level.

Reporting numbers and percentages of families who stayed and moved can seem a bit plodding, yet also dizzying. However, they do indicate important characteristics about neighbourhood stability and about the similarities between the past and the present. Even when the housing on the block was new and the image of the neighbourhood was respectably middle class, very few families stayed for ten years, what we might recognize today as a long, but not too long duration of time. Just three families, all of whom were original owner-occupants—the McKenzies at 248 Furby, the Murrays at 260 Furby, and the Breens at 308 Furby—lived on the block for more than twenty years. Moving and a lot of it, then,

83 “Rejects Socialism as Great Panacea,” Manitoba Free Press, 22 February 1915, 7. See the critical response to Galloway by Alison Craig, “Dr. Galloway Scores Economic Conditions,” *ibid.*, 27 February 1915. “Church Notes,” *ibid.*, 6 November 1915, 17.

has been a normal and permanent experience on the block. Houses were not homes in themselves, at least not permanent homes, but rather were places that for a time afforded families the opportunity to establish their homes. As circumstances changed, as finances changed for better or worse, and as children grew up, the space provided by houses became more or less suitable to aspirations for home.

To call the movement off the block “middle-class flight” would be too extreme. However, the reform activities of Furby residents showed their awareness of the city’s social problems. And these grew worse, not better, and class relations, strained since early in the century, became more polarized through the First World War. The General Strike that shut the city down for six weeks in the late spring of 1919 induced hysteria among the bourgeoisie. As congenial as its residents found Furby Street, their neighbourhood was easily within walking distance of working-class neighbourhoods and a core area within which housing was seriously deteriorating.

In 1918 the Deacons had bought a larger residence at 194 Yale Avenue, across the Assiniboine River in more exclusive Crescentwood. Around the same time, the Galloways also moved to that neighbourhood, buying 633 Wellington Crescent, on Winnipeg’s most elegant street. A few years later, another physician, Dr. John W. Manchester, who had lived at 271 Furby for more than a decade, joined the migration across the river and bought a house at 135 Montrose Avenue in River Heights.

CONCLUSION

Furby Street’s first families had formed a neighbourhood that reflected their social positions. By the early twentieth century block was part of a quiet, ma-

ture suburb of large—though, with one or two exceptions, not grand—residences. The size of their dwellings sustained homes with a membership that stretched to include non-nuclear family and roomers from similar backgrounds when husbands and wives were beginning to have children. As their families grew and matured, membership in their homes was restricted: more and older children displaced the relatives and roomers, although servants continued to have a place in homes that could afford them. Later in their family life-cycle, married children might for a few years live with their parents. Expansive families, as much as the genteel neighbourhood, signified the bourgeois homes of Furby.

Dignified and respectable as bourgeois life was, and as welcome as home was in times of rapid social and economic change, the domestic realm was not an entirely separate sphere with the private rigidly demarcated from the public. Not only did it embrace non-nuclear family members, but the doors to its parlour, living room, and dining room were open for entertainments and especially to support worthy causes. Holding dearly their values of family and home, the matrons of Furby Street believed that their domestic example offered remedy to the social ills of the city, to its poverty, disease, and what they interpreted as uncivilized cultures. The maternal feminist reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries articulated an ideal bourgeois home that, in its interest and intrusion in the family and home-life of immigrants and the working class, sought hegemony over the next century.

*“Suitable for Doctor, Institution or High Class
Rooming House: The Interwar Years*

After her husband's death in 1936, Mrs. Colin Campbell Chisholm stayed on in the family home at 294 Furby Street for about a year. She and her husband, with their two children, had moved in with his father and mother in the early years of the First World War. Cam was a partner with his father in James Chisholm and Son, Architects, and subsequently took over the firm's management. James C. Chisholm's health had weakened, and the house was large enough for the three generations, especially since the elder Chisholms regularly wintered in Ocean Park, California. After James died in 1920, Cam and family stayed in the house, although the property appears to have remained in his father's estate, and Cam probably paid rent to his mother and, after her death in 1928, to his siblings.¹

After the war, construction in Winnipeg stagnated and, so too, no doubt, did the Chisholms' business. And things got worse during the Depression of the 1930s. From his professional experience, Cam knew how quickly the city's housing stock could deteriorate if not regularly maintained and how maintenance expenditures could stimulate business and employment. In March 1934, near the bottom of the Depression, he submitted a proposal to the editor of the Winnipeg Free Press for

public consideration. Over the last four years, he estimated, the value of the city's residential stock had fallen by \$3.8 million. The effects, even in his quadrant of the city, were increasingly visible. "This applies not only to old districts where many buildings have for years been regarded only as rent collectors for what they might bring until such time as they fell down or were closed by authorities but it applies as well to the good residence districts of the north and west ends and south of the Assiniboine," he observed. Much work waited to be done, not just essential maintenance to structures and exteriors, but also more discretionary improvements, such as sun porches, dens, and extra bathrooms. With the drying up of mortgage funds, few home owners could finance the repairs and the projects they wanted and instead they watched as their buildings became more and more run-down. He was most concerned about over-crowded and decrepit housing in Winnipeg's central district, which ought to be redeveloped, in his opinion, to be more suitable for multi-family use. Perhaps sensitive to the growing discontent of the city's unemployed, he argued, "If only from the selfish point of view of its own preservation, the state cannot allow children to grow up under such circumstances regardless of the attitudes of the parents....Someone will surely pay for it." The quality of housing affected the quality of home, so the City should "dictate" that landlords provide decent housing to their

1 "Died at Ocean Park, California, Thursday," *Manitoba Free Press*, 16 October 1920, 5; "Pioneer Woman Dies at Santa Monica, Cal.," *ibid.*, 7 July 1928, 4.



Fig. 2.1: C.C. Chisholm

tenants who paid their rent with municipal relief allowances. More creatively, the City should offer loans up to \$4000, at five per cent interest over twenty years, to home owners wanting to improve their property. The loans could be charged on the tax bill, much as had already been done in the past to finance plumbing and sewer improvements. The City should absorb the management costs of the loan programme, much like other relief expenses. From his rough calculations, Chisholm claimed that every million dollars spent on repairs, with twenty-five per cent going for materials and seventy-five per cent for labour, would give five months of work to a thousand men "at a fair wage scale".² A good idea, like so

2 C.C. Chisholm, "Providing Much Work by Repairing Houses," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 24 March 1934, 18.

many, but it came to naught.³

Cam Chisholm's death in 1936 drew public notice—not because of his housing reform ideas, but because he had long been, like his father, a notable architect and very prominent in the western Canadian curling community. A past president of the Manitoba Curling Association and the Granite Curling Club, he invented the "Chisholm draw", the procedure whereby matches were organized at bonspiels.⁴

After Cam's death, his siblings and his widow decided to settle the estates of father and son by selling the house at 294 Furby. At first, the real estate agent advertised the property as a "choice house...suit[ed to an] adult family".⁵ But, then, with a clearer awareness of trends in the neighbourhood, the advertisements offered an "excellent house of 10 rooms, in first class cond., suitable for doctor, institution or high class rooming house".⁶

THE FIRST TRANSITION

In the interwar years, like other Canadians, the residents of Furby Street wanted their lives to be restored to some normality after the personal and collective sacrifices of the First World War. Getting

3 The heartbreak of the Depression provoked all sorts of reform proposals as people tried to understand the factors that had caused such general distress. Another Furby Street, Brian H. Green of 270 Furby, suggested first "a world-wide offering of prayer as the only and sure way for the return of prosperity." Second best, he thought, would a tax on automobiles sufficient to persuade drivers to return to horse-drawn transportation. Unlike cars, he explained, horses consumed grain and a growing and thriving horse population would greatly boost the market for western Canadian grain and revive the rural economy. "Return of Horses and a Cure for Depression," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 5 November 1932, 25.

4 "C.C. Chisholm, 52, Prominent Local Curler, Is Dead," *ibid.*, 7 September 1936, 6.

5 [Ad], *ibid.*, 19 August 1937, 20.

6 [Ad], *ibid.*, 24 August 1937, 18.

back to normal seemed scarcely possible. The personal and collective sacrifices of the First World War, and the class tensions that erupted in a general strike after it, troubled many who wondered where the disorder around them would lead. The transition to a peacetime economy faltered as recession lingered into the mid-twenties and as the too-brief recovery of the later twenties collapsed into depression in the 1930s.

Those trying decades had their effects on Winnipeg's housing and provoked the first efforts at a municipal housing policy. Housing surveys conducted by the City's Department of Health in 1918 and in 1921 revealed shocking conditions of overcrowding and physical deterioration in the older and working-class neighbourhoods of the downtown area and the North End.⁷ The 1918 survey report believed that instead of the many older, large houses that had been divided into rooms and flats, small houses were needed: "the age of a house of a limited number of rooms has arrived; that is the home of 1919 and the future will be three to five rooms in place of six, eight, ten or more." The problem, however, was that they were not being built and the 1921 survey report estimated that 5,600 new houses needed to be built immediately.⁸

Given these problems, one might not necessarily expect home ownership to be on the rise. However, it had increased from about thirty per cent of households at the beginning of the century to forty-two per cent in 1921. Over the next ten

years, that rate increased to forty-seven per cent before falling to forty-four per cent in 1941.⁹ That rate of ownership was in part a consequence of the will to possess that equated home with ownership, but many families also pursued ownership out of necessity, because of the limited supply of affordable, good quality rental housing. Cheap lots could be found beyond the city's already developed neighbourhoods and in the surrounding suburban municipalities. On them, many families, like families in other cities,¹⁰ used their own laboured to build their own homes.

The City of Winnipeg, in a limited way, also promoted home ownership by participating in the Dominion government's housing scheme initiated in late 1918. Concerned with a nation-wide housing shortage and growing labour protest over the high cost of living, the government offered the provinces money to enable municipalities to provide low interest mortgages for buyers of low or modestly priced houses.¹¹ A "citizens' committee", established in 1919 to advise the municipal government, trumpeted the benefits of home ownership for family life. "No longer a drifter", the head of the family was "stimulated to work and to save" and to develop a sense of responsibility as "citizen, home owner and tax payer". He took a "justifiable pride" in providing his family with a home. Because they no longer had to move frequently, his children formed friendships that lasted for

7 "Want Limelight on Housing Conditions," *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 January 1919, 5.

8 On housing conditions at the end of the First World War, see Ernest W.J. Hague, *Report on Housing Survey of Certain Selected Areas, Made May to December 1918*. (City of Winnipeg, Health Department, 1919), 74, and *Report on Housing Survey of Certain Selected Areas, Made March and April 1921*. (City of Winnipeg, Health Department, 1921), 88.

9 City of Winnipeg Archives, *Tax Assessment Rolls, 1901*; Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing in Vancouver, 1919-50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), Tables 1 and 8.

10 Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy, 1900 to 1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

11 Andrew E. Jones, *The Beginnings of Canadian Government Housing Policy, 1918-1924*. (Ottawa: Centre for Social Welfare Studies, 1978).

years, not months, and “their recollections are of their own home not of rented quarters from which they are being continually shifted.” In her own home, his wife took more interest and found more satisfaction in her family and keeping house. The committee believed that “hundreds, if not thousands of men in moderate circumstances would jump at the chance of owning their own homes if it were proven to them that this were possible.”¹² At a time of escalating class tensions, which soon erupted in a six-week long general strike, the committee equated citizenship with ownership and a suitable home life.

Put on hold by the general strike, the City did not initiate its housing scheme until 1920. Over the next three years, its housing commission helped finance the construction and purchase of 712 homes. The suburban municipalities, which experienced substantial growth in the 1920s, also implemented home ownership plans under the Dominion programme and financed between 500 and 600 new homes in the same period.

Shelter remained a problem, especially as the Depression threw thousands out of work or left them underemployed. The City attempted to revive its home ownership programme in 1937 by forming a corporation to build houses on City land and to aid buyers with the financing. A demonstration home “of the most modern design” was built that promised “an easy flow of home life, maximum comfort and minimum labour, making for true dignity of family life.” The provincial government killed the programme, however, when it judged that the City’s charter did not allow such initiatives. The ideal of the single-family, detached home re-

mained.¹³

Housing conditions worsened so that by 1941 the City estimated that 9,000 new houses were needed to solve the housing shortage.¹⁴ Near the end of the war, an article headline in the *Winnipeg Tribune* on 25 March 1945 informed readers that there was “not one dwelling in Winnipeg left for rent.” A report by the Winnipeg Council of Social Agencies in 1942 offered much the same analysis of housing conditions as Cam Chisholm had provided eight years before: so many families on relief had depressed rents and real estate values below levels that landlords judged sufficient to bear the costs of maintenance to their properties or to encourage the construction of new rental accommodation. Because “of the lack of income, many families crowded together, two families using a house adequate in rooms and facilities for only one... Decreased income also forced many families to move to cheaper and still cheaper housing units in order to have enough to buy food.”¹⁵

Within this interwar context, the character of Furby Street changed significantly. Owner occupancy declined as many of the socially and economically successful families departed for the sub-

12 City of Winnipeg Archives, Special Committees, Misc., Box 4. Special Committee on Housing Scheme, Report, [1919].

13 A Home You May Own and Pay for Monthly (*Winnipeg*, 1937), 7-13. “City Housing Company Unable to Function,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, 19 April 1938. At the national scale, the Dominion Housing Act of 1935 reinforced that ideal. Its heavy reliance on private sector participation, however, limited the opportunities for lower income groups to secure mortgages under its provisions. John Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 83-7.

14 “Asks for Chance to Prove Situation Here Is Desperate,” *ibid.*, 22 November 1941.

15 Winnipeg Council of Social Agencies, Committee on Housing. Report: Housing in Winnipeg. (*Winnipeg*: Winnipeg Council of Social Agencies, 1943), 19.

urbs or larger national metropolises. Their former homes were sold, occasionally for doctors' offices and private hospitals, but more often as rental properties, first for family residences and increasingly later as rooming houses or flats.¹⁶ The husbands and fathers in the families who moved to the block worked mainly in white-collar clerical, sales, and office occupations—a solid lower middle class in life style and aspiration, but a lower income stratum than their predecessors.

Property owners, most often non-resident, became more concerned with the revenue from their properties and less bothered with the quality of the neighbourhood. Elsewhere in the city, in Armstrong's Point, Crescentwood, and Wolseley for example, home owners effectively lobbied City Council to keep apartment buildings out of their neighbourhoods. As historian Richard Dennis has explained, apartment living provoked very mixed responses: to developers, apartments were signs of modernity and efficient domestic sophistication and a new residential option for the middle class in the 1920s. To neighbouring property owners, they were unsanitary and morally suspicious threats to family and home.¹⁷ On Furby Street, the construction

of four buildings between Broadway and Portage Avenue in the 1920s demonstrated the waning interest of owners in maintaining the residential character of the neighbourhood, as owners elsewhere were doing. Their appearance increased the population density of the block and coincided with greater residential turnover.

By the middle of the 1920s and more clearly into the thirties, the families and the homes on the block had started to change. Whereas over sixty per cent of heads of families in 1911 and 1921 were professionals, managers, or businessmen, no more than thirteen per cent had such occupations in 1931 and just ten per cent in 1941. More and more blue collar workers were living on the block. Notably, homeownership declined from about one of every two houses in 1921 to fewer than one in five houses in 1931, a level that continued through the Great Depression and into the postwar era. As owner occupancy dropped, property owners turned their buildings to a greater variety of residential uses in the interwar years. Several leased them to managers of rooming houses. Two became private hospitals. Three were demolished to make way for apartment blocks, while two more were renovated, one with a substantial addition, to become apartment buildings. As well, moving on and off of the block in the 1920s remained at the relatively high rate experienced in the 1910s, even though the dislocation caused by World War One was no longer a factor. Three quarters of households on the block in 1921 were gone by 1931. By the early years of the Depression, given the economic insecurity of that decade, movement on and off the block had increased significantly with about one third of families in 1931 arriving in the past year and about one third

16 Weaver and Doucet have noted the significant growth of flats, suites of rooms within what previously had been single family houses, in the interwar years through until the 1960s. Throughout that period in Hamilton, Ontario, flats accounted for a significantly larger share of rental accommodation than apartment buildings. *Housing the North American City* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 340-1, 379-81.

17 Richard Dennis, "'Zoning' before Zoning: The Regulation of Apartment Housing in Early Twentieth-Century Winnipeg and Toronto," *Planning Perspectives* 15 (2000): 287-92; "Apartment Housing in Canadian Cities, 1900-1940," *Urban History Review*, 26 (1998): 17-31; "Interpreting the Apartment House: Modernity and Metropolitanism in Toronto,

1900-1930," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 20 (1994): 305-22.

leaving the block over the next year. That same pace of coming and going continued into the war in 1941.¹⁸

Perhaps the most visible change on the block was in the number of women who headed households, either in detached and semi-detached dwellings, in flats, or in apartment suites. Their situations were not always clear from the street directories listing their names and addresses. Some were identified as widows; some who were not so identified may well have been; others may have been unmarried; still others were separated from their husbands, especially during World War Two when more than half of households were headed by women. But even in 1931 there were a significant number of women householders: women were listed as the principal occupant of six of thirty-two detached and semi-detached dwellings, six of eleven flats, and thirty-three of 116 apartment suites, for a total of more than

twenty-eight per cent.¹⁹

As one might expect, in both 1931 and 1941 women on their own or solely responsible for their children were least likely to reside in detached and semi-detached dwellings. When they did, they almost never owned their homes: only one woman in 1921 and one in 1941 were owners. The size of several households in detached or semi-detached houses headed by women in 1931 and 1941 suggests that they took in roomers, a not uncommon way for women on their own to support themselves. Mrs. M. Partridge at 305 Furby, for example, looked after sixteen people in her house in 1931. Mrs. Emma Jansen, a widow at 276 Furby, attended to eleven residents in 1931. Theirs were not the only large households on the block and others too were taking in roomers.

Discovering the extent of rooming in the 1920s and 1930s must remain impressionistic and indirect since the street directories did not often list all residents at an address and the tax assessment rolls recorded only the total number of occupants. However, what is clear is that the population on the block from the first war was not stable. Examining only those twenty-eight buildings that were occupied as dwellings from 1911 through 1941 reveals that the population on the block dropped by fifteen per cent from 208 in 1911 to 176 in 1921. No doubt, families matured; children married and moved out; young men went off to war. That fewer people should reside on the block at a time when the city was experiencing a significant housing shortage suggests the financial security of residents: they did not need to compromise the extent of their

18 To put the Depression into a historical context, the rate of moving in 1931 and in 1941, approximated the thirty per cent annual mobility that the West Broadway neighbourhood, of which Furby Street is a part, experienced at the end of the twentieth century when its poverty and deterioration were publicly recognized as serious urban problems. The earlier high rate of mobility, however, occurred in peculiar economic circumstances, as many men and women confronted a prolonged, though cyclical depression, and adjusted their household costs by seeking different shelter. Those with jobs might move up in the housing market; the underemployed and unemployed might seek something more affordable. More recently, much mobility has expressed the search by low-income families and single individuals for accommodation at the lower end of the market that might prove qualitatively better, for the moment, as home. "City of Winnipeg Neighbourhood Profiles: 2001 Census Data, West Broadway," [Available on-line <<http://winnipeg.ca/census/2001/Community%20Areas/Downtown%20Neighbourhood%20Cluster/Neighbourhoods/Downtown%20East/default.asp>> (accessed 6 July 2006)]

19 In 1941 women were listed as the principal occupant of eleven of twenty-seven detached and semi-detached dwellings, twenty-two of forty-three flats, and sixty-four of ninety-eight apartment suites, for a total of more than fifty-seven per cent.

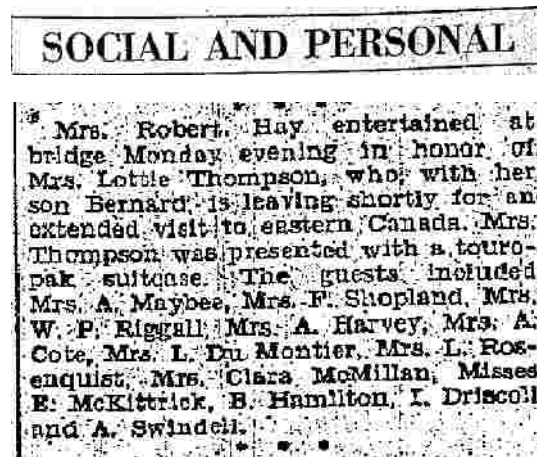


Fig. 2.2. *Winnipeg Free Press* report on the social activities of Mrs. Lottie Thompson, 28 November 1930

living space by renting out rooms. By 1931, the population returned to about the number of residents in 1911. Middle and upper-middle class families were less interested in such large houses and the families that took them over rented out the extra rooms. During the Depression years, the trend to higher density occupancy on the block intensified as more families took in lodgers and as several non-resident owners redeveloped their houses as multi-family dwellings. By 1941, there were 324 residents, an increase of fifty per cent from 1931.

For example, when Richard and Sarah Breen moved to 131 Montrose Street in River Heights, a more affluent neighbourhood, in the mid-1920s, they rented out their house at 308 Furby to a single family. In 1931 their tenant was Goodman Johnson, a carpenter who was also the janitor at an apartment building on nearby Sherbrook Street, and his household family totalled just six members. After their parents died,²⁰ the Breen children divided their former twelve-room family home

into six suites and kept it as an income property until about 1942. After its conversion, approximately twenty people lived there through the mid-thirties and into the forties. Other houses experienced comparable renovations and consequent higher densities.

Women made up the majority of those renting flats in 1931 and in 1941. Who was typical is difficult to determine because so little can be discovered about them. But a few left brief traces. Lottie Thompson, who may have been a war widow, lived in Suite 3 at 251 Furby, which originally had been the Deacon family home. Mrs. Thompson was not employed, but she had sufficient means to live modestly, of necessity, in her flat. She did maintain a polite circle of friends who could follow her occasional activities, and their own no doubt, on the "Social and Personal" page of the *Winnipeg Free Press*. They could read about her hosting a wedding shower.²¹ They might congratulate her on winning a prize playing court whist at the anniversary banquet of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Valour Road Memorial Branch of the Canadian Legion where she was an active member.²² They wished her well, and even held a bridge evening in her honour, when in 1930 she and her younger son Bernard went on an extended visit to eastern Canada.²³ One hopes, too, that they shared her pride and satisfaction when her elder son Alan graduated from teachers' college in New Mexico and when he returned safely in December 1944 from service in the South Pacific with the American army. Four months after his return, Lottie made certain that the newspaper printed a notice of Alan's

20 "Private Funeral Service for Richard Breen Pioneer," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 Dec 1929, 5; "Many Friends Attend Funeral of Mrs. R Breen," *ibid.*, 28 June 1933, 6.

21 "Social and Personal," *ibid.*, 11 January 1934, 10.

22 "Clubdom," *ibid.*, 21 October 1936, 10; "Armistice Tea for Valour Rd. B.E.S.L.," *ibid.*, 10 November 1936, 7.

23 "Social and Personal," *ibid.*, 28 November 1930, 8.

wedding in Artesia, New Mexico, where he was an athletic coach and physical education instructor at the local high school. And a few months later she proudly announced that Alan and wife Sara had come to visit her in Winnipeg.²⁴

Beyond a few details of her personal life, the Free Press also reported on the activities of Mrs. Thompson's favoured charity, the Nasik Guild. The organization was established in 1929 by twelve women friends to raise funds in order to endow a bed and a cot at the hospital operated by the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission in Nasik, India. The Guild was one of several city groups affiliated with the Winnipeg branch of the Mission that raised money and made quilts and clothing to support its work. Lottie, who served as Treasurer for a time, pitched in by taking charge of the refreshments at fundraising teas or by organizing the bridge games.²⁵ Her contributions to the Legion and the Nasik Guild, while in some ways similar activities to those of pre-war women on Furby, were on a much less grand scale—as, of course, was her lifestyle.

TWO HOSPITALS AND AN "ORPHAN"

Besides dividing houses into flats for tenants like Lottie Thompson, attempts to



Fig. 2.3. Winnipeg Orthopaedic Clinic, formerly the residence and office of Dr. H.P.H. Galloway, corner of Broadway and Furby Street

convert single-family dwellings to new uses were evident in the establishment of two private hospitals on the block. After he moved to Crescentwood, H.P.H. Galloway, in partnership with several other orthopaedic surgeons, opened the Winnipeg Orthopaedic Clinic in 1920. Besides offices in his former residence at 661 Broadway, the Clinic included a convalescent home at 655 Broadway, a nurses' residence at 647 Broadway, a gymnasium and physiotherapy centre at 249 Broadway, and a private hospital at 251 Furby. The last facility was the former home of the Deacon family. The Centre catered to patients able to pay for treatment and care in what had been upper middle-class residences, more comfortable than in larger and more impersonal hospitals that attended to a less exclusive class of patients. The Clinic was not a financial success, however. Perhaps Galloway had his own experiences to draw upon when he complained in a speech to the Manitoba Medical College, "The public are too inclined to look upon debt to a doctor as entirely different from any other financial obliga-

24 "Society," *ibid.*, 17 May 1938, 10; "Thompson—Sietz," *ibid.*, 21 April 1945, 13; *ibid.*, 6 June 1945, 8.

25 "Clubdom," *ibid.*, 28 November 1930, 8; "Nasik Guild Seeks Money for India," *ibid.*, 22 November 1933; "Mrs. Syd Barnes Heads Nasik Guild," *ibid.*, 22 January 1938, 10; "Nasik Guild Plans Tea for Hospital," *ibid.*, 12 February 1938, 12; "Nasik Guild Tea to Aid Hospital," *ibid.*, 22 March 1939, 12.

tion...We owe it to ourselves and our dependents to educate our patients that debt to a doctor is not different from any other obligation...The possibility of sickness should be provided by everyone in their family budget."²⁶ After only a few years, both the private hospital and the gymnasium were closed and converted to apartments, with two suites at 249 Furby and nine suites at 251 Furby.

Dr. John W. Manchester bought 271 Furby around 1910 where he and his two sisters lived until the early 1920s. To facilitate the house calls that he made, Manchester retained a live-in coachman, Joseph Pennington, whose wife, Agnes, he employed as a servant in the household. In 1916 Manchester acquired the house next door, at 265 Furby, and rented it to Frederick W. Lill and his wife Rebecca, a nurse, who operated a private hospital there. When Manchester moved to 135 Montrose Street in River Heights in the mid-1920s, the Lills rented 271 Furby from him and turned 265 Furby entirely into a private hospital. Lill's Nursing Home provided maternity care until about 1927 when another operator took over for a few years and advertised what he called a "Unique Home".²⁷

The hospital was a "unique home" in more than one way. It also operated an orphanage and adoption service, called the Bible House. Thomas Morin, who related his story to a subsequent resident of the house, was born at 265 Furby on 12 March 1921. His mother, Mary Ellen Simpson came to Winnipeg from rural Saskatchewan to give birth. Her parents had disapproved of her marriage to John Thompson, a farmer. As a result, after her husband's sudden death from pneu-

monia at the age of twenty-one years, Mary Ellen was on her own and sought care at Lill's Nursing Home. Her newborn infant was weak and ill, and he required hospital care soon after birth. Despairing of her ability to look after her baby, she gave him up for adoption when he was just three days old. Thomas lived for three and a half years in "The Home" before a middle-aged couple adopted him.²⁸

THE VIEW FROM A PROFESSOR'S STUDY

Like others in the 1920s, William T. Allison and his family did not remain on the block for long and by 1924 changes in the neighbourhood, as well as their improving fortunes, contributed to their decision to move to Gertrude Avenue in Crescentwood. In 1917 they had moved into 254 Furby Street, which they rented for \$40.00 a month.²⁹ The house was close to Wesley College on Portage Avenue where Dr. Allison had been appointed Professor of English in 1910 and Dean of Arts the year of their move. A graduate of University of Toronto and Yale University, Allison had served as a Presbyterian minister in Stayner, Ontario, before taking a position as Lecturer in Rhetoric at Victoria College, University of Toronto.³⁰

In Winnipeg, Allison quickly developed a reputation as an articulate commentator in the press (and later on the radio) and an engaging guest minister at a number of the city's more liberal Protestant churches, as well as the Labor

26 Ihor Mayba, *Bonesetters and Others: Pioneer Orthopaedic Surgeons* (Winnipeg: Henderson Books, 1991), 117, 120.

27 "Unique Home," *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 May 1920, 23.

28 Thomas M. Morin to Alexandra Penner [pseudonym], 23 March 1999. Copy in possession of D. Burley.

29 [Ad], *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 September 1917, 20.

30 A. Gerald Bedford, *The University of Winnipeg: A History of the Founding Colleges* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 52, 140, 397; W.L. Morton, *One University: A History of the University of Manitoba, 1877-1952* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957), 139.



Fig. 2.4. 254 Furby Street, first house on the block and the home of the Allison family in 1919

Church.³¹ As a moderate social gospeller, he remained optimistic that the Kingdom of God on earth would be achieved through the progressive reform of society and that Christianity as a force for social reconciliation would resolve the deepening class tensions of wartime and postwar society. When the more radical social gospeller, Salem Bland, lost his faculty position at Wesley College in 1917, Allison offered him support, even though he publicly expressed confidence in millionaire hardware merchant James H. Ashdown, who as Chair of the Board of Directors was responsible for the decision. As well, during the Winnipeg General Strike, Allison addressed strikers on several occasions; the topics of his presentations are unknown, but had he not expressed some sympathy for their cause, the strikers surely would not have had him speak again. Later, after the strike, Alli-

son wrote a lengthy article on Ashdown and his business in which he judged the wealthy hardware merchant and former mayor to be exemplary in securing “exceptionally cordial and mutually satisfactory” relations with his employees.³²

The sympathy that Allison expressed for both sides of social division demonstrated his conviction that reconciliation first required understanding, something which as an intellectual Allison believed he could promote. In 1920, when he took up a new appointment at the University of Manitoba, he offered an inaugural public lecture, later published as a pamphlet, on “Bolshevism in English Literature”. No doubt he hoped his audience would find his title provocative, but he intended to explain how many authors, who had found well respected places in the canon of English literature, had in their own time been perceived as being unconventional in their rejection of prevailing standards. For Allison, that rejection of convention, grounded in a social conscience, represented the real meaning of Bolshevism and, of course, once recognised, the foreign and contemporary connotations of the term became apparent as prejudice and misunderstanding.³³

Such thoughts engaged Allison as he worked at home in his study, thinking and writing. After his death, his son Carlyle estimated that his father had written approximately 3000 words a day for forty years. In one of his newspaper articles, Allison himself reflected on the contentment and security that settled upon him in his study: “The other afternoon when a blizzard filled the air with drifting snow, I was sitting in my cosy library alone with

31 “Crescent Congregational,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 19 December 1914, 4; “King Memorial Church Elmwood,” *ibid.*, 14 March 1914, 21; “Notes for the Churches,” *ibid.*, 26 April 1919, 23; “Labor Churches Hold University Sunday,” *ibid.*, 6 February 1922, 22.

32 W.T. Allison, “Are We Nearing the Abyss?” *ibid.*, 11 May 1920, 7, and “Romantic Story of the Growth of Ashdown Business,” *ibid.*, 11 September 1919, 8, 12.

33 “Around the University,” *ibid.*, 23 September 1920, 4; William T. Allison, *Bolshevism in English Literature* (Winnipeg: 1920), 3.

my thoughts. And as I looked at Jill, our fox-terrier, curled up on the sofa, I was conscious of an extra sense of comfort just because the storm raged through the wintry sky." That "sense of comfort" came from the physical barrier against the weather that his house provided, as well as from the satisfaction that Allison found in his thoughtful work in his own place and the unqualified affection of the family pet who had chosen his company that afternoon. Thinking more about the source of comfort, he remembered a verse from the Old Testament book of Isaiah: "A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." And, then, from that verse, he offered that "to those individuals who have had the good fortune to be born in warm and happy homes, pater familias is 'an hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest.' And this is why the very word 'father' seems to have a tranquilizing effect on the human heart." Allison's earliest memory of his own father returned quickly to his mind and he fondly recalled how as a four-year-old child he had been carried in "the safe shelter of my father's arms". As a man of letters, Allison explained the "range and power" of the meanings associated with "father" in literature and in the Bible—mercy, trust, faithfulness, love, all of which come to be known and understood through the reflections of the father's children.³⁴

Allison offered a masculine, patriarchal, Christian, and scholar's understanding of home. It seemed natural to him that university students should board with his family. One, who stayed with for two years, was S.I. Hayakawa, later a professor of English himself, president of San Francisco State College, and a United States Senator. Hayakawa's father, in the wholesale importing business, returned to Japan

and left his son in Winnipeg to complete his Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Manitoba. Hayakawa very much enjoyed living with one of his favourite professors. He came to refer to the Allison's as "Papa and Mama"—though in his oral history interview he remembered the former more than the latter—and maintained a life-long friendship with their two sons and one daughter. That intimacy grew not just from domestic contact, but also from a developing intellectual mentorship.³⁵

The Professor's home and his family life easily merged with his professional life, as he worked on preparing for his classes and entertained and boarded his students. It also offered him a secure and comfortable position from which he could reflect on the changing world and offer what he hoped would be an analysis for change. Describing his sentimentalized, self-indulgent, and self-centred experiences of home, Allison did indeed present himself as pater familias. Unmentioned, but presumably dedicating herself to the smooth functioning of the home so that father-professor could write undisturbed, was his wife, Mrs. W.T. Allison, as contemporary conventions would have her known. One can only speculate about Allison's reasons for presenting his readers with such a self-absorbed model of

34 W.T. Allison, *This for Remembrance* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1949), 1-3.

35 Significantly, in his oral history interview Hayakawa refers to his birth father and mother as "Father" and "Mother". Just when Hayakawa boarded with the Allison's is unclear, as is the exact date when the family moved to Gertrude Avenue. However, it seems possible that Hayakawa lived with the family in both locations. S. I. Hayakawa and Margedant Peters Hayakawa, "From Semantics to the U.S. Senate, Etc., Etc.," interview in 1989 by Julie Gordon Shearer, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1994, 19-20, 38-41. [Available on-line at: <<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb5q2nb40v/>>(accessed 25 July 2007)].



Fig. 2.5: The Panaro Family, 20 May 1926

home. So peculiar was it to his academic profession that few men who went out daily to work could either relate or aspire to it. Was Allison proclaiming his privileged place? Was his essay, with its selective and idealized memories of his father, an elegy for a lost time when fathers were more centrally at home? Did he hope that men who could not work at home might find some new ways to exercise their responsibilities as *pater familias*?

Those questions cannot be answered. Even though the essay cannot be dated precisely, it must have been written some time in the 1920s and 1930s and Allison would surely have been aware of the stress put on families and home during the interwar years.

THE PANARO FAMILY'S CHANGING FORTUNES

About the same time as the Allison moved into 254 Furby, Mary Panaro obtained a permit to build a house next door at 260 Furby, a lot formerly occupied by the house of contractor George Murray in the 1880s. Joseph and Mary Panaro moved from their house at 589 Ellice Avenue in 1918. They were looking for-

ward to starting over after the business reversals that Joseph had recently experienced. No doubt, it seemed prudent for Mary to hold the title to the house.

In 1882 Giuseppe, before he was Joseph, Panaro had borrowed money from his uncle to emigrate from the village of Bella, in Potenza, Italy. By 1892 he was in partnership with another Italian immigrant, Leonardo Emma, in a fruit and grocery business on

Main Street between McDermott and Bannatyne Avenues in Winnipeg. Joseph obtained his naturalization papers in 1892 and, his family remembers, he remained in his own estimation a proud Canadian businessman, rather than an immigrant.³⁶ He had married and had a son the following year. After the death of his first wife and child, he remarried in 1900, to Maria Ann Kerndl, a German immigrant born in Dingolfing, Bavaria, and twenty-six years younger than he was.³⁷ By the time they moved to Furby, the Panaros had eight children of their own and also were raising the four children of Maria's deceased sister, Victoria Nicastro.³⁸ After their move, they had two more children. Given the size of the family and the size of the house—two and a half storeys and approximately 3000 square feet—they planned to build, it is hardly surprising that the municipal official issuing the building permit suspected that they planned a rooming house. He wrote across the permit, "The applicant distinctly understands that this dwelling is for

36 Communication, Norma Panaro Dietz with D. Burley, July 2006.

37 "City and General," *Manitoba Free Press*, 31 October 1900.

38 "Obituary," *ibid.*, 23 November 1907, 10.



Fig. 2.6. The Panaro home, 260 Furby Street

one family only.”³⁹

Joseph Panaro had done well in business—for awhile, that is. The Main Street fruit and grocery business prospered, despite a serious fire in 1901,⁴⁰ and Panaro and Emma opened a small restaurant in their premises. Their new business prospered and, looking for larger premises, they formed a partnership with two other Italian immigrants, Agostino and Giuseppe Badali, who were also in the fruit business on the corner of Portage Avenue and Smith Street. In 1905 the four partners launched the Olympia Café in the new block—“The Finest and Best Café in the West,” they proclaimed. Besides its main dining area, banquet and reception hall, and a short order counter, a private room was reserved for the ladies. Another attraction was a new bowling hall with three alleys. Bowling had long been a pastime in local hotels and saloons, where it easily associated itself with drink-

ing and gambling. However, the Olympia lanes, installed by the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company, were typical of the new leisure industries of the turn of the century: rules and factory-produced alleys, pins, and balls were standardised, and Brunswick sponsored competitions and bowling leagues across North America.⁴¹ Quickly, the Olympia became popular with the lunch crowd, for organizations, and for special occasions.

Their business’s success convinced Emma, Panaro, and the Badalis to think big—this time, a “high class hotel”. In 1910 the partners assembled several lots on Smith Street, just north of the Olympia Café. Designed by the local architects, James Chisholm and Son, the hotel was built in two stages: construction began on the first three storeys in 1913, with plans for another six floors at a future date.⁴² Much excitement accompanied the November 1914 opening of the Olympia Hotel. However, a cautionary note crept into the newspaper commentary on its opening: “With the war and the financial depression this does not seem the most favourable time for launching an enterprise of the kind. But the tide of affairs is sure to turn.”⁴³

The tide did turn, but for the worse. On 3 May 1915, after just six months in

39 CWA, Building Permits, Application for Permit to Build, [260 Furby Street,] no. 839, 13 August 1917.

40 “Main Street Fire this Morning,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 February 1901, 1; “Joseph Panaro, Old Time Citizen of Winnipeg, Dies,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 6 April 1934, 6.

41 “Bowling Game to Boom Here,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 13 October 1905, 6.

42 City of Winnipeg, Planning, Property and Development Department, Heritage Conservation, Municipally Designated Sites in Winnipeg, “321-31 Smith Street: Marlborough (Olympia) Hotel,” 3, <<http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/historic/pdf-consv/Smith331-long.pdf>> [accessed 23 April 2007].

43 “New Olympia Is Splendid Hotel,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 19 November 1914, 16.

business, the Olympia Hotel suspended operations. Unable to raise enough money to carry on, the partners assigned their assets to their creditors. The Free Press commented, "It is said that A. Badali, J. Badali, L. Emma, and J. Panaro, directors of the Olympia Hotel company, have sacrificed all their assets in the venture."⁴⁴

After losing the hotel, the partners concentrated on the restaurant business, relocating the Olympia Café in 1915 to 312–314 Donald Street. Emma, the Badalis, and Joseph Panaro were all listed in the street directory as employees of the Olympia Café, while Mary Panaro was identified as the proprietor, again a way of sheltering the business from the partners' earlier losses. As well, when Joseph foresaw that the syndicate might encounter difficulties, he transferred assets to his wife.⁴⁵ As well, to help the family through the financial difficulties, Mary Mary took boarders into the already large household; they needed the money.⁴⁶

Just when Joseph Panaro left the Olympia Café is not clear. His obituary reported 1923, but the business was not sold to its new owner until 1925, not long after its workers, organized by the One Big Union, had gone on strike.⁴⁷ The business had once again encountered difficulties and its creditors had taken possession of its equipment and stock for well over a year before the sale. In 1923,

44 "Doors Closed at Olympia Hotel," *ibid.*, 4 May 1915, 3; "Olympia Hotel Case in Appeal Court," *ibid.*, 18 December 1915, 27; Stanislao Carbone, *The Streets Were Not Paved with Gold: A Social History of Italians in Winnipeg*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Italian Heritage Committee, 1993), 33.

45 "Notice," *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 August 1920, 15.

46 [Ads], *ibid.*, 5 September 1919, 19; 4 September 1920, 26; 3 November 1924, 22.

47 "To Have 'Real Strike', Says O.B.U. Organizer," *ibid.*, 10 January 1925, 9; "Frank Cancelli Buys Out Donald Street Restaurant," *ibid.*, 14 May 1925, 11.

about the time that the Café experienced its problems, Joseph Panaro opened the Broadway Grocery, on the corner of Broadway and Furby Street, not far from his home. Ill health forced him to retire in the late 1920s.

By the end of the 1920s, Joseph and Mary felt that their finances had recovered and, as their children grew up and left, they also had less need for a fourteen-room house. In the spring of 1929, they put their house on the market for \$13,000, advertising it as an "excellent rooming house proposition" that unfortunately was standing "in the path of progress" for the family. They arranged the financing for potential buyers, but the house took two years to sell. Not until 1931 or 1932 were they able to move into an eight-room house at 338 Elm Street in the much more desirable neighbourhood of River Heights.⁴⁸

Living on Furby for the Panaros had been a time of recovery and in the end they could remain satisfied in their accomplishments and the maturing to adulthood of their large family. The Depression had delayed their move, but still they could move up in a deteriorating real estate market.

P.J. RYKERS AND HOME AS AN ANCHOR IN HARD TIMES

The Depression presented few opportunities for P.J. Rykers, a roomer at 254 Furby Street. On Tuesday 5 June 1934, he called the Winnipeg Free Press to announce that he was beginning a "death fast". The unemployed photographer, artist, and inventor protested his treatment as a single man seeking assistance from the City Relief Department and refused to be "humiliated" further. "It has got to the point," he explained, "that I don't care

48 [Ads], *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 April 1929, 29; 1 May 1929, 30.

anymore. I just feel as if I'd like to go to sleep and never wake again. I am not going to go through the humiliation of undergoing the treatment they give you when you are on single men's relief. I got my last meal ticket from the city Saturday and am not going to ask for another." With that, he consumed his last meal of two slices and a crust of brown bread washed down with a cup of weak tea.⁴⁹

The Free Press gave front-page coverage to Rykers's story. A Dutch immigrant, Rykers had come to Winnipeg in 1919. He had worked in several photographic studios in the city, had sold his paintings and photographs, and had invented a number of adaptations to cameras and photographic equipment. As well, he was a talented musician who played the violin and a harmonium of his own making. The Depression put him out of work. About a year prior to his fast, Rykers had first come to public attention when the Free Press reported, with a combination of humour and indignation, that he had run afoul of the City Relief Department for spending the summer at Grand Beach on Lake Winnipeg—a relief recipient on holiday! In fact, Rykers had taken a job at a resort on Honey Bay painting cottages in return for room and board. Unable to pay for the storage of his art work and inventions, he had continued to seek relief payment to cover the \$4.00 a month rent for his Furby Street room. When Relief officials discovered his situation, they immediately cut him off support.⁵⁰ His room with his intellectual property was Rykers's connection to the creative dignity of his earlier life. He could not sell his art, inventions, and musical equipment, and so, he quit his job, returned to Furby Street, and went back

49 "Furby Street Resident Starts Self-Imposed Death-Seeking Fast," *ibid.*, 7 June 1934, 1.

50 "City Refuses Relief to Man Summering at Lake, despite Threat," *ibid.*, 12 July 1933, 4.



Fig. 2.7: "Winnipeg Resident Starts Self-Imposed Death-Seeking Fast"—
Winnipeg Free Press, 7 June 1934

on relief, which provided a housing and food allowance. Now, he contended unhappily, he was costing the City more.

However, over the next year the personal cost to Rykers proved more than he could bear quietly and he went off relief. Most offensive to him had been the medical inspection required by the Relief Department. Rykers described "the practice of sending all single men before the doctor. That is, they have to undress, and, in the nude, line up in front of the door of the doctor's office, like a lot of animals ready for the slaughter house. This is how the single men of the relief get treated as bohunks by a doctor with bohunk fashion, derived from the fashions of the city relief office, where they treat the men similar."

If Rykers's intent had been to draw public attention to the plight of the single

unemployed, he succeeded. The City Relief Department relented and said that he need not submit to the medical examination to receive relief again. The Department also sent him another meal ticket, an act that renewed Rykers's protest: he sent the ticket back, protesting that the food in the soup kitchen was so awful it made him ill and demanding instead the same monetary allowance for food that single women received. What did persuade Rykers to give up his fast was an anonymous letter from another single man also on relief. This unknown sympathizer sent him \$1.00 for food. That act of generosity touched Rykers, who no doubt felt that he had made his point anyway about the insensitive treatment of the unemployed.⁵¹

What became of P.J. Rykers has not been discovered. A hardworking and creative man, the Depression not only took away his livelihood, it reduced his dignity and that he could not quietly accept. His room, his home, with his equipment, his art, and his inventions preserved his identity, as much as 254 Furby had done the same for Professor Allison.

MANAGING "HIGH CLASS ROOMING HOUSES"

Furby Street south of Portage Avenue remained a modestly attractive residential neighbourhood for those seeking rooms to rent in the 1920s and 1930s. Most commonly, owners contracted out the management of rooming houses, expecting their managers to provide the furnishings, usually purchased from the previous manager, and to maintain the property. In 1927, 270 Furby Street, with twelve unfurnished rooms, was rented for \$70 monthly.⁵² If its tenants were able to rent out nine single-rooms at \$15 a month,—

probably in the lower range of rent that one could reasonably charge in that area of the city,—they would have \$65 gross profit. From that, however, they needed to cover heat, utilities, and repairs, plus cover their own costs of living. Profit margins that seemed attractive in the 1920s proved difficult to sustain in the 1930s and, as James H. Gray recollected in his memoirs of the Depression, landlords always seemed to have trouble making ends meet.⁵³

Phyllis Boehlig remembered visiting her aunt and uncle, Florence and Richard Bell, who managed a large rooming house at 270 Furby in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The owner, James Sheane, a contractor, lived nearby on Langside Street, but he preferred to have a resident manager. To the young girl visiting from the rural suburb of Charleswood, the house with its large front door and the tree-lined, shady street were quite impressive and elegant. Phyllis's grandmother rented a sparsely furnished room in the house, which she kept spotlessly clean and tidy and where she entertained her granddaughter at tea. Once the Second World War broke out, several young married women whose husbands were in military service also rented rooms. The stress and fear were difficult for some to bear and Florence Bell, who previously had been abstemious, occasionally shared a drink and conversation in the evenings with one of them. The Bells stuck it out managing 270 Furby, but in the end they decided to move on and to take employment as hotel managers.⁵⁴

After the war, a recovering economy and a housing shortage made rooming-house management a more attractive

51 "Faster Receives \$1, So Quits Hunger Strike," *ibid.*, 8 June 1934, 1.

52 [Ad.] *ibid.*, 11 Oct 1927, 29.

53 James H. Gray, *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairies*. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), 59-60.

54 Phyllis Boehlig, interview by D. Burley, August 2005.

proposition. In 1947, when Doug McKenzie was two years old, his recently widowed mother Georgina moved into 266 Furby to run it as a rooming house.⁵⁵ When Doug was born, he and his nineteen-year-old mother at first lived with his grandmother and two aunts at 775 Banatyne Avenue. They stayed in the three-room suite with kitchenette on Furby until 1954.

Georgina McKenzie's sister, Laura Mulvaney, worked for a lawyer handling mortgages, but as a sideline she also ran a number of rooming houses, one of which was 266 Furby. She specialized in operating rooming houses that were getting a bit run down—renting the premises and buying the furnishings from the previous keeper. She and her sisters would fix them up, manage them, and then Laura would turn them over at a higher price to a new operator. Doug McKenzie remembered working hard fixing up 226 Furby, helping to hang wall and ceiling paper, among other chores, when he was six years old.

Running the rooming house helped Georgina McKenzie cope with the expenses of being a young mother on her own. She also worked at Kahane's Devonware, a firm that made hand-painted ornamental figurines, and was located just off Main Street. She started there as a painter, but was promoted to supervisor overseeing quality control, for which she was paid \$21 a week. Being away from her mother's house also gave her more freedom to be with her boyfriend, Smitty, who was a taxi driver for Duffy's Cabs. He lived at Furby off and on, getting back together with his wife, Doug McKenzie suspects, after he and Georgina fought, only to return later when her anger faded.

Living in a rooming house was socia-

ble experience for a young boy. Doug remembered there being four families besides him and his mother on the first floor and three more families upstairs. (The Henderson's Directory, however, lists nineteen occupied suites in the side-by-side duplex at 264-266 Furby.) He remembers a few of the people who lived there. Ruby, a widow, had a room in the front and "lived on wine". Mrs. Newell, who seemed to the five-year boy to be in her nineties, regularly invited him in for a very formal and well-mannered tea. Upstairs for a time lived a German family with a son about his own age, but with whom he could not speak. For a child the large number of people under one roof seemed normal: all the houses on the street had roomers and throughout the city rooming houses were common. People all seemed to get along, or perhaps, at his age he was not sensitive to the tensions and strains that arose from sharing space.

In 1954 the McKenzies moved to 401 Balmoral Street. It was another of Aunt Laura Mulvaney's rooming houses. She had operated it, but when she bought her own house, she turned it over to her sister.

CONCLUSION

The interwar years were frustrating and even troubling for many, if not for all Winnipeg families, including those on Furby Street. Social conflict and worsening economic times made getting back to normal after the war, let alone getting ahead, difficult if not impossible. Perhaps sensing the uncertainties of family life, one Furby Street resident, Professor W.T. Allison, was moved to write a nostalgic defence of the patriarchal family. Government policies also held out the ideal of the single-family, detached home as the foundation of citizenship and family life. At the same time, their limited implementation frustrated those who embraced that ideal and left the city's housing shortage

55 Doug McKenzie, interview by D. Burley, August 2005; "Deaths: McKenzie," Winnipeg Free Press, 23 April 1947, 17.

unresolved.

The housing shortage had its effects on Furby Street. Its large houses, less attractive to middle and upper-middle class families because of newer, more appealing neighbourhoods, and too large and too expensive for working-class and lower income families, became rental properties, often divided into rooms and suites. A middle-class family, like the Panaros, might buy on the block, but their ambition, like several other families on the block, was to move to one of the more exclusive neighbourhoods south of the Assiniboine River.

The result was that owner occupancy declined, residential turnover increased, population density increased, and, as Cam Chishom observed, buildings deteriorated and depreciated in values because of lack of maintenance and renovation. For some, home remained a goal for the future, as they moved frequently to find some place to live that was a little better or a little cheaper. For others, like Lottie Thompson, home on Furby was a modest suite that permitted her to maintain a social life and to take pride in the accomplishments of her sons. For those, like P.J. Rykers, home had been pared down to a single room that contained the essential artefacts of an identity and personal dignity, below which they were unwilling to go.

Rooming Homes, Not Rooming Houses: Tenants, Owners, and Their Children, 1944 – 2006

In the closing years of World War Two, Mabel and Eunice Jones [pseudonyms] moved onto Furby Street.¹ Like many young rural Manitobans at the time, they found few prospects to hold them in the small-town where they had been born and raised. They returned to Hamiota regularly to visit family, but Winnipeg became their new home.

Twenty-year-old Mabel Jones arrived first in Winnipeg in 1943. She found employment with Great West Life Assurance, where she worked for the next forty years. For a year, she took room and board at a house on Colony Street in the West Broadway neighbourhood. Then, when her younger sister, Eunice, came to the city to go to teachers' college, the two sisters wanted a place together. Mabel Jones had grown to like the neighbourhood; as she explained, "It was an area that had well-kept homes and nice houses on it and it was within walking distance for me to work and for Eunice walking to the Normal School. We didn't have a car until 1954 so we had to be within walking distance of downtown." They hoped to rent a suite in an apartment block—an appealing option for young women finding their independence in the city. However, they had to put their name on a waiting list for one in the Cambridge Apartments at 303 Furby Street. In the interim, the sisters found a ground-floor, two-

room suite nearby at 287 Furby. The sitting room had a gas stove, so they could prepare their meals, but they had to share the bathroom with other tenants in the house. Still, the rent of \$30 a month was more than what Mabel had previously paid, but on her \$50 a month salary and, with the share paid by Eunice, who was teaching at Cecil Rhodes School, it was manageable for them and they stayed there for five years until a suite in the Cambridge became available.

The Jones sisters liked their rooms and the house. Not only was the location good for work, but other activities were nearby. Shopping was close at hand at the stores along Portage Avenue and Broadway. Several of their old friends from the country lived downtown and they quickly made new friends among those whom they met at their neighbourhood church, Young United. Living downtown brought numerous leisure opportunities close to hand. Nearby on Portage Avenue were the Furby Theatre and Harmon's Drug Store and Confectionery, where the cream pie became a special Saturday treat. The sisters went dancing at the Winnipeg Auditorium and skating with friends. They enjoyed watching the hockey games at the Velodrome in winter and baseball at the stadium in the summer. Several of their relatives played for the rural teams that competed in Winnipeg and their visits were occasions to renew acquaintanceships and learn the news from back home.

1 Mabel Jones and Eunice Jones [pseudonyms], interview by P. Chorney, May 2005.



Fig. 3.1. The Cambridge Apartments, 303 Furby Street, built 1926

Of course, in good weather quiet Sunday afternoons could be spent in Vimy Ridge Park, not far away.

The sisters' preference all along had been to share an apartment and they were pleased when one became available in 1949. They were growing tired of their rooms. When they first moved in, their landlords were a retired couple, Samuel and Rose Maydanik, who lived north of Portage Avenue at 409 Furby Street. The Maydaniks had purchased 287 Furby Street from the Western Trust Company in 1943, which had acquired the property in the middle of the Depression, perhaps as a mortgage foreclosure. At the time, it had been a single family residence, but in the late thirties it was divided into rooms and flats. In 1946 the Maydaniks moved into the other ground-floor suite at 287 Furby, opposite the Jones sisters. In 1949 they sold the house to Mark and Matrona Michaylow, Ukrainian immigrants who had arrived in Canada in the 1920s and had farmed near Minitonas, Manitoba,

until retiring to Winnipeg.² The Joneses found the new owners less congenial. As Mabel Jones explained, they "were of Ukrainian descent and they had a lot of relatives coming and having parties at the house. They were nice people. They liked to dance on Saturday nights." Sometimes the noise of the parties and the accordion, played enthusiastically by son

Wesley, were too much for the two women who lived on the same floor.

They welcomed the move out, but still they appreciated their time at 287 Furby. When asked in our interview what it was like generally living in a rooming house on a street that was lined with rooming houses, however, they were a bit puzzled. Their understanding of "rooming houses" had been formed from more recent descriptions in the media of rundown properties operated by absentee owners. No, they had not lived in a "rooming house" and few such places were on the block in their time. Mabel Jones responded, "I thought there were mostly rooming homes." Eunice agreed, "I thought so too."

THE SECOND TRANSITION

From the mid-1940s through the mid-1970s, the character of Furby Street changed, as families like the Maydaniks and the Michaylows—some moving to the city from the country, others moving up in the Winnipeg housing market—purchased the large houses that had been converted to rooming houses in the 1920s

2 "Obituary: Wesley Michaylow," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 July 2006; "Deaths: Maydanik," *ibid.*, 24 March 1952, 24.

and 1930s and for the most part had absentee owners. Not all of the home buyers were first or second generation immigrants, but most were and many of the immigrants were Ukrainian. Attractive to the mostly working-class buyers was the possibility of living in the houses and renting out rooms to others, whose rents helped to finance home ownership. The houses became very different residences, "rooming homes", as the Jones sisters described them retrospectively. Owners and tenants lived closely together and, if the reminiscences of some of the children who grew up in them that the roomers were just like "family" were romanticized, was an intimacy and personal knowledge and concern about one another that was a kind of home quite different from the nuclear family model developing in the new suburbs.

After the Second World War, suburban development boomed in Winnipeg, as in other Canadian cities. Metropolitan Winnipeg grew from 297,739 in 1941 to 535,480 in 1971 and the fastest growing areas were the suburban municipalities that amalgamated with the City in 1972.³ The growth of the suburbs promoted the growth of home ownership. In response to a survey conducted in 1952 by the Winnipeg Housebuilders' Association to find out "the most important aspect of the modern home", one woman asserted, "Possession."⁴ Families found that more often in the suburbs than in the city. In the suburban municipalities, fifty-nine per cent of dwellings were owner-occupied by 1971. In the City itself, ownership had increased to fifty-three per cent in 1951, but then declined by 1971 to forty-seven per cent.

In many ways, the thirty years after the Second World War were somewhat of "a golden age" on Furby Street. Conventionally, the decline of the downtown neighbourhoods of many North American cities has been attributed to the development of new residential suburbs in the last half of the twentieth century.⁵ Perhaps in the long term that might have been the case, but in the postwar years the appeal of the suburbs reduced the demand for older, downtown housing, and a recovering economy helped those who could not afford a new house, or who wanted to live in a central location, to acquire a home. For the first and only time, the houses on Furby Street became almost entirely a block of home owners. In 1931 only eighteen per cent of homes had been owner-occupied, but ten years later slightly more than half were owner occupied. The rate of ownership increased to eight-seven per cent by 1961 and remained high at seventy-one per cent in 1971.

The neighbourhood changed dramatically in another way. The new home owners stayed on the block for decades in some case. In 1951 only one of the twenty-five families that had occupied a house or semi-detached/duplex dwelling unit in 1941 had been there since 1941. The exception was Catherine Hyslop, who had moved from 297 Furby to 265 Furby after her husband died. Relatively more tenants of flats and apartment suites stayed through the forties, and their rate of persistence did not change greatly through the fifties and sixties. Owners and renters of detached and semi-detached/duplexes did stay put at much greater rate through the fifties, sixties and seventies and were greatly more rooted

3 Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1977), 205.

4 Val Werier, "Sun and Gadgets: Musts for the Modern Home," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 8 November 1952.

5 One of the most recent expressions of this contention is Lawrence Solomon, *Toronto Sprawls: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

than others on the block. Indeed, not only was the block more a block of home owners than ever before, but also it was a more stable block.⁶

Each family had its own experiences, but for all, home differed in one significant way from the suburban model that has become our stereotype of the 1950s: homes were places in which women provided services for roomers and earned income to help secure home ownership and many other expenses associated with raising a family.

LEAVING THE FARM FOR THE CITY

In 1939 James and Catherine Hyslop decided to give up their farm in the McAuley district of Manitoba and move their family of two sons and two daughters to Winnipeg, where several of their relatives lived. They were part of that movement off the land and into the cities that transformed the Prairies following the Depression.⁷ James Hyslop had immi-

grated to Canada from Dumfriesshire, Scotland, in 1906 when he was twenty-six years old and began farming in McAuley three years later. By the time of the Second World War, thirty years of farming, through good times and the bad, had taken their toll on his health. Not seeing much future on the land, perhaps, and feeling both the call of duty and the frightening thrill of war, the Hyslop boys, Abe (Ebenezer) and John, joined the military and went overseas.⁸

In Winnipeg, the Hyslops first lived in the rooming house at 270 Furby Street.



SGT. JOHN HYSLOP, who has been reported killed, according to official information received by his wife, Bird's Hill, Man. He enlisted in the Canadian army at McAuley, Man., in 1939, and went overseas in 1941. He has one small son. His mother and sister reside at 297 Furby street. He was born and educated in McAuley and received his army training at Brandon and Camp Borden. Prior to enlistment he was farming in the McAuley district.

Fig. 3.2, Winnipeg Free Press report of the death of Catherine Hyslop's son, 16 October 1944

⁶ See Appendix

⁷ A number of their neighbours on Furby Street had similar experiences. David and Elizabeth Cannon, for example, moved to the city in 1945 and purchased the rooming home at 288/290 Furby. The World War I veteran had been born in the rural municipality of Archie, Manitoba, in 1896 where he had farmed until he moved to Winnipeg. David sold real estate for a time, while Elizabeth looked after the rooming home, which had over twenty tenants. Perhaps living in proximity to so many people convinced the Cannons to move to nearby 210 Young Street a few years later; they remained close enough to look after the property, but far enough away to have some peace and quiet. However, the Cannons missed the country-life and bought a horse ranch near Teulon, Manitoba, about 1951 and subsequently a farm near Stonewall. Finally ready to retire, the Cannons returned to Winnipeg in 1972. One of their Furby Street tenants, Ethel Duxbury, had also moved from the country. Born in Ontario, she had come west with her parents who settled at Kenton, Manitoba. In 1911 Ethel married Thomas Duxbury and the couple home-

steaded at Imperial, Saskatchewan, for two years returning to Manitoba to farm in the Burnbank area. Thomas died in 1942 and a son was killed in wartime action in 1944. The grieving widow and mother moved to Winnipeg in 1945. "David Cannon," Winnipeg Free Press, 17 May 1977, 59; "Ethel Duxbury," *ibid.*, 16 November 1978, 79.

⁸ "James Hyslop," *ibid.*, 4.

Within a year, they moved across the street and rented 297 Furby. James Hyslop found a job as a caretaker; daughters Isobel and Kathleen worked as drug store clerks; and Catherine took in roomers. They regularly attended their Presbyterian Church, while James became an active curler. Sadly, James Hyslop fell ill, lingered, and then died in mid-November 1942. Catherine kept the rooming house at 297 Furby, with perhaps as many as six or eight tenants at any time over the next six or seven years, and managed to scrimp and save little by little. In the interim, her daughter Kathleen had married David Curwain, a jeweller at Eaton's, and the young couple and their two children lived with Catherine. After the war, son Abe moved back to the block and rented a room down the street at 265 Furby. Perhaps it was his knowledge that the owners were considering selling the building that persuaded his mother to make an offer. She bought it in 1949. Welcome as the income from the boarders was, she still needed her job as a short-order cook at Karr's Drug Store, just around the corner on Broadway.

The "rooming home" was small and the space crowded. The Hyslops lived on the first floor, and on the second floor were several rooms and a shared bathroom, while the third floor was a self-contained suite with kitchen, living room, and bathroom. Besides the five family members, city tax assessment records indicate the presence of between four and eight roomers.

Historians examining working-class boarding houses, especially ethnic ones, have contrasted the memories of children growing up among so many unrelated residents with the often unspoken concerns of their parents for the safety and well-being of their children, especially



SGT. JOHN HYSLOP

who was incorrectly reported killed in action in a story appearing in Monday's edition of the Free Press. He has been reported wounded in action according to official information received by his wife, at Bird's Hill. His mother and sister reside at 297 Furby street.

Fig. 3.3. Winnipeg Free Press correction, 18 October 1944

their daughters.⁹ None of the three women interviewed for this project who lived in boarding houses as children expressed any recollections of danger or worry—just the opposite. But that did not mean that their parents did not try to manage the situation. Cathy Hoekstra, Catherine Hyslop's granddaughter, remembered enjoying growing up among so many people. "We had a lot of boarders, a lot of women. To me they seemed older then, but probably they were twenty-five or thirty." After school, she remembered, "I'd run up to see Mrs. Hedley, because

9 Donna Gabaccia, Franca Iacovetta, and Fraser Ottonellie, "Laboring across National Borders: Class, Gender, and Militancy in Proletarian Mass Migrations," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 66 (Fall 2004): 69; Stacey Zembrzycki, "'There were always men in our house': Gender and Childhood Memories of Working-class Ukrainians in Depression-era Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 60 (Fall 2007): 85, 96-8.

she had cake.” It was like having a house full of aunts to indulge a little girl, she mused.¹⁰ A preference for women boarders created a more secure environment for the boarders themselves and also for a daughter.

Her parents’ desire for a place of their own in the suburbs revealed their preference for a different model of home. Cathy Hoekstra remembers that her father especially was ambitious to get ahead and better himself and his family. She remembered, “Dad wore a shirt and tie every day of the week”—to work Mondays to Saturdays and to Young United Church, just down the street, on Sundays. After church, he enjoyed the ceremony of Sunday dinner. Kathleen and her mother prepared the meals all week, but on Sunday he cooked the roast himself and, still in his white shirt, sharpened the knife and carved it at the table as the family watched—just as thousands of middle-class families did across Canada in that era. In 1959 David opened his own jewellery store in Transcona and moved his family to that growing suburb.

Catherine Hyslop stayed at 265 Furby Street, but the following year she sold the house to a young couple, Stanley and Mildred Belluk. The Belluks took over the “rooming home” and for a year or two one of their tenants was Catherine Hyslop. She missed her children and grandchildren, however, and so, she too moved to the suburbs, first into an apartment in Transcona and then in with her daughter and family.

A BETTER LIFE

If older families retiring from rural Manitoba were attracted by the possibility of operating rooming homes on Furby Street, so too were first and second generation immigrants, many of whom were



Fig. 3.4. Home of Catherine Hyslop, 265 Furby Street

of Eastern European heritage. Working hard at trades or labouring jobs, many moved through the housing market and the city, renting in Winnipeg’s North End or Point Douglas before buying a home. The rent paid by boarders was more than additional income and more than work for the women who provided domestic services. For many home owners, it replicated their personal experiences as boarders, a commonality that made the landlord/tenant relationship more than a financial one. As well, those families who moved into the West Broadway neighbourhood did not forget their origins. They remained connected to their ethnic communities, with their religious and cultural organizations, and they remembered the economic difficulties and the prejudice they had experienced as newcomers.

In 1948 Omelian and Mychalina Monastyrski bought the two-and-a-half-storey house at 305 Furby and moved in

10 Cathy Hoekstra, interview by D. Burley and P. Chorney, February 2005.

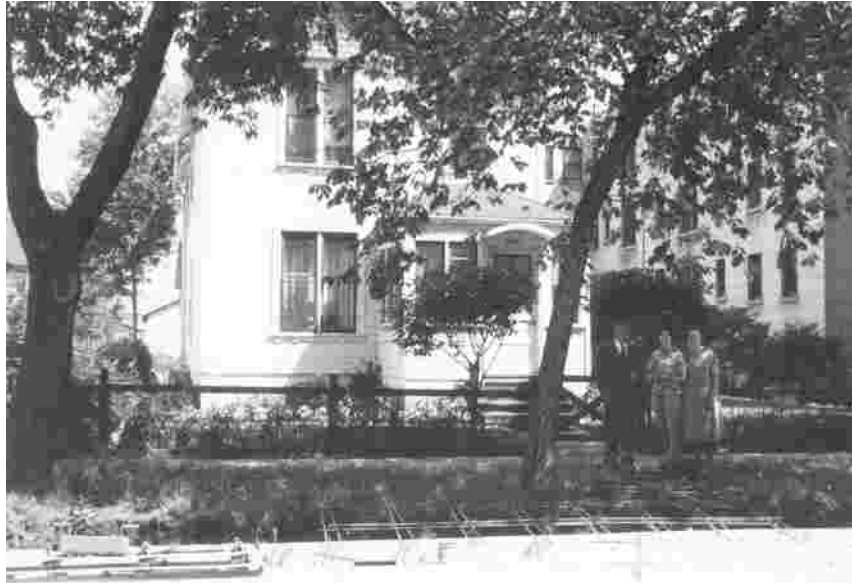


Fig. 3.5. Omelian and Mychalina Monastyrski in front of 305 Furby Street, 1962

with their fourteen-year-old son, Taras.¹¹ They were not the first immigrant family on the block. The Martynchuks had bought the house next door at 307 Furby two years earlier, the same year as the Kushnirs bought 282 Furby. The Mankewicz family purchased 311 Furby in 1943 and moved in 1946. The Maydaniks bought 287 Furby in 1944 and moved in two years later. Nor were the Monastyrskis the last immigrant family on the block. Harry and Mary Herchie bought 276/278 Furby in 1948, and in the same year the Menzyks bought 257 Furby. Several times 254 Furby changed hands: the Kolts bought it in 1950, the Mignaccas in 1952, the Wensels in 1955, the De Loofs in 1976. Similarly, from 1953 through 2002, 271 Furby was owned by the Hrycynuiks, the Sereduiks, and the Yaremchuks (Yaremczuk). The Barkowskis moved into 261 Furby in 1956. The Cannons, retired farmers, sold 288/290 Furby

11 Taras Monastyrski, interview by P. Chorney and I. Keenan, May 2005.

to the Kusins and the Gurinows in 1953.¹²

The Raczenkos, who had purchased 297 Furby in 1956 from the Wowkowyches, sold their home in 1969 to the Correias, the first of several Portuguese families who owned or rented on the block and in the larger neighbourhood. But none of these immigrant families resided as long on the block as

the Monastyrskis. Mychalina stayed on after her husband died in 1988, until somewhat reluctantly she moved into a seniors' home in 1994. She had lived on the block longer than anyone encountered in this study, forty-six years.

Omelian and Mychalina Monastyrski were born in a small village in western Ukraine southwest of Ternopil. They

12 "Gurinow" was a pseudonym adopted by Peter Trimpolis. A Ukrainian, whose family was persecuted under Stalin's regime, Trimpolis had been transported to labour camps in the Soviet Union before World War Two. To prevent too close surveillance by the secret police and to avoid military service, he moved from place to place as he could, adopting false identities as he went. In 1942 he was conscripted into military service and fought for a time before being taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans. At the end of the war, he was placed in a displaced persons camp. Fearing what might await him if he returned to Soviet Union, he was able in 1946 to immigrate to Canada. He found work on construction projects in northwestern Ontario and Manitoba, before finding a job as an electrician at the Canadian National Railways shops. Only once after years of security in his Canadian home did he feel sufficiently comfortable to revert to his real name. Peter Trimpolis, *My Rocky Road of Life* (Winnipeg: P. Trimpolis, 2000).

married in 1928 and, as Taras Monastyrski remembered their explanations, they wanted "to make a better life" by immigrating. They studied reports about Canada in the newspapers and knew others who were immigrating. Shortly after their wedding Omelian Monastyrski left. Like other newcomers in the 1920s he was obliged to work two years as a farm labourer. After serving his time on farms in Saskatchewan, he came to Winnipeg where his wife joined him in 1930. They rented a house on Stephen Street in Point Douglas, which at the time was a Ukrainian neighbourhood where they did not need to speak English. It was also close, just across the Louise Bridge, from the Swift's meatpacking plant where Omelian Monastyrski, like many other Ukrainians, found work. Later he got a better, though at first seasonal, job as a labourer with the Winnipeg School Division, which hired its own crews for concrete work. To supplement his wages he took a part-time job delivering groceries for the Ukrainian National Co-op in Point Douglas. Unfortunately, while working for the co-op, Monastyrski was injured when the delivery truck in which he was a passenger was in an accident with a bus. After almost a year, the court awarded him compensation, but the delay revealed some of the risks that working people confronted.¹³ He was able to secure full-time employment with the school division, laying sidewalks, patching floors, and other projects, although he continued to take on extra work. School trustees, knowing his work for the board, would hire him on the weekends to put in sidewalks and driveways at their residences. Mychalina Monastyrski too worked hard at plants not far from their home, the Swift's

chicken eviscerating plant and the Winnipeg Cold Storage warehouse.

The Monastyrskis moved several times in their first decade together in Winnipeg, all within Point Douglas. They rented houses on Sutherland Avenue and Rover Avenue, before buying a house at 57 Heaton Street in South Point Douglas. Home ownership was important for the Monastyrskis and for their circle of friends. As their son reflected on their ambitions, "There were some people who were shrewd businessmen and they got into it early. And the others would look at this and say, hey, he's doing well. So they all followed his good example...All of our acquaintances knew it was important to own a home. At the end of the year why have [twelve] rent receipts when you could have [twelve] pieces of equity. Most of the people we knew bought houses. The others maybe we didn't associate with, they went another way...Our friends wanted a proper life in Canada."

One reason that people could do well from owning a home was that they could take in roomers. The house on Heaton had space for roomers; the house on Furby was better and bigger, with even more space, and, as Taras Monastyrski explained his parents' motives for moving, "They wanted to better themselves." Two of their roomers moved with the family and, because at times they had as many as six roomers, Mychalina Monastyrski quit working outside the home; there was enough housework for her to do, along with doing the laundry for some of the roomers and tending to the garden. For a time in the 1950s the Monastyrskis in partnership with one of their tenants who was a carpenter bought a rooming house on Sherbrook Street north of Portage Avenue and Mychalina took on the management of that property, maintaining and collecting the rents. When their partner decided to marry and move out, he needed his investment back and so they

13 "Three Hurt as Bus and Truck Collide," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 January 1942, 5; "\$664 Is Assessed in Damage Claim," *ibid.*, 7 December 1942, 3.



Fig. 3.6. *Mychalina and Omelian Monastyrski in their garden*

sold, not with much regret since it was more difficult managing a property at a distance.

They never had any serious problems with their Sherbrook Street roomers, other than the occasional tenant who skipped without paying the rent. But the relationships were different. Those who lived upstairs at 305 Furby, Taras Monastyrski described as “almost family”. Two of the roomers were carpenters and when the house needed modification or repairs and when a new garage was built, “we’d get the boys to help out.” Renting rooms was for many a stage in their life cycle until they married. Some roomers were already married, but came from rural areas and moved ahead of their families to get work, get started, and find a place. Monastyrski thought that his mother “was like a mother to these people. Any time they’d come in late she’d let them know. ‘Hey, what are you doing coming in late!’ In a joking fashion she’d get after them.” A son, especially in his recollections, might not always have appreciated that a landlady’s cajoling could sometimes irritate a roomer. She probably felt it necessary on occasion to bring late hours to her

tenants’ attention because their comings-and-goings might inconvenience others in the house. But doing so reminded a roomer that rent did not buy independent living. Still, many tenants developed an attachment to their landlords. When they moved out after their families arrived or when they married, they came back to introduce the Monastyrskis to their spouses. Over time fewer people were inter-

ested in rooming; “that style of living was dying off in the eighties and nineties,” Monastyrski observed. There were university students, some from the West Indies. By the 1980s and 1990s Mychalina wanted to cut down on her work anyway and so they had only two roomers.

One of the chores around the home that Mychalina Monastyrski loved was gardening. An attraction to the property had been the half lot to the south of the house that was perfect for a large vegetable patch in the rear and flower garden on the side and front of their lot. People stopped on the street to admire the garden and strike up conversations. The tenants in the apartment building next door enjoyed the garden view from their side windows and their compliments usually earned gifts of vegetables at harvest time. Such friendly relations with neighbours made the apartment dwellers an informal “neighbourhood watch” who observed comings and goings on the street from their higher vantage point, just as those who worked in their yards observed the comings and goings on the street. When Mychalina Monastyrski was on her own and the neighbourhood was changing, that surveillance provided a sense of security for her and for her son.

The Furby house also appealed to the Monastyrskis because of its location. Be-

ing close to shopping, especially Eaton's and the Bay department stores, made running the household easier. They never owned an automobile, and the streetcar and bus routes along Portage Avenue made getting around the city easy, especially maintaining connections with Point Douglas and the North End. They kept up their attendance at St. Michael's Ukrainian Orthodox Church on Disraeli Street until the new Holy Trinity Church opened on Main Street in 1951; by bus they were just steps away at each end of the trip from their destinations.

Public transportation also conveyed them to the variety of activities in the Ukrainian community that were central to their personal and cultural identities and their networks of friends. They were proud Ukrainians. Chafed by reaction to his "foreign" name, Omelian Monastyrski did accept being called "Bill" at work, although he probably preferred Omel for short, and occasionally employed humour when his last name was misunderstood. Once when the police were called to investigate an accident at the school where he worked, the officer taking his statement asked him to spell his name. He replied, "B.I.L.L.—stupid!" The story spread quickly through the school division as another example of Bill's prickly humour.

As Taras Monastyrski remembered, "Dad was involved in the cultural activities and mother was involved in the church activities and doing volunteer work." Omelian Monastyrski actively participated in a Ukrainian cultural and literary institute for which he helped produce and performed in plays. He especially loved singing and belonged to several church and concert choirs. Mychalina and Omelian made sure that their son went to Ukrainian school in the evenings and on weekends so that he would learn their language and heritage. As he recalled, "Ukrainian dancing was my sport." The

commitment to church and homeland grew firmly and strongly in Taras Monastyrski. In 1960 he was elected president of the Manitoba division of the Ukrainian Youth Association.¹⁴ He continued to be active in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, encouraged his children to learn the language, and took pride in their attachment to Ukraine and their Ukrainian identity.

Commitment to their son's education was an important component of the Monastyrskis' pursuit of a "better life". His parents did not want him just "to be somebody on the street." That attitude, Taras believed, was typical of their Ukrainian community and was encouraged and exemplified by the priests, themselves well educated. "All the parents made sure that their children got an education," he observed. "They would work two jobs or have several rooming houses to insure it." His achievements contributed to his recognition as a promising student and not just the son of immigrants. Although he never felt any prejudice in the neighbourhood or at school, he admitted, "I wasn't one of the inner circle of kids, because, you know, Taras Monastyrski is a non-WASPy name. Hey, I was a good student, always got complimented by the teachers....I wasn't part of the clique." In 1955 he went to study engineering at the University of Saskatchewan. After graduation, he moved back, although his work required that he be away from the city, so that often he was only home on weekends. When he got married in 1964, he and his wife lived in an apartment on the second floor.¹⁵ In 1965 they bought a house in East Kildonan where they raised their two daughters and two sons.

14 "Ukrainian Youth Elect Monastyrski," Winnipeg Free Press, 14 November 1960, 5.

15 "Weddings: Monastyrski – Sych," *ibid.*, 15 February 1964, 17.

Living on Furby for the Monastyrskis was in many ways a success. As Taras Monastyrski described it, "Even though it wasn't a classy house, the family was warm." His parents, as they grew older, were reluctant to move out. In the early 1980s a developer who bought the three houses to the north of 305 Furby made them an offer of \$60,000 for their home. At first Omelian Monastyrski refused; he did not want to move. But then he started worrying that the developer and subsequent property owner might remain angry with him for not selling and become difficult neighbours. When he offered to sell, the plans had been completed and other houses were demolished. The Monastyrski house was no longer wanted.

After her husband died in 1988, Mychalina Monastyrski stayed on and did well keeping the place. But her security was a concern for her son who wanted her to move to a seniors' residence. The turning point occurred when someone broke into the house while she was there. One of the roomers phoned the police and the burglar jumped out of the second-floor window when they arrived. Mychalina admitted, "I guess I gotta move out." She would not leave immediately because of her cat. One day in 1994 she phoned her son to say, "I'm ready to go....The cat died." She moved into a Ukrainian retirement residence, St. Josephat Selo-Villa on McGregor Street in the North End.

After his mother's death in 1996, Taras Monastyrski and his son Tim, into whose name title passed, rented 305 Furby out. "We didn't want to put too much money into this house because we wanted to get rid of it," he explained. But that proved difficult as property values plummeted in the inner city, while assessed values for municipal taxes fell more slowly. In 1998, fifty years after Mychalina, Omelian, and Taras Monastyrski moved in, they sold the house for \$10,000

to the owner of the apartment building next door, who demolished the house.

AN IMMIGRANT'S STORY

José Correia and his parents, Joachim and Maria, moved into 297 Furby in 1969.¹⁶ José was sixteen years old. He and his mother had emigrated the year before from the Algarve region of Portugal, joining Joachim who had come to Canada in the late fifties or early sixties to work seasonally on Canadian National Railways track crews in northern Alberta. He had been back and forth regularly since then to be with his family. His earnings had supplemented the income that the Correias earned from the farm in Portugal, but their decision to immigrate as a family was motivated by more than financial considerations.

José Correia explained, "I became of the age of sixteen and I was the only son and back then it was when Portugal was in war in the colonies and he decided then to bring my mum—in order for me to come my mum would have to come...; that was the immigration rules...Otherwise if I wouldn't immigrated then...you had to join the army and six months later you'd be in Angola, Mozambique...that was really the main reason."

After their arrival in Winnipeg, they rented a suite in a house at 641 Maryland Street, between Sargent and Ellice Avenues—in an area that housed a significant Portuguese community. From his earlier time in Canada, Joachim Correia had become familiar with Winnipeg. The city was "a hub" or "base" for immigrants from his region of Portugal, and personal contacts, who helped him obtain employment, drew him to Winnipeg in the first place. The Correias looked around in that area to buy a house, but the bus con-

16 José Correia, interview by D. Burley and I. Keenan, 13 July 2005.

nections and proximity to downtown shopping made West Broadway a more attractive location. A few months later they bought the house at 297 Furby where they stayed until 1978. Several years after they moved in, after he had started working, José's fiancée, Maria, came over from Portugal and they married.

Not long after the Correias bought 297 Furby, by coincidence the Barros family, also from the Algarve, moved into the house just two doors south of them. Around the same time and over the next few years, other Portuguese immigrants moved into the neighbourhood. Not in the heart of the Portuguese community, the neighbourhood nonetheless was close enough to make it possible to attend the Portuguese church and to stay involved with the Portuguese association, as well as to shop at the Portuguese groceries on Notre Dame and Sargent Avenues. "To get fish—that used to be the big issue." Once a week the Correias met other families at the grocery when the shipment of fresh fish arrived. Their Portuguese grocery also imported grapes from California each fall so that the Correias and other immigrants could continue, as they had done at home, to make wine.

As for other immigrant families who moved onto Furby, the opportunity to rent out the upper floors was an attraction and helped to make mortgage payments. On their second floor, the Correias rented a suite to a couple who had moved in when they married and stayed there until retirement—more than thirty years, before the Correias bought the house and after they moved out. Similarly, on the third floor was a single man who rented



Fig. 3.7. The Correia home, 297 Furby Street

there for years. "Back to those days the tenants in those houses...the tenants would stay forever... They continued there until they went into homes," Correia reflected.

Owners and tenants enjoyed their own privacy, but still they took an interest in one another. Correia observed, "We would help each other." After his daughter was born, Mrs. Dola who lived upstairs would baby-sit for them. They were tenants, "but became like family." For immigrants, they were also an important resource, explaining how things were done in Canada, where different services could be found, and generally helping with the inevitable adjustments to a new country.

Once they had their house, the Correias became part of the network that helped other immigrants from Portugal adjust to Canada. Throughout their time on Furby, they always had one or two or

three people—relatives, friends, friends of friends—staying with them for a month or two. They had an extra room on their floor and finished another one in the basement for visitors. When they found work and “got on their feet”, they often stayed in the neighbourhood.

Owning their house also made gardening possible. Unlike their Portuguese neighbours, the Correias did not build a coop to raise chickens and rabbits, but they did grow a lot of their own vegetables. And the garden at 297 Furby was very fertile, producing two crops a season: being a small lot it was sheltered and the family enriched the soil with compost and the mashed remains of their grapes. Everyone—or at least eighty per cent—on the street, Correia remembers, had gardens, although the Portuguese and the Ukrainians raised different vegetables. Everyone grew tomatoes, but the former liked kale, and the latter cabbage and cauliflower. As good neighbours, of course, they shared their surplus.

José Correia went north to work with his father, but returned after a few months to go to school at Tech-Voc and later Daniel McIntyre High School. He studied English and also welding, electricity, and drafting—just “the basics” of each, he explained, because he needed to work. While in school, he found a part-time job with the Winnipeg branch of Richards-Wilcox, a commercial and industrial overhead door company. Subsequently he worked part-time as a janitor for Bee-Clean Building Maintenance, an institutional cleaning company. A year later, finished with school, he started full time with Bee Clean. By the mid-1970s he had become an area supervisor and held a controlling interest in Bee-Clean Manitoba. With a partner from Edmonton, he built Bee-Clean into the largest institutional



Fig. 3.8. 287 Furby Street

leaning firm in Canada.¹⁷

In 1978 José Correia felt that the family could afford to move to the suburbs and they purchased a home in Southdale, in southeast Winnipeg. His parents moved with them temporarily, but his mother, who would never have emigrated had it not been in her son's interests, wanted to move back to the Algarve. She had worked briefly in the garment industry, but preferred the farm and her chickens. Her garden provided some relief and satisfaction, but she hated Winnipeg's winters, stayed inside, and felt isolated. Having seen their son established in life—married and with his wife and children in their own home, and in business—they could return to Portugal. Joachim Correia continued, however, to work seasonally on the rail crews, returning to his original pattern of going back and forth from Portugal for several more years. José Correia and his family visited the Algarve, but Winnipeg became home, where he built his life, married, and raised children.

17 Bryant Avery, “Janitorial Kingpins Clean Up,” *Edmonton Journal*, 11 October 2003.

Correia kept the family house at 297 Furby as a rental property. He had already bought and sold properties in the neighbourhood, buying run-down places and fixing them up. With long-term tenants, rental properties could be a good investment. In 1979 he and his wife bought 283 Furby and 287 Furby in 1992. José thought that holding three adjoining properties would generate some revenue and might ultimately present some development opportunities. Some of the first tenants were Portuguese immigrants who had been living with them and several stayed in the rental suites for several years.

But changes in the neighbourhood and an increase in vandalism, made it difficult to retain tenants in the 1990s. The turning point, Correia speculated, occurred when the welfare office opened on Broadway, just around the corner, and attracted a transient population of home-seekers to the neighbourhood. Experiencing difficulties in keeping tenants and often having to repair the damage they left, he decided to rent as much as possible to his employees, even reducing their rents to induce them to stay. "But then they started to become intimidated." As well, what he saw as increasingly stringent and poorly thought out city regulations further diminished the profitability of inner-city rental housing in the 1990s. "We were basically subsidising those homes for the last ten years.... It was a huge change in twenty years." The turning point occurred when the police contacted him about one family of tenants, not among his employees, whose activities they were investigating. The house had developed a reputation in the neighbourhood as a gang house and centre for drug deals. "The lo-



Fig. 3.9. Kitchen in third-floor flat, 287 Furby Street, after tenants moved out.

cal police patrol person called me one time and told me what was going on there—We gotta get out of this.... We can't fix it." He investigated the possibility of donating the houses to the University of Winnipeg, which was just beginning to develop student housing in the neighbourhood, but when nothing happened, he sold the two properties, and donated the third, to the Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation.

After more than thirty years, almost his entire time in Canada, José Correia severed his connection with Furby Street.

The Last of their Generation

In 1960 Stanley and Mildred Belluk moved into 265 Furby.¹⁸ Stan Belluk was a carpenter who had grown up in Beausejour, Manitoba. Mildred came from Starbuck, Manitoba. Like so many small-town young adults in the 1950s, they both moved into the city when they were about eighteen. Mildred worked as a waitress at the popular Barbecue Restaurant, across

18 Janice Belluk, interview by P. Chorney, April 2005.

from Eaton's, beside the Metropolitan Theatre. They met at the restaurant and began seeing one another. They married and for awhile lived in a bed-sit with kitchenette on Hargrave Street. Then they moved into the house on Furby, where their daughter, Janice, was born shortly thereafter and a son two years later.

The Belluks soon fell into a regular routine. The house required some repairs and Stanley applied his skill as a carpenter to fixing it up in the evenings and on the weekends. Mildred who worked from 7:00 PM to 11:00 PM at the restaurant took care of the house and the roomers during the day. After her husband got home from work, the family had dinner together before Mildred had to catch the bus for work. On Fridays, Stan picked her up in the car after work. Twice a month they drove to the new Co-op supermarket on Wall Street for groceries and household necessities; when they ran short of something, they shopped in the neighbourhood, at the smaller Safeway store around the corner on Broadway. The children easily fitted in with the other youngsters on the block and enjoyed activities at the Broadway Optimist Community Club, where Stan was a board member. Since they resided in a central neighbourhood, there were numerous small businesses nearby where Janice Belluk could seek part-time employment. When she was old enough, she took a job at a Broadway pharmacy.

The Belluks routine was a balancing act that co-ordinated the schedules of family members who worked for wages at different times away from the home and who also work around the home to earn more income, either directly through renting rooms or indirectly through renovations, maintenance, and housekeeping that made renting rooms possible. The income from the roomers, who were a mix of single men, immigrant women, and single mothers, helped considerably to estab-

lish the Belluks in their home. By the mid-1970s, however, they felt more secure financially and decided that now that the children were in their teen years, the family needed more space and more privacy. As Janice Belluk recalled, "My parents just made a decision not to have roomers in the house. We called them roomers back then. It was hard. Some people had been there since I was little. I don't remember why my parents exactly decided that. Maybe because my brother and me were both getting older and wanted somewhere to have our own space." After the roomers left, she and her brother got their own rooms on the second floor, and she was especially excited to have her own space and to help select furniture for it.

By the mid-1980s, the Belluks decided that they no longer needed such a big place and the heating and maintenance costs that went along with an older house. The suburbs beckoned. They found a bungalow on Brewster Bay in Transcona. However, by that time the inner-city was becoming increasingly perceived as a run-down area, with the range of social problems associated with poverty. They confronted considerable difficulty in attracting interested buyers. As well, the suburbs proved less satisfying than they had hoped. Mildred Belluk especially hated the longer bus ride to and from the Barbecue Restaurant where she still worked. After only six months, they moved back to 265 Furby. Janice moved out in 1985; but her parents stayed on Furby until their deaths, Stan, in January, 1995 and Mildred, not long after, in November. After their mother's death, the children sold the family house.

By the 1990s very few families remained on the block to take in roomers. One Furby resident, who lived on the block for several decades, worked in a Broadway drug store where she got to know many of the residents of West Broadway who came in to have their pre-

scriptions filled. The nineties, she remembered, seemed to be a decade of funerals; so many of the long-term residents had grown elderly and were passing away.¹⁹ The Yaremchuks (Yaremczuks) were perhaps the last owner-occupants to run a “rooming home”. Rose Yaremchuk purchased 271 Furby sometime in the late 1960s. She and her husband, Sylvester, had farmed in Poplarfield, Manitoba, through the Depression before moving into the city with their four children. After her husband died in 1959, Rose Yaremchuk bought a house at 442 Edmonton Street and found a job as a cleaner at the Winnipeg General Hospital. Not long after, her son Edward and his wife Joyce moved into a rented room at 290 Furby Street. Several years later, her son Walter, who was an automobile mechanic, moved into a rented room at 271 Furby Street. Perhaps his familiarity with the house and the presence of her two sons on the block persuaded Rose to buy 271 Furby. Walter stayed with his mother until he married about 1972 and then he and his wife Gloria rented a flat not far away at 192 Canora Street. Like other women on their own—Catherine Hyslop, for example—taking in roomers was a way for Yaremchuk to make ends meet; she also worked as a kitchen helper in the Viscount Gort Motor Hotel, one of the city’s larger suburban motels. When her son, Edward, was forced to retire early from Modern Dairies because of ill health, he and his wife, Sadie Rebecca—always known as Joyce—moved into 271 Furby.²⁰ Eddie helped keep the house in repair, while Joyce continued to manage the Yamato Restaurant, which she co-owned.

Eddie and Joyce Yaremchuk became



Fig. 3.10. The Yaremchuk home, 271 Furby Street

well-known residents of the block and the West Broadway neighbourhood. They perceived the social changes that were occurring and wanted to do something to help out. Both were active in Young United Church, which as conditions changed in the neighbourhood played an increasingly important role in providing a range of services to the growing number of low-income individuals and families, many of whom were Aboriginal. Joyce Yaremchuk was involved with Native Ministries, AGAPE Table (which provided meals for those in need), and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Her husband’s passion was amateur boxing. A light-heavyweight well-known in provincial sporting circles in the 1950s and 1960s, Eddie Yaremchuk promoted the game after he hung up the gloves. He loved coaching and formed the Pan Am Boxing Club to give his fighters the opportunities to train, to compete across the country and internationally, and to improve their lives. At a testimonial dinner in 2000 honouring his contributions, his friends established the Ed Yaremchuk Scholarship Fund to help young boxers

19 Sandy Hamilton [pseudonym], interview by M. Maunder, April 2005.

20 “Obituary: Ed Yaremchuk,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 April 2001; “Obituary: Sadie Yaremchuk,” *ibid.*, 22 August 2002.

further their education. "He gave everything he had to his fighters and asked for absolutely nothing in return," reported a newspaper article published after his death in 2001.²¹

By the 1980s the Yaremchuk house offered perhaps the last good accommodation on the block for roomers. Doug Crawford [pseudonym], who had moved out of the North End and into the West Broadway neighbourhood with his mother in the 1950s, took a room there in 1986.²² He had lived across the street at 266 Furby for five years. The building had been well maintained by its owner, Peter Neufeld, who responded quickly to his tenants' complaints and evicted those who drank too much or engaged in other disruptive behavior. The new landlord, a numbered corporation, let things slide. "After he sold out," Crawford explained, "I stayed another year....The reason I moved out after six years was they changed owners, and the new owner just didn't want to keep a lid on things like as far as drinking. Once a month, when they got their pension cheques, it was 'Party, Party' for two or three days. I couldn't sleep....The caretaker was a drunk himself. The caretaker was drinking with these people." He stayed at the Yaremchuks until 2002, when Joyce Yaremchuk died and the house was boarded up.

By 2005 only one of the immigrant families who had bought houses on the block remained. Arsène De Loof emigrated from Belgium in 1958 when he was in his early twenties and shortly after he had served two years in the army.²³ His wife Christine came four years later. They had contemplated immigrating to the Belgian Congo, but the war there made them

consider other possibilities. The United States seemed attractive, but a friend, whose brother was in the air force at Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, told him that jobs were available for cabinetmakers, a trade that De Loof had learned in a furniture factory. Once in Portage, however, he had to take labouring work for a moving company because he spoke no English. After a couple of years, he found a job as a carpenter with a Winnipeg construction company.

Until they purchased 254 Furby in 1978, the young couple lived in rooms and small apartments in the downtown area. For a time, they were apartment building caretakers, but gave that up after a robbery. "They stole everything," Christine De Loof explained; "We had to get out of there," her husband added. Not only did their house on Furby offer more room for the De Loofs and their young daughter, its upstairs apartment brought in much welcome rent to help them with the mortgage. They always found stable tenants who stayed for long periods, the last for twelve years. The double garage was another feature that attracted them: Arsène set up his own cabinet making business and Christiane worked with him in the shop. A regular contract with a chain of pet stores for puppy pens gave them a small, dependable trade, but for the most part, their business of making and installing kitchen cabinets, bathroom vanities, and other custom work depended on word of mouth, since they did not advertise. It was "small scale, just to survive," Arsène De Loof explained, but we "always did half-decent—good; we survived....Of course, through the years, some weeks [there was] absolutely nothing." Once the business got going, they needed the rental income less and when their last tenant died, they renovated the apartment for their daughter and her girlfriend. The young women stayed there until the De Loof's daughter married and

21 "Ed Yaremchuk," *ibid.*, 17 April 2001.

22 Doug Crawford [pseudonym], interview by P. Chorney, March 2005.

23 Arsene DeLoof and Christine DeLoof interview by P. Chorney, May 2005.

moved out.

Over the more than twenty-five years that the De Loofs lived on Furby Street, the neighbourhood changed quite a bit. But that hardly bothered them and they never experienced break-ins to their house or workshop. They applauded efforts of one landlord who “cleans out the junk” and evicted troublesome tenants. The De Loofs always kept to themselves, maintaining polite relations with neighbours, but not getting too close. Their main social connections were through the Belgian Club. None the less, for them in their quiet and self-contained way, Furby Street became a home for life together.

CONCLUSION

Furby Street after the Second World War offered a very different variation on the theme of the postwar growth of home ownership. So often pictured as an era of suburbanization and flight from the city, the years from the mid-forties to the mid-seventies also witnessed a significant change in downtown housing tenure. Overall ownership did decline. But in a few neighbourhoods, like Furby Street, it increased to levels comparable to the suburbs. More neighbourhood studies are needed to find places like this block. We might hypothesize, however, that buyers perceived small areas of the city suitable for the “rooming home” model and so pockets of owner occupancy developed. The number of families seeking this kind of accommodation was not large enough to raise the overall rate of ownership in the city. After all, it was a working-class and immigrant and ethnic experience.

Their homes did not much resemble those of the first families, nor did they easily conform to bourgeois notions of privacy. For the immigrant home owners, homes were well within a public sphere frequented by tenants whose presence was both an economic and a social contract.

Memories that they were “like family” might be taken with a grain of salt. For many of us, like the people who grew up on the block, childhood was a very different, less complicated time, and the worries of parents, big and small, often remained concealed. We found little about the stresses and strains that husbands and wives experienced in juggling the demands of work and family life, although three of the immigrant couples did divorce while on the block. Nor have we spoken with very many roomers and tenants, who may have had their own perspectives on being “like family”. But there nonetheless was a reciprocal intimacy and concern among people who in the past had relied upon the assistance of countrymen and women in their adjustment to Canada and who welcomed not just the extra income they earned but also derived satisfaction from helping those who were at a stage they had earlier experienced. In considering lodgers in the early twentieth century, Peter Baskerville has wondered whether the pattern of householders renting rooms to those like themselves in ethnic background contributed to a multicultural mosaic.²⁴ No doubt the multiculturalism that informed government policy in the 1960s and 1970s, and had emerged as practice decades before, was very much lived in the rooming homes of inner-city blocks like Furby Street.

However, the immigrant pursuit of home had a sensitive calculus of financial advantage deeply embedded. To “make a better life” for oneself, one’s spouse, and one’s children necessitated careful decisions, extra work, occasional risks in buying rental properties, and valuing education. Home was not a refuge from the heartless world, but a resource for use in

24 Peter Baskerville, “Familiar Strangers: Urban Families with Boarders, Canada, 1901,” *Social Science History* 25 (Fall 2001): 322-45.

Rooming Homes

prevailing in it. In applying that calculus to the achievement of a "better life", women played a profound economic role and one that distinguished the downtown from the suburbs.

*A Landlady and Her Tenant: Mary Herchie
and Don Dixon*

In 1946, shortly after the end of World War Two, Jean Knight (née Herchie) moved into 278 Furby Street with her parents, Harry and Mary Herchie (Hryciw) and her younger brother, Russell. In a telephone interview with her in May 2006, Knight remembered how sorry she was to leave her many friends on the block of their former house at 511 Boyd Avenue in Winnipeg's North End, but her parents, especially her mother, felt that the West Broadway area was a better neighbourhood and that the new house was much larger and a better investment.¹ Owning both semi-detached sides of the three-storey dwelling at 276 and 278 Furby, the Herchies lived on the first floor of one unit and rented out one- and two-room suites.

An interview with one of the roomers at 276 Furby offers another perspective on life in the house. Don Dixon, who arrived in Winnipeg in 1969, lived there until 1971. His small, modest room became his first home on his own and offered him the comfort and security to sort what had been a troubled childhood and adolescence.

For both landlady and tenant, in their own ways, the rooming house experience became deeply and profoundly embedded in their lives and personae.

"MOTHER SAVED DESPERATELY"

On Boyd Avenue, Mary Herchie had learned that rent from tenants helped to finance home ownership and the insecurity of her childhood reinforced her immigrant desire "to own a part of the earth," as Jean Knight opined. Saving and owning property became an important goal in life for her. As Knight recalled, "mother saved desperately" throughout her life and remained fearful of being poor in old age. Unbeknownst to her husband, a stitcher and leather cutter at Great Western Saddlery, Mary Herchie had scrimped and saved enough out of the housekeeping allowance to put \$3400 down on 511 Boyd in 1942. Harry Herchie thought the small duplex—poorly built in his opinion—was not worth the money, but Mary prevailed, arguing that she had saved the money and she wanted the house. In the midst of World War Two the Herchies bought their first home.

Harry Herchie (originally Gregory Hryciw) and Mary Strowons had married during the depression of the 1930s. Before moving to Boyd Avenue in 1942, they had lived in rented houses, except when occasionally they had to move in with Harry's mother and father. Their parents had emigrated early in the twentieth century from the western Ukraine, in what is now Poland. Both were born in 1908. Harry Herchie's father, a self-

1 Jean Knight, interview by D. Burley, May 2006

employed shoemaker, had himself built the family's four-room house on the northwest corner of Roch Street and Ottawa Avenue in East Kildonan, right on the edge of the prairie as Jean Knight recalled it. Unfortunately, the Herchies lost their house during the Depression because they could not pay their taxes.

Mary Strowons's childhood was difficult. Her father worked seasonally on railroad construction for the Canadian Pacific Railway and was away from his family for much of the year. In 1918 he was working in British Columbia when the influenza epidemic reached Winnipeg. Only Mary survived; her mother and siblings died. Whoever conveyed the sad news to her father that his wife and children had been stricken failed to mention that Mary had not succumbed. Having no reason to return, he kept working in British Columbia for another two years before learning that his daughter was still alive. During that time she was passed on from one reluctant relative to another. Reunion with her father brought only brief relief, since two years later, when she was fourteen years of age, her father was seriously injured at work. Because he was unable to work, at fourteen years of age Mary Strowons had to find a job to supplement his inadequate CPR pension.

The Herchies were the first owner occupants of 276/280 Furby. For thirty years previously, the property had been a rooming home owned by the Eggertsons, Arni Sr. and Jr. The elder Eggertson had been born in Iceland in 1873 and immigrated to Canada in the mid-1880s. He came to Winnipeg from the Interlake in 1887 to complete his education in the public schools and at a business college. Subsequently he became a real estate agent, developer and builder who erected a number of apartment buildings and assembled substantial land holdings in Fort Garry. A successful member of the Icelandic community, he was elected alder-

man for the ethnically diverse Fourth Ward in 1906-7 and also served on the parks board and general hospital board. Some time in the 1920s he transferred ownership of 276/278 Furby to his son. The younger Eggertson, after being invalided in the First World War, became a lawyer and opened a practice in Wynyard, Saskatchewan. His father managed the Furby property until his death in 1942.² By the time the Herchies bought it in 1946, the house had deteriorated and needed considerable upgrading and renovation.

But the building's condition had little effect on their ability to fill it with tenants. They had purchased at a good time, just before real estate values started going up. Winnipeg's wartime housing shortage worsened through the late forties and into the fifties. Returning soldiers, newlyweds who had postponed marriage because of the Depression and war, and young people coming to the city from the country searched for accommodation. Jean Knight remembered the telephone ringing incessantly when her parents advertised a vacancy in the newspaper. The Herchies' single rooms with a hot plate and the larger suites with a kitchenette and bed-sitting room went quickly. So great was the demand that for a couple of years the Herchies even rented their living room to Mrs. Dancho, a young war widow, and her son whom they took pity on when the two just could not find anywhere to live. Sympathetic as they were to their tenant's plight, they also were willing to reduce their own family space to earn a bit more.

And tenants stayed. One of the very first tenants, Charlotte Campbell, re-

2 "Eggertson, Arni," in *Pioneers and Prominent People of Saskatchewan* (Winnipeg: Canadian Publicity Co., 1945), 145; City of Winnipeg Archives, "Pathways to Winnipeg's History," [On-line exhibition], <<http://winnipeg.ca/clerks/docs/pathways/Imagination01/Imagination01Pg09.stm>> [Accessed 16 March 2008]

mained there for nearly as long as Mary Herchie ran the home. Estranged from her family, she came to Winnipeg from the country in her late teens to work in Eaton's catalogue department. Jean Knight felt they became like sisters. Both developed a crush on one handsome young tenant and were disappointed that he was romantically involved with a "cute girlfriend" who was also a roomer.

Tenants stayed not only because there were few choices, but also because Mary Herchie operated a clean and orderly rooming home. She worked hard and did not hesitate to chastise tenants whose behaviour fell short of her expectations. To remind them, if indeed they ever forgot, she posted signs all over—"Please wipe your feet," and so on. Some problems could not be solved with such notices.

Not all tenants were ideal, and with the extension of wartime housing regulations into the late forties, evictions proved difficult. Among the first tenants was one family—father, mother, and son—who rented three rooms on the top floor. They seemed perfect at first: The father had a managerial position at Eaton's. But he was a violent alcoholic who came home drunk and mean after work. Often he could barely stagger up the two flights of stairs and crawled on his hands and knees, collapsing to vomit along the way. When in that condition, he beat his wife and threw her down the stairs. So terrorized was his son that he was too frightened to go outside to play with the children on the block. The Herchies reported him to the police, but in those days the police hesitated to intervene in domestic disputes. It took two years to evict the family.

Demanding though Mary Herchie might have appeared in setting rules, her daughter described her "instinctive generosity". One of her early tenants was a single mother and her eight-year old son—immigrants, Jean Knight speculated,

from Greece or the eastern Mediterranean region. Several months after moving in with her son, Cyril, Mrs. Kopsi's behaviour grew stranger and ever more erratic, suggesting that she was developing serious mental problems. Worried about her health and her son's well-being, the Herchies contacted medical authorities and Mrs. Kopsi was hospitalized. Not knowing whether she would ever get well, they took Cyril into the family. He shared a bed with their son, Russell, and the family dog and greatly enjoyed a more normal family life than he had known for a long time. After six months of institutional care, Mrs. Kopsi recovered and was reunited with her son. Cyril never forgot the uncomplicated and spontaneous kindness of the Herchies, strangers though they had been. He credited Mary with saving his life and kept in contact with her for years, long after moving to Saint Paul, Minnesota. Mary Herchie, perhaps because of her own precarious upbringing, had no questions about what she needed to do for Cyril Kopsi.

The Herchies became acquainted with other Ukrainian families on the block and kept in touch after they moved away. The children played together and puzzled over their differing dialects from the western and eastern regions of Ukraine. That ethnic culture on the street provided some relief from the prejudice too often directed at Eastern Europeans. Jean Knight confessed that she had hesitated to tell people that she was Ukrainian, but her parents urged tolerance and reassured her that "there's good and bad in every nationality," including Anglo-Canadians. Prejudice seemed worse to her when she was in her early and middle years of school in the North End and then at Mulvey School in West Broadway. By her senior years at Gordon Bell High School, she believed, like many children from minority families, that academic achievement left little basis for discrimination. She

studied diligently and read voraciously to excel. Her parents wanted her to become a doctor or a lawyer, but Jean herchie had a talent for art. As a child of four, she had been so disappointed that she could not go to school with her older friends that her parents found the money to send her to a private school run by nuns at St. Alphonsus Roman Catholic Church in East Kildonan, near where they were living at the time. The nuns recognized her budding artistic talent and she won a scholarship to take Saturday art classes at the University of Manitoba. When she turned sixteen years of age in 1953, she decided to quit school and, with a friend, go to Montreal where she found work as a commercial artist. Her parents were opposed, but she wanted her freedom.

The earnings from the rooming house were the product of hard work and the Herchies' own compromises over their privacy. Relations between husband and wife became strained, and not long after Jean Herchie left in 1953 her parents separated and divorced. Harry Herchie moved into a house they had bought at 251 Carlton Street and Mary kept the Furby house. Their son, Russell, stayed with his mother.

In 1955 Russell Herchie, at age seventeen, died tragically in a gun accident. His family always found the circumstances of his unsatisfactorily explained, given their suspicions that it had not been accidental.³ When she was informed of the death, Jean Knight borrowed money to return from Montreal in shocked disbelief and convinced that the incident was some "macabre joke". She found her mother deeply distressed, but supported by her friends. The first night back home, Knight slept in her brother's bed. She wakened not long after 8:00 AM to see him standing at the

3 "Gun that Wouldn't Work Killed Youth," Winnipeg Free Press, 17 January 1955, 1; "Russian Roulette Blamed," *ibid.*, 27 January 1955, 1.

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FARGO NORTH DAKOTA

Fig. 4.1. Winnipeg Free Press advertisement, 7 March 1953

side of the room. When she realized that she could see right through him, she turned away in fear, only to find when she turned back that he had vanished. Later Mary, who had been taking sedatives went for a nap in her son's room. She came out afterward puzzled by a dream in which her son had said, "Ask about my shoulder." Harry Herchie subsequently revealed that when he had identified his son's body, he had wondered about a cut on his son's left shoulder and thought that he should ask about it at the inquest. In the event, he forgot to do so. Those troubled days of remembering her brother, trying to make sense of his loss, and comforting her mother persuaded Jean Herchie that she should return home.

She went to work for her mother. Needing to support herself after her separation, in 1954 Mary Herchie had mortgaged the rooming house to raise capital to invest in a partnership in one of Winnipeg's first Dairy Queen franchises, on Pembina Highway. A relative of friends had worked for Dairy Queen in the United States and possessed the contacts and experience to get the business off the ground with the backing that Mary Herchie provided. The business was profit-

able from the beginning and Herchie, who had always wanted her own business, loved working there and serving customers. The partnership proved more problematic. After four or five years, she recognized that her partner had a gambling problem. She suspected that he had been dipping into the cash receipts, but became aware of the severity of the problem when one day two large men “dressed like gangsters”, daughter Jean recollected, got out of a big Buick and entered the store. Menacingly, one growled at Herchie, “You tell Peter we’ll burn the store if he doesn’t pay his debt.” She automatically let out a loud shriek and attacked them with her broom, driving them out in hasty retreat. Doubting that that would end the consequences of her partner’s gambling, Herchie re-mortgaged her house to buy out her partner.

Running the business presented other risks. Late one evening in May 1959, Jean Herchie and her fiancé Brian Knight dropped into the Dairy Queen for a milk shake after an evening out. Her mother, who has not usually troubled when on her own, confided that she felt as though someone had been watching her for several days. Knowing that her mother took the day’s receipts home—on that night about \$1500—Jean offered to accompany her home to make sure that she got there safely. After they had parked behind the house, and as Herchie proceeded to the door, a large man stepped from the shadows, stuck a gun in her stomach, and told her to be quiet. “This is a stick-up.” Herchie automatically started screaming and kept screaming so loudly that the lights came on in houses up and down the block. Panicking, her assailant wrestled the paper bag that she was carrying away from her. He failed to notice, however, as he grabbed the bag roughly, that Herchie had dropped her purse and her money was spilling from it onto the ground. As he turned to run away with the bag, which

Kids! Look!

**FREE TREAT for Dad
Father's Day June 20**

Boy, oh, boy! Be sure to bring Dad to Dairy Queen on Father's Day. Your Dad deserves a FREE TREAT — and we'll have one for him! ANY 20c SUNDAE

DAIRY QUEEN

"The Cone With the Curl on Top"

CONES • SUNDAES • MALTS • SHAKES • QUARTS • PINTS

3 - STORES - 3

★ **NEW STORE OPENING** ★

475 PEMBINA HIGHWAY
AT DUDLEY AND HUGO
Peter Gabrielow

836 SARGENT AVE. | **390 OSBORNE ST.**
AT BURNELL ST. | AT DON AVE.
C. V. Suxon | Yocom and Lockwood

Fig. 4.2. Advertisement for the opening of Mary Herchie's Dairy Queen, Winnipeg Free Press, 19 June 1954

contained stale luncheon meat for the cat, Jean Herchie tackled him from behind. Pushing her away, he pistol whipped her and knocked her to the ground. As he disappeared down the street, she noticed a bystander in the shadows who, she assumed, was a witness. Despite his reluctance to wait for the police, he provided a statement that said little. Later Jean Herchie suspected that he had been an accomplice on watch at the front of the house.⁴

For a time Jean Herchie worked at the Dairy Queen with her mother, but subsequently she found work as a commercial

4 "He Gets Ham in the Holdup," *ibid.*, 1 May 1959, 1.

artist with Acklands and then Reid and Eibner. She stayed in Winnipeg until she married Brian Knight, a chartered accountant. Eager for a change and travel, the newlyweds moved to Puerto Rico, where Knight's employers had a branch office. On her own again, Mary Herchie continued running her rooming house and the Dairy Queen. Her frugality intensified into self-denial, as she grew more and more frightened of becoming destitute in her old age. She did treat herself, however, to visiting her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren in Puerto Rico. Each winter, after closing the Dairy Queen, off she went for three or four months.

"MY PLACE OF COMFORT AND SECURITY"

Don Dixon moved into a room on the third floor of Mary Herchie's rooming house in September 1969.⁵ He returned in the fall of 2005 for our interview, which was conducted in the space where he had lived for about a year and a half. Major renovations after Westminster Housing Society acquired the property had changed his old room beyond recognition, joining it with another to make a more spacious suite with its own formal kitchen area and bathroom. But he remembered his old home with fondness and with deep appreciation for the significance that living there had in his life. Old, a bit rundown, and cheap to rent—\$32 a month—his room was "very modest", but nonetheless "warm" and "nice", and "the mood of the building was very quiet," as Dixon recalled. "Even though the furniture really wasn't mine, it was very comfortable; it was mine, you know, it was my place, it was my space and it was secure, warm, comfortable." For him, his room was a refuge, which gave him the opportunity to

sort out his life and start his own family.

After a troubled childhood in Toronto and strained relations with his alcoholic father, Dixon had dropped out of school, several times in fact, and worked at "crummy jobs". In the spring of 1969, at age nineteen years, he hit the road, heading west—"a bit of a hippy", as he described himself. Arriving in Winnipeg, he thought he would stay only a short time with a friend who lived in a rooming house on Langside Street, north of Portage Avenue, an area that he noticed even then was "rough". He planned to work and save some money before continuing westward.

Jobs were difficult to find, but Dixon and his friend regularly applied at Casual Manpower to take whatever day labour was available. Even there, getting work was not easy, and he remembers having to show up at 2:30 or 3:00 AM to be assured of getting picked for some "terrible jobs". One assignment that he never forgot was at Dominion Tanneries in St. Boniface. The plant had just received a boxcar load of raw, uncured hides from Mexico. After several days of transport in the July heat, they smelled so badly that the factory's regular workers, Dixon speculated, would not unload them. He and another fellow needed the money badly and had little choice. The stench was so strong that they decided to unload the forty-pound bundles of hides onto pallets as quickly as they could. Finishing early at 2:30 in the afternoon, they hoped nonetheless that they would be paid for a full day, having done what was easily a full day's work, quickly and well. They were out of luck and, even though the foreman was surprised and happy that they had so efficiently done work that others would not, they received no more than the pay for the hours they had put in. Disappointed and tired, Dixon took the bus home, only to become aware gradually that no one was sitting near him because he smelled so

5 Don Dixon, interview by M. Maunder, September 2005.

badly. To add injury to insult, after he got off the bus, two dogs, intrigued by his aroma, excitedly chased him for some distance. Such jobs paid the bills, were experiences, but offered few reasons to stay long in Winnipeg.

After a few months, Dixon's friend wanted to move on and told him that he could dispose of the few household items that he had accumulated. Dixon was leaving, too, so he gathered together the mop and broom, pots and pans, cutlery and other bits and pieces to take to a pawn shop. The load was heavy and awkward for him to carry, but he figured since the articles had cost about \$50 in total, he ought to be able to get something for them. The woman in the pawn shop picked through them and, as Dixon recalled, "She looked at it and looked at it, and finally said, 'You know, this stuff, I'm not that interested in this stuff,' and she said—and I think I have the amount right. If it's not exactly right, it's close—she looked at me and said, 'I'll give you twenty-six cents,' and I thought twenty-six cents, how did she come up with that number?... 'You have to give me more than that,' I said. 'No, that's all I'm givin' ya'.... I guess she thought I wouldn't go to the trouble to take it away." But the offer so incensed him that he did just that; he took it back to the rooming house. An Aboriginal woman, a single mother with two or three children, lived on the bottom floor, and Dixon, who had never really had much to do with her other than saying hello, asked if she would like the items. "She was just absolutely delighted to get all this stuff," he remembered. "I never forgot that, twenty-six cents."

Then in early August Dixon hitchhiked to Calgary to visit friends and see the mountains. After about a month or so, toward the end of September, he started giving some thought to where he would spend the winter. "There really didn't seem to be any opportunities in

Calgary," he thought, and he did not want to return to Toronto. He was familiar with Winnipeg, but more importantly he had been corresponding with a young girl he had met there, fifteen year old Jamie Nelson. So he caught a stand-by flight back to Winnipeg.

Leaving his bag at an Italian fruit and vegetable store on the north side of Portage Avenue where he had previously shopped, Dixon walked the streets looking for a place to live. He saw the "Rooms for Rent" sign posted outside 276/278 Furby and decided to inquire. He did not meet Mary Herchie, but dealt with an elderly woman who looked after the building and tenants for her. In order to come up with the \$32 a month rent, he had to pawn his camera. The Main Street broker "wanted to give me quite a bit of money for it and I wanted to keep it as low as possible because I wanted to make sure I could repay it because I wanted the camera back. He recognized it was a very good camera."

Finding work took Dixon about a week and a half and he had used up almost all of his money when he took a job on the production line at Storm-Tite Industries, a manufacturer of aluminium doors and windows on Wall Street in the city's west end. "I was almost out of money by the time I got that job.... I went there a few days and asked for a bit of an advance. I mean, when you look back on it, it's funny because you were operating on such tight margins.... I didn't have money; I ran out of money and didn't have enough money for bus fare to get to work, so I asked him for an advance. So he gave me an advance." That job was seasonal and lasted a few months before he was laid off. After a few weeks, he found another job with the Moyer Division of Vilas Industries, a school supplies company. At first he made bulletin boards, but later he worked in the warehouse.

A Landlady and Her Tenant

Earning some money and happy to see Jamie Nelson again, Dixon settled into his new place. "It was very, very modest here," he recollected. "It was just one room with a bit of a partition and a stove, a little, tiny little gas stove, and refrigerator in the hall, which I shared with a woman down the hall." For furnishings, the room had a small kitchen table under the window and a fold-out couch, although he soon got a mattress to put behind the partition. He had no television or record player, just a small radio, and there was no telephone. A few posters on the walls, some plants, a school desk, and a tie-dyed sheet that he and Jamie made draped over the partition added personal touches. "That," Dixon explained, "was the kind of way you lived, all right, I mean, you lived with very modest furniture, and you just got by, you know, you just made do with very, very modest amount of stuff. And that was almost at the time a kind of badge of honour, you know; it was a very anti-materialistic kind of period....The philosophy of the day was that materialism wasn't important." Still, he thought, "You were able to put your own sense into the space."

Nor was he much concerned about the condition of the house. "There really wasn't a lot of upkeep being put into the building," he remembered. "The inside of the building basically looked to me like it would have looked like when it was constructed." Still everything—the plumbing and heating, kitchen appliances, the storm windows—functioned well. "I'm not saying that the place was run down but I don't think she was putting a lot of money back into the place."

The tenants, about half of whom had been long-term residents, were quiet and kept to themselves. Dixon remembered a woman in her late thirties who seemed always seemed to engage in quite animated conversations with herself, but became rather embarrassed when others no-

ticed. His neighbour, with whom he shared the refrigerator, often gave him home-made pasta, which she used to dry on cords strung across her room. "Those people wouldn't put with a lot of rowdy behaviour," he opined. They got no trouble from Dixon and they tolerated the other hippy who lived on the second floor, even though they might have disapproved of his girlfriend regularly staying over night.

Dixon's quiet, warm room became home. "And—but, it became, you know, it became home and it became home in the cold, cold winter. That 1969–1970 was a very cold winter, as I recall....That was quite unusual for me coming from Toronto. I had never experienced that kind of harsh, harsh coldness before. And although I didn't have very much money and it was kind of difficult, and sometimes I wasn't sure exactly where I was going to get my next meal from, it was quite a relief actually. I felt it was quite a nice change." In his room he had the time that he needed to think, about life, about his family, about his childhood, and about himself. That was what he wanted and needed.

Dixon explained, "I wanted to get away from Toronto. I had grown up in circumstances in Toronto that were less than ideal. My father was an alcoholic and it was, you know, an unpleasant situation a lot of the time....We were always well taken care of and well fed and it was kind of, I always described it as being kind of, a mixture on the one hand of being sort of idyllic and on the other hand mixed with moments of sort of terror based on what was going on inside my house and it wasn't that I was physically abused or anything like that. It's just that my dad was a, was a cranky alcoholic and would come home and terrorize people. And it was extremely upsetting to live in that environment. But on the other hand I was well cared for. I mean I grew up with, my

mother was a loving mother....I don't want to give the impression that my childhood was a total terrible disaster, it wasn't, but it was disturbing enough at least for me that I, I, it had a profound effect on me and I wanted to do something different...It was a searching process...and it was very very trendy at the time, too, I mean, everybody was searching and questioning." Dixon needed to escape, "to make a break and do those kinds of things that young men want to do; they want to get out into the world and create their own life... I was very happy, and relieved almost, to be on my own." With that distance, he tried to understand his father and resolved that he would never be like him.

Part of his father's problem, Dixon figured, was a generational and class one. "It was a kind of blue collar, it was a blue collar, middle class, sort of lower middle class—but that doesn't describe it very well. My dad was a blue collar worker, my mother was a switchboard operator actually and we lived in a, you know, middle class kind of neighbourhood in north Toronto [Willowdale], modest house." His father went to work every day at a job that he hated. "My dad was a pretty intelligent guy," he explained, "and he was, he was working in a job that was not particularly challenging to him and he worked with people that he didn't have a lot of respect for and I think that was part of what troubled him. But there's lots of people who work in jobs that they didn't like and aren't particularly challenging to them and that doesn't justify them becoming abusive alcoholics....But I think a lot of people from that generation didn't have the skills to kind of analyze their own situation and try to—or even had a sense that they had more control over their situation than they thought they did." He went on to speculate about the effects of his father's upbringing on his subsequent behaviour. "I think that part of it was the

culture of the time was much different from the time we grew up in. My dad, my dad's father was a plumber and was often-times unemployed. He grew up in downtown Toronto in modest circumstances and there was, there was never any expectation that my father would do anything but become a tradesman. And—and there was a real, I think, cultural assumption there that that was what you were born into and you didn't break out of that even to the point that if you did try to do something different it might be perceived by your parents as insulting to them—that their, the route that they travelled in life wasn't good enough for you." Not just class culture, but also the times, formed his father's behaviour and attitudes. "The generation of our parents was defined, I think, a lot more by the war and responsibility. And you've got to accept your lot in life and accept responsibility," Dixon speculated. "And so there was a lot of, I think, a lot of dissatisfaction and repressed kind of unhappiness there which found its outlet, I think, in a lot of cases in alcohol....It just seemed that everybody in the fifties and sixties drank....So there was real strong kind of cultural thing associated with alcohol, I think, and part of what happened in the sixties was the rejection of that....Part of that interest in drugs was a rejection of what their parents drank, alcohol."

Making a break with the previous generation was a personal decision that Dixon considered was consistent with the spirit of the sixties. He gave much thought to the meaning of life and how he wanted to live his own life. "While I was here you know I was pretty, I was in many ways pretty serious about—I did a lot of reading and when a friend came and stayed here and ended up getting a room eventually down on the bottom floor, we'd have lots of philosophical late-night discussions—as it seemed to be the case with everybody back then; it was a great period

of introspection.”

Living on Furby gave Dixon the chance to be introspective. On his own, independent, he developed a sense that “you can do whatever you want to do—although I didn’t have that, my parents didn’t tell me I could do whatever I wanted to do—but there was more of a sense of the adventure of life. Go out there and see what you can do.” When he thought about what he wanted to do, he did not consider money or things, but rather the type of person he should be and the type of life he should lead. “I said that I didn’t have great ambitions and expectations in life and I think that’s true, although I think, I think my ambitions were more inner as opposed to outer. I think my ambitions were to try to live my life in a way that was, I guess, different than the environment that I had grown up in, you know, and to try to get away from the some of the negativity of the circumstances that I had grown up in....I think I did have ambitions but they were more philosophical or perhaps spiritual ambitions than they were materialistic ambitions.”

Wanting very much to be in control of his life, Dixon became convinced that to do so he needed to obtain an education and enter a profession. “I recognized early on that if you were doing a job every day that you hated, over a period of time you couldn’t help, that couldn’t help but affect you and your relationship with your family and feelings about yourself.” From his childhood, he had dreamed of being a wildlife biologist, but he recognized that going back to school was not going to be easy. During the summer of 1970, he learned that his application for financial assistance had been successful: the provincial government awarded him \$112 a month to complete his high school education and go on to university. After he paid his rent, he would have just enough to live on. So, he quit his job and in the

fall started at the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre on Colony Street to earn his high school diploma.

From his arrival in Winnipeg, Dixon kept to himself for the most part, with his thoughts and sense of purpose. He generously described his neighbourhood as “modest”, but its rough side had already started to show. He was aware of the hippy sub-culture, but was no longer interested in its fascination with drugs. “I guess I was a bit of a hippy but...I mean, I wasn’t doing any drugs or doing anything like that. I’d moved on from that....I mean, I did some experimenting with that kind of thing when I was in Toronto but I decided, you know, I needed to get serious, I guess.” As well, he could not avoid others who were part of a growing underclass in the area. “I certainly, living in this kind of modest environment, you tend to bump into people who are living in a modest means as well, but who are choosing a life that’s less than productive, and I mean I certainly ran into people during that period who were completely, I guess I would define them as completely irresponsible kinds of people, and leading irresponsible kinds of lives, and getting into trouble with the law, and doing all those kinds of things and, you know, my immediate reaction to those people was that I didn’t want to have anything to do with that. I didn’t want to get involved. It struck me as being dangerous and unproductive and I just, I didn’t feel any comfort at all from being around those types of people.”

He found comfort being with Jamie and spent as much time as he could with her. “We were kids, eh...We really liked each other a lot and we enjoyed each other’s company and so were quite happy about that. And I think part of it as well was that her—She’d came from a broken home and her family situation perhaps wasn’t as great as it could be and so we had these two people coming from, kind

of, to some extent—I don't want to speak for her—but to some extent, dysfunctional family backgrounds. So we were quite happy to spend time together." Occasionally they went to a coffee house in one of the churches or, when the weather was good, they went to Memorial Park, which was filled with young people, many of



whom were on their own journeys of self-discovery. They also took in the free rock concerts in Assiniboine Park. Going to the movies regularly, and talking afterward about the meaning of what they had viewed, offered a night out together. But mostly they went on long walks, everywhere, lost in conversation.

Their relationship deepened. When Don and Jamie Dixon talked about the interview that he agreed to share with us, she told him straight out that he had to tell us that their first son was conceived in his modest, comfortable room on Furby Street. They learned that she was pregnant in the winter of 1971, while both of them were finishing their high school programmes. They decided to get married; he was twenty-one years old and she was seventeen. Dixon had little doubt about what he should do. "I had told myself many times as a child that if I grew up and had children, got married and had children, that I wouldn't treat them the way, you know, the way my dad had treated me....The decision to get married was part of the whole attitude that I had about doing something different....I had a strong commitment to taking responsibility for my own actions and so I felt that the responsible thing to do was to get married and not only that to be, to be a

Fig. 4.3. Young people walking on a Winnipeg street, 1970

responsible father, to be a responsible parent." That responsibility only strengthened his commitment to getting a professional education to allow him to provide for the family.

His and his wife's families were sceptical about what they were doing. "And a lot of people at the time would have thought that it was completely nutty what I was doing. You know here I was getting married, and having a child with no obvious means of being able to support not even myself, let alone a wife and a child." In February Dixon moved out of his Furby room and in with his wife and her parents. Don finished high school and over the summer worked at his old job in the school supply warehouse, as well as earning a bit more as a census enumerator. In the fall when Dixon started the zoology programme at the University of Manitoba, the young family moved into a apartment on Victor Street near Sargent Avenue, a neighbourhood that was "a bit rough", but it was their own place. Over the next few years, while Don studied diligently and did well, they moved annually and their family grew with two more children. Dixon developed an interest in bees

and, when the family moved about 1973 to a house with a large garage on Main Street outside the city limits, he began keeping bees. His hobby became his work. After completing his Bachelor of Science degree, he went on to earn a Master's degree in agriculture. On graduation he was hired as an apiarist for the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. He held that position for twenty-five years, until he was appointed Director of the Department's Soil and Crops Branch.

In reflecting back, Don Dixon marvelled at all that he and his family have achieved. His son, conceived in a small room in Mary Herchie's rooming house, became a surgeon and member of the Faculty of Medicine at University of Calgary. Dixon observed, "He came from rather modest beginnings and I think there were an awful lot of people, I know there were an awful lot of people at the time who looked at that situation and thought, well, this poor little kid being born into this family with these irresponsible teenagers and what possible chance does that little guy have to make it in the world...And no doubt probably some people thought that he should have been given up for adoption... And that's been kind of an important thing for me, personally too, because you know, one of the lessons to take from that, no one knows where a life goes." But he also knows that his family's success has not been the sole result of hard work and a sense of purpose and responsibility. "I could never have done all those things, I could never have gone to school, I could never have raised family I could never have got the advanced education that I got and therefore the jobs that I got if I hadn't had a lot of support from society, and from, you know things like scholarships, student loans, and all those kinds of things, and you know reasonable levels of tuition. It certainly defined my political, my political view. I won't forget that...We could

never have done all those things as a family if we hadn't been given the opportunity that society has provided to us through those kinds of assistances....I've paid society back many times....Those experiences that I had at that time really defined in many ways the kind of society we should have and the social programmes we should support."

THE DECLINE OF 276 / 278 FURBY STREET

Don Dixon did not remember Mary Herchie very clearly. She was pre-occupied with the Dairy Queen and traveled in the winter. She did, however, keep her eye on him and her other tenants. When Dixon was packing to move out, Herchie stuck her head into his room to see how he was doing. He had just taken down the tie-dyed sheet that decorated his wall, when she said to him, "You know I'm relieved because I thought that you had hung that big sheet up there because you'd somehow broken that partition and put a hole through it or something. That was the only reason you would have hung that sheet there." He was a bit startled. "I was a bit shocked that she thought that I'd done something to destroy the place." On the other hand, he might also have been impressed that, despite her concern about damage, Herchie had left him alone and not questioned him about it earlier.

Mary Herchie's travelling ended in the late seventies when her health weakened. A series of small strokes, misdiagnosed as the onset of Alzheimer's disease, put her in a nursing home. Her daughter wanted her to sell her house, but Herchie hoped to return to the sociable life of running the place and sold the Dairy Queen instead. As her health deteriorated further, the Manitoba Public Trustee intervened to take control of her assets and affairs, since as an out-of-province resident living in Toronto, Jean Knight could not do so.

The trustee turned 276/278 Furby over to a property management company. In 1982 Mary Herchie had a much more serious stroke, which put her into a coma for a time and from which she never fully recovered. Returning to Winnipeg to visit her mother, Jean Knight dropped into her old home to see what things she might have left there. She was shocked. A door had been kicked in, her mother's suite had been burgled, and her television set stolen. Worse, the house was filthy and run down. Her mother's refrigerator contained rotten food left by her mother, and she found the living room occupied by tenants who left quickly when she appeared. Not only had the property managers let the house fall into disrepair, she thought that they had exercised little discretion in renting to people whom her mother would have chased away with her broom. Several tenants appeared to have drinking problems, and with disgust Knight described the place as "equivalent to a crack house". Angrily she complained to the public trustee, but was told that the matter was of their, not her concern. On her next visit to her mother, three months later, conditions in the house were even worse and the same food continuing to rot in the refrigerator. Complaining again, she returned to Toronto. Subsequently, without informing her, the public trustee sold the house and all its contents, including all of those sentimental articles and photographs that Knight wanted.

The public trustee managed Herchie's finances very effectively, for on her death in 1993 she left a sizable estate.⁶ But the house deteriorated seriously after Mary Herchie became too ill to manage it. Af-



Fig. 4.4. 276/278 Furby Street after renovations

ter its sale, it became even worse. The property was purchased as an investment by a numbered company (66520 Manitoba Ltd.), which held it for a few years before selling to Ronald and Robert Stanley. The Stanleys operated it as a rooming house, with Ronald resident in the house, for about a decade. In 2000 they sold it to Michael Pettigrew of Nanaimo, British Columbia, who kept it until 2004 when Westminster Housing Society undertook its renovations.

CONCLUSION

The rooming house at 276/278 Furby Street by the late 1980s and through the next decade was nothing like Don Dixon's "place of comfort and security" for the lodgers who followed him. Nor did its owners have the deep personal identification with the place that Mary Herchie had. For Herchie and Dixon the house had provided a very special home. Knowing so much insecurity and misfortune in her childhood, Mary found a personal stability, sanctuary, and financial success in her house. And she held on to it tightly, ob-

⁶ "Obituaries: Mary Herchie," Winnipeg Free Press, 18 October 1993, G&.

A Landlady and Her Tenant

sessively, and dearly. Her home, her property provided the security that the misfortunes and hardships of her life had threatened to destroy. The time that Don spent in his small room turned his life around. His character strengthened and focused on the love and life purpose that

he gave meaning into adulthood. And he never forgot that home.

Aboriginal Experiences of Home

Anna Morrissette always enjoyed those occasions when friends and relatives dropped by her home at 299 Furby Street.¹ She and her three adult sons, David, Kelly, and Ringo Starr, had moved into the two-bedroom, first-floor apartment in 1987. One of the house's attractive features was its front porch. When the weather was pleasant, Morrissette, her sons, relatives, and friends would sit outside on the porch and its steps, have a drink, and enjoy one another's company. In a photograph of one of those occasions, which she showed during her interview with us, Morrissette is smiling fondly as she watches Dave's girlfriend, Brenda, give him a hug and kiss on the cheek, while each had their hand on the shoulder of Morrissette's nephew. It was a good time and Ringo—or, perhaps it was Kelly—left his bottle of Bud on the porch railing while he captured the moment with family and friends on film.

A number of the houses on Furby Street, like older dwellings throughout the city, have front porches and residents of those places that had been converted to suites or rooms especially welcomed the opportunity to sit outside where there was more space to socialize with friends. A strip of houses, from 299 south to 283 Furby, was conspicuous on the block from the 1990s for their porches, most sagging and in need of paint, and for the numbers of people, many with Aboriginal ancestry, who got together on and around

them for a few drinks and conversation. Some older residents in the neighbourhood told Mike Maunder, who was collecting information about the block in the early 2000s, that they found their presence offensive and even intimidating, especially when occasionally they received insults as they walked by—"What the fuck are you looking at?" was the challenge thrown at those whose gaze lingered. Some, including Maunder, quickly concluded that the houses had become gang hangouts and crack dens. In fact, the Winnipeg Police Service had several of the addresses under surveillance.

The reaction of some neighbours was in keeping with what had long been one understanding of the city's growing Aboriginal population: Winnipeg had an "Indian problem". From at least the late 1970s the deterioration of the city's older neighbourhoods came to be associated in the media with increasing numbers of Aboriginal people moving in; if they were not the cause, they were definitely a symptom. As the Winnipeg Tribune reported on a City planning document in October 1978: "The most visible social problem in the Inner City, and particularly the core area, is the Indian problem....Native migration and the problems it causes must be addressed very seriously. Because the people are usually low income and relatively transient they occupy the worst housing in the Inner City and create a need to keep this housing on the market. Racial problems also arise as homeowners react with alarm at a perceived influx of Indians into their neighbourhood. There

1 Anna Morrissette, interview by M. Maunder, June 2005.

is a perception that following the American experience, an influx of native persons into an area is an indication of the final stages of deterioration of the area."²

That apprehension, expressed in other Prairie cities as well, fuelled speculative estimates of the size and growth rate of the Winnipeg's Aboriginal population. In 1976 a special report to the Manitoba cabinet projected the population to reach 100,000 by 1985. Larry Krotz in *Urban Indians: The Strangers in Canada's Cities* estimated the numbers already to be 60,000 in 1980.³ The real numbers are much more elusive. Underreporting and definitional changes make earlier census figures and growth rates difficult to interpret. No doubt Winnipeg was home to more than 210 Aboriginal people in 1951, 1,082 in 1961, and 4,940 in 1971. But the trend was unmistakable and, even if more recent censuses employed subtler and more inclusive definitions of origins and self-identity, the visibility of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg was clearly marked as the numbers of those reporting Aboriginal origins doubled from 16,575 in 1981 to 35,150 in 1991 and rose to 55,755 in 2001.⁴

By the late 1990s twenty-seven per cent of the population of West Broadway was Aboriginal, probably an underestimate given residential transience and the fluidity of household membership. The population, however, did experience some changes. Between 1996 and 2001 their

numbers did drop slightly from 1,425 to 1,385, although the Aboriginal presence maintained the same proportion since the population in West Broadway declined by almost three per cent. But a more notable change was the substantial decline, 12.4 per cent, in the number of First Nations people and the substantial increase of 13.5 per cent in those reporting a Métis identity. An even more significant change was in the numbers of people who spoke Cree or Ojibway, which fell by a third from 480 in 1996 to 325 five years later.⁵ Interpreting such small numerical changes is always tentative. However, they may indicate that the neighbourhood was attracting a more urbanized Aboriginal population with a longer residential history in the city.

From Aboriginal perspectives, many "Indian problems" have accompanied the move to the city. Finding adequate housing has been just one. Complicating the search for shelter are the extensive ties that many families have among their kin and friends. As Larry Krotz described the Paul family of Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba Reserve in 1980:

It is impossible to understand the Paul family by thinking of individual people, individual lives. One needs to think of a group of people, a collection of bodies melded together into family. A group of people of whom no count is automatically taken. No one, at any given time, could ascribe a number to those staying at the house on the reserve or at the house in the city without stopping first to count them off one by one. If it is a family without count, it is also a family without bounds. A family where there is always room for an extra, where another body is welcomed without fuss or formality.⁶

2 Quoted in Larry Krotz, *Urban Indians: The Strangers in Canada's Cities* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1980), 48.

3 *Ibid.*, 49 and back cover.

4 On the definitional problem of identifying Aboriginal populations, see Eric Guimond, "Fuzzy Definitions and Population Explosion: Changing Identities of Aboriginal Groups in Canada," in *Not Strangers in These Parts: Urban Aboriginal Peoples*, ed. David Newhouse and Evelyn Peters, (Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, 2003), 35–49.

5 City of Winnipeg, "2001 Census, City of Winnipeg Neighbourhood Profiles: West Broadway," <<http://www.winnipeg.ca/census/2001/>> [Accessed 8 October 2006]; City of Winnipeg, "1996 Census, City of Winnipeg Neighbourhood Profiles: West Broadway," <<http://www.winnipeg.ca/census1996/pages/wpg.htm>> (Accessed 8 August 2006).

6 Krotz, *Urban Indians*, 25.

Depending on the availability of work, the need for a place to stay, and the desire to see loved ones, many Aboriginal people, not just the Pauls, moved back and forth between the reserve and the city.

Such mobility, from reserves to the city and back, has tipped perhaps in the direction of urban destinations, but nonetheless it does seem consistent with what anthropologist Regna Darnell has called an "accordion model" of social organization. By that, she meant, in academic language, "a process of subsistence-motivated expansion and contraction of social groups in relation to resource exploitation".⁷ More simply, as fortunes have shifted, one or another group might achieve some new relative purchase on opportunities that would attract kin or friends. Rather than simple migration to the city, since the Second World War the geographical space within which Aboriginal people have lived has changed as shelter, food, and emotional sustenance have become available in variable abundance and on various occasions among urban centres and reserves or rural communities.

The logic of Aboriginal mobility may well be rooted in patterns of "resource exploitation" effectively practiced in traditional economies, but movement to the city has been much more than just the integration of new geographical space. As ethnohistorians Laura Peers and Jennifer S.H. Brown contend in their study of Ojibwa families: "The combination of poverty, marginalization, cultural disruption, loss of land and resources, residential schools and other assimilative pressures left many Ojibwa families vulnerable to illness and death." And other First Na-

tions families, too. The intricate web of community and kin relation has been a system of survival and recovery for Aboriginal people.⁸

Differing though their individual experiences have been, the stories of a few of the Aboriginal residents of Furby Street are consistent with these generalities.

FROM STONEWALL TO THE CITY

In 2002–3, Anna Morrissette, Nanny to family and friends, lived with her three adult sons on the second and third floors of 283 Furby Street. They had lived in the West Broadway neighbourhood for twenty-five years and had lived on Furby since 1987 when they had moved into 299 Furby. Asked why three of her four sons still lived at home, the eighty-year-old grandmother replied a bit incredulously, "It's just family. I think I'd be lost without my kids....That's how my life is, just me and the boys."

Anna Morrissette was born in Stonewall in 1925. Her mother, Teresa Chief, was Aboriginal and her father, Norman Morrissette, was a "Frenchman", whose family lived outside Stonewall in a low-lying area known locally as "The Bog". When Anna Morrissette was five years old, her mother died. Unable to look after the children on his own, her father turned to his wife's family who lived in Stonewall. Her two brothers, Alex and "Snooky", were raised by Suzette Smith, their mother's mother. Suzette's sister, Mary, and her husband, Billy Matt, raised Morrissette.

Making ends meet during the Depression and the Second World War was often difficult for the family. From an early age, Morrissette worked on farms in the sum-

7 Regna Darnell, "Rethinking Band and Tribe, Community and Nation: An Accordion Model of Nomadic Native North American Social Organization," in *Proceedings of the 29th Algonquian Conference*, ed. D. Pentland. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, Press, 1998), 91.

8 Laura Peers and Jennifer S.H. Brown, "'There Is No End to Relationships among the Indians': Ojibwa Families and Kinship in Historical Perspective," *The History of the Family*, 4 (2000): 529-55. Quotation on 547.

mers and during the fall harvested potatoes and sugar beets. A trip to Winnipeg offered a welcome break in the routine of small-town life. She remembers a street-car that ran from Stonewall to the city, for "50 cents return." Sometimes her Uncle Andy, nicknamed Doodle, would take them in his car. They would shop at Eaton's, the Bay, the Goodwill Store and other second-hand shops.

Increasingly, the city drew many people from the country, not just for shopping but also for work. "Slowly our people started moving in, because of work," Morrissette remembered. "There was no work in Stonewall." Then, when the second war broke out, it seemed as though everybody was hitch-hiking to Winnipeg to enlist in the military. She recalled, "There was hardly any men at all up there.... Everybody I knew joined up right away." Her brother Alex signed up and was shipped out to Hong Kong. The city fell to the Japanese on 25 December 1941 and he spent the rest of the war in a prisoner-of-war camp. Snooky was luckier. He did get to Halifax, but because his left arm was shorter than his right, he was discharged and he returned to Stonewall for the duration of the war. When Anna Morrissette was about eighteen years old, she decided that "there was not much doing in Stonewall," and she too would move to Winnipeg. Her cousin, Martha, had found work at Child's Restaurant on the corner of Portage and Main and suggested that Anna apply there for a job. She did and was successful.

The move to Winnipeg was Morrissette's first time away from home. She reluctantly left behind those family members who had not made the move to the city. Her grandmother, who was also bringing up Snooky's first son, Tucson, agreed to look after Morrissette's daughter, Grace.

Suzette Smith had a strong influence on her family. She was born in a teepee on

the banks of the Red River. Anna Morrissette's daughter, Grace, remembers a photograph, now lost, of an encampment of teepees with women sitting in front; Suzette was one of the women.⁹ After her first husband, Charlie Chief, died she married Jack Williams and moved into his big stone house in Stonewall. For many years, she worked as a servant for a Winnipeg physician during the summers. However, not until 1957, some time after her second husband died, did she move out of her house, finally convinced by her family to move to Winnipeg, where among other amenities she could enjoy indoor plumbing. She died in 1968 at the age of 101. "I was so proud of my Granny," recalled Morrissette. "All the flags in Stonewall flew at half mast that day."

Anna Morrissette enjoyed her life in the big city, but being away from her family was often difficult. She divided her time between working and visits when she could get back to Stonewall. "That's the kind of life I had," she remembered. After about a year in the city, she was homesick and had had enough and so returned to Stonewall. That summer and fall, there was a lot of farm work available, harvesting potatoes and cutting sugar beets. She thought in retrospect, she made "quite a bit of money."

After a time Morrissette got the urge to leave again, especially when her cousin suggested they could get work with Canadian National Railways as "beanery queens", waitresses in the "beaneries" located in the train stations. They had hoped for jobs in Winnipeg, but nothing was open there and so they accepted an assignment to Blue River, British Columbia. Being in the mountains upset the young women from the Prairies. They were homesick. While Morrissette found herself hungry and constantly eating, her cousin could not eat, to the point that she

9 Conversation with Mike Maunder, 2005.

sought medical advice. After just a few months they returned to Winnipeg. When her cousin left to visit friends in the east, Morrissette tried her luck once more as a “beanery queen”, this time in Edson, Alberta. Again she grew homesick, came back to Stonewall for a visit, and never went back to her job.

Still not much was doing in Stonewall, especially in the postwar years when across Manitoba young men and women were moving to cities in search of employment. Norman Morrissette had made that move a few years before. Hearing from a friend that work was available in the stockyards in St. Boniface, he moved to Winnipeg and from the 1940s into the sixties worked for a number of abattoirs, processing, and meat packing companies. There he remarried and he and his second wife, Josephine, who was a sewing machine operator in the garment industry, rented a house for many years at 250 Bushnell Street. In the early 1950s Anna Morrissette came to stay with her father and “mum” in the house on Bushnell Street. The house was a gathering point for many family members and friends from Stonewall. Uncle Andy and Aunt Mary lived across the street; upstairs were the Parisiens, also from Stonewall.

At first, Morrissette found work by the day as a housekeeper through a casual employment agency, but gradually, as the women for whom she worked came to know her as a reliable and thorough cleaner, they asked her to come back regularly. In her spare time she socialized with her brothers and friends, including Bert Starr. She had met Bert before when he lived in Gimli before he joined the navy. Now, released from service, he was working with the Royal Produce Company. Later he would work as a labourer for a



Fig. 5.1. The Morrissette home, 299 Furby Street

construction and engineering company.

Sometime in the mid-fifties Anna and Bert decided to live together. In their first years together, they moved frequently. For a time they rented rooms in a house on McDermott Street and then a house on Jarvis Avenue, both in the North End. Later they found a place on Elgin Avenue. Then they took over 250 Bushnell when Norman and Josephine Morrissette moved into a smaller place on retirement. All of those places were in older areas of city, which in the 1950s and 1960s were increasingly identified as slums and targeted for urban renewal. None of the dwellings was standing in 2005.

Anna and Bert had four sons, Brent born in 1955, David in 1956, Kelly in 1960, and Ringo in 1964. In the early sixties, Anna Morrissette had lost twin girls and her doctor had said that she could not have more children. But she did. Late in her pregnancy she contracted pneumonia and was unconscious for several days after delivery. Her baby contracted pneumonia and remained in an incubator for eleven

days. When she regained consciousness, a nurse told her, "Ringo's doing fine, Mrs. Starr." Confused, she asked, "Who's Ringo?" The nurses caring for the infant had started referring to him as "Ringo". She had intended to call her son Bert, but it was, after all, 1964 and in the end they decided to name him after the English musician.

Sometime in the 1970s, the family moved into the house Morrissette remembers most fondly, 402 Boyd Avenue, for its spaciousness and for the entertaining and celebrations they enjoyed there. A six-room, two-storey house, with a large living room and dining room, it was also well suited for the wedding of her eldest son, Brent. She kept pictures of many of the good parties they held there. On one set of pictures in her album, from a 1975 party at which Brent "put down the bottle" for good, one of the boys jokingly wrote the heading, "Drinking is Indian." Morrissette explained, "We're part Indian," a part of her heritage going back to her grandmother and of which she remained proud.

When she and Bert separated in 1975, Morrissette stayed on at 402 Boyd. She told Starr, "You go your way. You can see the boys whenever you want, but the only thing is you're not taking the kids away from me." She and her three sons have lived together ever since. They were able to stay in the house until the early 1980s when it was sold and the new owners wanted to move in.

Briefly Morrissette and her sons lived on Flora Street in the North End; it was "not that good of a place" and in need of repairs. Son Kelly, who was working at a lumberyard in the south end of the city, suggested that moving out of the North End would simplify his bus ride to work. She thought that a central location would be more convenient for shopping; she had always gone downtown to shop at Eaton's and the Bay and elsewhere. A friend who

lived on Spence Street in the West Broadway area told her about places in the neighbourhood, but from an advertisement in the newspaper she found a suite at 308 Langside Street, almost across the back lane from where she would later live on Furby.

About 1980 the owners of 308 Langside undertook renovations. They evicted their tenants, but helped them find other places and even got a truck to move their belongings. Morrissette and her sons moved into an apartment building at 212 Langside, just a block south. They stayed there for about five years and for a time she was the caretaker of the building. Then mother and sons moved into 299 Furby Street. Before moving, they had no idea that the block had a bad reputation, even though they had lived in close proximity to it for years. They moved in on New Year's Eve. Only after settling in, "That's when I heard it was rough territory," said Morrissette.

Their ground floor suite was cramped with four adults—two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, bathroom and a spacious central room which served as dining room and gathering place. Morrissette and Kelly each had their own bedroom; David and Ringo slept on couches in the living room and dining room. Their home nonetheless provided a welcome location for them to get together with friends and relatives, particularly the growing ranks of grandchildren and great grandchildren. Morrissette had helped raise Brent's son, Garrett, and often babysat Grace's grandson, Stephen, when her daughter lived on nearby Balmoral Street. The children first started calling her Nanny, and the name stuck.

Morrissette did not like to go visiting herself, but always enjoyed others dropping in on her. Cheryl and Mort were neighbours from down the street. Cheryl had grown up in Stonewall and Mort had been friends with Ringo since high school.

"Nanny's was just a great place to visit," explained Cheryl. "She was a great storyteller."¹⁰ Especially on weekends, quite a few people would visit, have a few drinks, talk, and laugh, while listening to music and to stories of the old days. In warm weather, the group, often quite large, moved onto the front porch, greeting acquaintances as they passed by on the street. Being out front also helped them to know and be known by their neighbours. The house was a gathering place on the block.

Morrisette and her sons became very good friends with Andy Miller and his two daughters who lived four doors south at 283 Furby. Miller and his daughters were regular visitors, especially after work and on weekends, talking, relaxing, and having a beer or two. "They were just like family—him and his girls," Morrisette recalled. When Miller heard that the family wanted a place with more room, he suggested that they move into his building where the top two floors were vacant. He had worked for some time as a cleaner for Bee-Clean and the building in which he lived was owned by his employer, José Correia, who let suites in buildings he owned on the block to employees. Morrisette and her boys got the larger apartment and moved down the street where they continued to enjoy the company of their relatives.

In 2003 neighbours identified the houses in this strip as rundown, noisy and much in need of improvement. Although 283 Furby was not among them, Correia decided to divest himself of all his properties. He sold 283 and 287 Furby to the Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation and gave the corporation 297 Furby, which needed serious structural repair. Tenants were given three months to move, including an option to relocate to other properties the corporation had

already renovated.

One Saturday after receiving their notice, Morrisette, her sons, and others on the block were sitting outside on her front porch. Andy went inside to get a beer out of the fridge and never came back. Wondering what was keeping him, someone went in and found him on the floor having a heart attack. He died shortly after the ambulance had taken him to hospital.

A few weeks after Miller's death, Anna and her sons moved into an apartment block run by Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, not too far away from their old neighbourhood. In her suite, for the first time in many years with no front porch, Anna Morrisette gathered her family to celebrate her eightieth birthday on 17 December 2005.

RUTH PATERSON'S FIRST CHRISTMAS

On 25 December 2002, in Anna Morrisette's old first-floor suite at 299 Furby Street, Ruth Paterson [pseudonym] was cooking her very first Christmas Dinner and celebrating the first Christmas truly on her own.¹¹ The nineteen-year-old mother had recently moved in and was trying sincerely to achieve the sort of stability for her two children that she had never enjoyed growing up "in the system".

Patterson's mother was First Nation; her Métis father was a biker. Ruth, her sister, and her parents lived in a trailer park north of Winnipeg. When she was just seven years old, Child and Family Services took her and her sister into care. Her parents, she admitted, had their problems, including addictions, but they did the best they could and had treated her well. In our interview, Paterson blamed the social workers for convincing her to confirm allegations, reported by a schoolmate to a teacher, that her father had

10 Conversation with Mike Maunder, 2005.

11 Ruth Paterson [pseudonym], interview by M. Maunder, May 2005.

abused her. "I was just seven years old," she explained. "When they asked me all these questions, I said, 'Yeah, they spanked me.'" But, thinking back years later, she concluded, "It was just discipline. If we stole money, we got a good licking....They loved us."

Being taken into care caused her to become "out of control." After their apprehension, Paterson and her sister went through six foster homes in two months. In two homes, they were sexually abused. When she did return home, Paterson was seriously disturbed and uncontrollable. Her behavior frightened her mother, who arranged for a voluntary foster placement. Then, from seven to eleven years of age, she bounced back and forth—foster care, back home, foster care, back home. She hated the foster homes and ignored her foster parents. "I'm just a pay cheque to you," she told them. In retrospect, she confided, "So many years I was emotionally neglected. I didn't have love, stability. I was still a little girl. I still am."

Paterson learned about life from other young people in care, whom she met while participating in various day programmes. They formed a loose network of friends, all with similar problems and all feeling that they had no one other than each other to turn to for help and support. She ran away from her foster homes and joined up with friends who were living in the West Broadway neighbourhood: she crashed at a friend's place, couch-surfed from place to place, partied, started smoking marijuana, dealt drugs to earn money and learned how to steal cars for excitement. "I had my first joint on Langside. I had my first taste of alcohol on Langside. I stayed with a friend in a rooming house on Langside." All of this happened when she was about eleven years old. Her fourteenth birthday was spent in custody at the Manitoba Youth Centre.

Her older sister got her out of the Youth Centre and arranged for them to

live together in the Lord Selkirk Park low-income housing project. Through her sister, Paterson became involved with an Aboriginal activist group. For a year they traveled from conferences to informal gatherings, pow-wows, and traditional ceremonies; they took part in a barrier protest in Minneapolis and an American Indian Movement sundance in Rosewood. Paterson learned a lot about the colonialism and the racism that she had experienced all of her life and cynically she survived by exploiting the system that had brought her up. She and her sister pooled their welfare, while her sister drew additional money by claiming to provide foster care and home schooling. "We totally had a good scam going on," Ruth exclaimed.

The sisters returned from one of their political trips to find that they had been locked out of their Lord Selkirk Park home. Child and Family Services found them shelter in a hotel until they moved back to West Broadway, sharing a house at Langside Street and Sara Avenue with a number of other youth activists. The stress of their life styles, and their life histories, got to Paterson's sister. She broke down. One day she burned all of her Aboriginal ceremonial regalia and political literature in the middle of their living room.

After that, Paterson moved around the neighbourhood from one short-term apartment to another and to support herself she began working for an escort service on Spence Street. About this time, she entered a relationship with a man in the neighbourhood whom she later discovered to be a crack cocaine dealer. She stayed off heavy drugs herself because she soon found herself pregnant. At sixteen years of age, she gave birth to her first son. But her relationship with her boyfriend was abusive and getting uglier and uglier. He accused her of stealing his drugs and threatened her unless she left

his drugs alone. One day she decided that, if he thought she was a crackhead, she would be a crackhead. "I figured crack was just like weed," she exclaimed. That made the domestic abuse worse, and she phoned the police department's emergency telephone service after escaping from her boyfriend who had pinned her up against a wall and pushed a lit cigarette in her face. Police kicked down the door. Not long after, she moved out and into a "Mom and Me" foster home to try to raise her baby. She soon discovered that Child and Family Services had assembled a file on her and the baby, and she sighed, "They took him away from me."

The next year was a blur—living with her sister on Furby Street, moving several times, partying, crashing with friends, getting stoned on crack at anonymous houses, once at 299 Furby, she remembers. Finally, when Child and Family Services sought a permanent order of custody for her baby, Paterson decided she wanted to raise her own children and wanted to change her life. She was pregnant with her second child. "You know what?" she told herself, "You're going to lose this kid. I was the fourth generation of my family to be raised in the system."

Paterson had turned seventeen years of age and knew she could only draw on the resources of Child and Family Services for another year, until she turned eighteen years old. She sought help. The psychiatrist who examined her for Child and Family Services told her, she said, "I believe you can parent your son, but you need to learn to cope." On his recommendation, she moved into a second stage women's shelter in St. Boniface. There the director, an amazing woman in Paterson's telling of her story, became her advocate and gradually built up her self-confidence. "My biggest fears are the police and loneliness. The biggest thing I was dealing with was being lonely, being away from my son, from his father." She received

counseling and participated in programmes for compulsive behaviour, anger management, and parenting. While living in the shelter, she gave birth to her second child.

The shelter found her a nice home in St. Norbert. While Paterson appreciated their assistance, she had a difficult time settling in. "It was so isolated," she explained. "It took me an hour to take the bus to West Broadway where I knew everybody—the gangstas, the activists, the Food Not Bombs people." Wanting to be closer to her friends and familiar territory, in November 2002 she and her children moved into 299 Furby.

She had not realized from the newspaper advertisement that it was her former crack house. However, the place had changed. "There was a new owner, Nancy. She'd kicked out the dealers and fixed it up. I really wanted to make it a home." Paterson lived on the ground floor. Upstairs was an Aboriginal couple with children. To her dismay, she soon discovered that in the back apartment lived a pedophile drug user, who seemed constantly to be having visits from little children. She complained to the owner. "I live here with my kids. They (the couple upstairs) live here with their kids. We don't do drugs. We don't party. This is a home." Nancy evicted the pedophile. In this setting, struggling to make 299 Furby into a home, Paterson celebrated her first Christmas on her own. She cooked a Christmas dinner, decorated the house, had friends over and presents for the kids. "It was my first Christmas dinner that I cooked all by myself. It's all presented out on my table."

Despite the satisfaction that she got from that celebration, conditions at 299 Furby deteriorated when her former boyfriend, who was still dealing drugs, moved into the back apartment. Paterson had nothing to do with him, but rumours spread through the neighbourhood that

she was involved with him and doing drugs again. "I learned what it was like to be in one spot, to be comfortable, happy, content...But the trick was to be there by myself," she reflected. She still struggled with loneliness, still felt the pull of her old life.

In May 2003 she left Winnipeg and traveled with her two sons to British Columbia. There she connected with a boyfriend from her activist days and lived for the summer and fall at an old homestead in the mountains. Then, for the next year, she moved around: from the homestead to Vancouver to stay for a short time with her boyfriend's mother; then bringing her children back to stay with her parents near Winnipeg; then on to Alberta to find work. In 2005, she arrived back in West Broadway, found a job she liked, and volunteered at her children's school.

After all of the moving, Paterson still looked back on her Furby Street apartment fondly. "Furby was a major turning point," she explained. "I wanted stability but I didn't know how."

MARY NIEMI AND THE D.A. GANG

Shortly after Paterson and her children left 299 Furby Street in May 2003, a First Nations family that had been in West Broadway for quite some time moved in. When first interviewed in April 2005, Mary Niemi, her thirty-year-old son Jacques, and three grandsons lived in the two-bedroom unit at the front of the house, while her daughter, Roxanne, in her late twenties, lived in the rear suite.¹² Her elder son, Aaron, lived nearby in the neighbourhood. For twenty-one years, the Niemi family had lived in a house on Langside Street, and, like their old residence, the Furby apartment became home and gathering place for many more rela-

tives and friends. Part of the Niemis' normal routine was the continual coming and going of members of an extended network of kin and acquaintances who knew one another from Mary Niemi's home in Armstrong, Ontario, or from years around Winnipeg. As well, Niemi and her children regularly visited relatives in Thunder Bay and every summer went back to Armstrong for camping with friends and family. Despite the vitality of their interaction with so many people, the smaller Furby apartment never really took the place of their old home on Langside; it just was not large enough. In 2006 Niemi, Roxanne, and two of the grandsons moved to Thunder Bay. Jacques stayed in the apartment, which he shared with his nephew, Darren, who was in his early twenties, and his cousin, Candida. Mary Niemi's cousin's son, Glen, and his partner, Michelle, moved into the second-floor apartment. The Niemi home was fluid both in its membership and in its location at any time; people moved from place to place, where space permitted and help was offered, but they stayed together as a network.

A typical day for Mary Niemi brought a parade of siblings, cousins, near-relatives, far-relatives, neighbours, and lots of children into her Furby Street home. She enjoyed making lunch for them, putting the kettle on for tea or coffee, and talking on the telephone, all with the noise from children playing in the background. As she explained, "My mother said when you grow old and your kids have their own kids, you'll love them more than you loved your kids. ...I like to have my grandchildren around. When they go to school, I enjoy that quietness for about an hour, but I like that little noise sometimes—my grandchildren. I don't know what I'd do if I had to live alone." She went on, "I love my grandchildren. I looked after all my sister's kids, my friends' kids. I always have a houseful of kids."

12 Mary Niemi, interview by M. Maunder, June 2005.

And adults, whom Niemi knew as children, regularly brought their children to visit. As one friend, Jacquie Maxwell, who was visiting during our interview, declared, "I'm not really related," said Jacquie of her relationship to Mary. "I've just known her forever." Niemi explained, "Her father was my best friend." Maxwell spent much of her childhood growing up in the Niemi home and her two sons, Cole and Tristan, were getting to know Mary well. The connections among her own children and grandchildren, her nieces and nephews, and the children of friends became so close that descriptions of kinship and blood relations cannot capture the emotional affinity among people who consider themselves almost siblings and Mary Niemi as much mother as "aunty".

More casually, friends and remotely connected relatives from Armstrong regularly dropped in and stayed, always welcome and bringing fish and game for a traditional meal. Some were visiting the city; others needed somewhere to stay for a couple of days while they found their own places. Back in Armstrong, the Niemis belonged to one of the larger families, the Sinoways, and Jacques remarked, "Everyone comes to us like we're magnets." Mary Niemi expanded, "I'm always helping people; that's why they come to me....The boys from back home, they call me 'mum' when they come here." Amazed by the number of people with whom she has shared close connections and her home, the interviewer observed, "I have about seven relatives that I am connected with. How many have you?" Niemi's response spoke volumes. She just laughed—and then started an endless list that she never finished.

For Mary Niemi, having her children, grandchildren, and extended family around her has entailed more than just keeping the door open. She remembered how lonely she herself had felt as a child

when she was forced to leave her family to attend St. Joseph's Residential School in Thunder Bay, Ontario, for three years. The nuns' discipline was strict, and their oversight of the cleaning and housework that the girls performed at the school was vigilant and unrelenting. But most painful for her were their efforts to prevent the children from speaking their Ojibway language and their refusal to let her speak to her brothers. The residential school experience, however, did not break the commitment to kin and friends that had already been formed within her extended, yet close, family. And she has endeavoured to re-unite family members who have been separated.

For example, at the time of our interview, Niemi had just received permission from Child and Family Services to have her fourteen-year old grandson Cody, Aaron's son, live with her for the rest of the school year. For several months he had been living with his other grandmother on the Long Plain Reserve, about fifty kilometres southwest of Winnipeg. Cody was pleased to be with his grandmother and Roxanne's two boys, Kevin and Marquis. His cousins, the third generation of their family to live in the neighbourhood, were doing well in school, enjoyed attending pow-wows, and participated regularly in the programmes at the West Broadway Community Club and at Crossways-in-Common, a complex of social organizations. That helped Cody to fit in.

Before him, Cody's older brother Darren, a self-described "free spirit", had gravitated back to the West Broadway neighbourhood. After his father, Aaron Niemi, and his mother split up, Darren went with his mother to British Columbia, where he had grown up living sometimes with his mother and sometimes in foster homes. He often left for months at a time, moving and partying with friends from town to town on Vancouver Island.

Then, when he turned eighteen, he moved to Winnipeg to live near his father and his grandmother. "My grandma's a lot of help to me," he declared. Cody shared his brother's gratitude, as he explained: "Family are the people that care for you and look out for you, just like you should do for them."

At the centre of the family with all of its extensions was Mary Niemi. Her family had moved into Armstrong when an Ontario Hydro dam had flooded the original reserve of the Whitesand First Nation homeland in 1942. Not long after she returned from residential school, Mary, still a teenager, met and married Arni Niemi. Aaron was born in 1964. When their son was five years old, their marriage broke up. Reluctantly Mary followed her mother's advice and let Aaron go with his father who had a steady job and could assure that their son would finish his schooling.

After the break-up, Mary entered a relationship with a young Québécois who was in the air force stationed at CFS Armstrong, an early warning radar installation along the Pinetree Line. When the station closed in 1974, he was transferred to the air base near Beausejour. Niemi went with him. Accommodation was hard to find and her partner rented a place for her in the North End of Winnipeg, at 1318 Arlington Street, near Flora Avenue. He visited her on the weekends and soon she gave birth to their son, Jacques, named after his father. They were able to rent a house in Beausejour and there a second child, Roxanne, was born in 1976. The couple had planned to marry for some time, but, as Niemi explained, they "had some troubles" and, when he was transferred to Saskatchewan, she did not want to keep moving. "He left me with the kids."

When the house in Beausejour was sold, Mary Niemi and the children had to find new accommodation. They lived

briefly on Portland Avenue in St. Vital. Over the next five or so years, they changed residences frequently, living on Selkirk Avenue and Aberdeen Avenue in the North End, Rosedale Avenue in the south, before moving into West Broadway. They lived on Young Street, and then Sara Avenue, before renting a house at 118 Langside Street from Kinew Housing, an Aboriginal low-income housing corporation.

The large two-storey house at 118 Langside was home and focal point for holding family and friends together for twenty-one years. They formed close relationships with their neighbours, especially an Italian immigrant couple who returned to the old country when they retired. Jacques and Roxanne started and finished school while living there. Roxanne remembered being honoured when she was ten years old and was selected to present flowers to the wife of the Lieutenant Governor at the ceremony opening the new community club. Mary's niece, Candida, joined them. When he was seventeen years old, Aaron left his father in British Columbia to stay with his mother. Over the next several years as he had his own children, six in all, another generation was welcomed into the family home. Thinking back to those years, Jacques, Roxanne, and Candida credit their warm home-life for keeping them out of trouble.

In the 1980s and 1990s West Broadway was gang territory, with informal Aboriginal youth gangs and the more organized Manitoba Warriors. The Niemis were not frightened. Jacques, Roxanne, and Candida knew gang members from their years in school, from walking around the neighbourhood, and also from the hours they spent roller-skating at the rink just north across Portage Avenue. But because the younger generation was already so strong a family, they felt no need to find a surrogate in a gang. They were their own gang—the "D.A. gang", the

“dumb-ass gang”—as Candida joked about the put-downs they always threw at one another for doing something “dumb-ass”. Others referred to them as “the Langside girls” or the “Get Along gang.” But they had fun, took advantage of the various programmes that the West Broadway Community Centre offered—it “kept me out of trouble,” Roxanne said. Jacques added, “We took over the neighbourhood.”

Niemi helped raise many children, but also encouraged them on their own path in life. Laughing, she explained, “I kick them out, I give them hell, and they’re still back.” She told her niece, Candida, to leave, “to find her own place, start her life, do this and that.” But her niece is a still regular visitor and family member. Roxanne stayed at home when she had her first son, Kevin. After her second son, Marquis, was born in 1995, she dropped out of high school and moved out. When she had two more children, Niemi suggested that Roxanne, her partner, and children move in with her and Jacques at 118 Langside Street and become the principal tenants. They all lived together for four years, until Roxanne needed to get away. She left the youngest children with their father and took Kevin and Marquis with her to Thunder Bay, where her uncles and several other family members lived.

Roxanne’s departure had the unintended effect of losing the family home. The policy of Kinew Housing Corp. was to rent only to families with dependent children. Once Roxanne’s children were gone, Niemi had to move. She regretted, “If I’d known this, I would’ve taken those two small grandchildren. I could’ve stayed in that house.” She had to move out, while Roxanne’s partner and the two youngest children stayed on. Roxanne was not away for long before she returned to Winnipeg, and she and her two children and Mary and Jacques found a place

at 222 Young Street, near their old home. Then, in 2003, they moved into 299 Furby. For Mary, her daughter’s return was welcome, despite the cramped accommodation; “I’ve always asked Roxanne to stay with me,” she admitted.

With all of its extended members, coming and going, the household strained the capacity of the apartment. Jacques and her grandsons had the two bedrooms, while Niemi slept on the couch in the front room. She struggled to keep the place orderly and in good humour chided her grandsons for their “messy bedroom”. Looking around, she said a bit wistfully, “This is what I call a home for me. I wouldn’t mind a nice big house where I could have everything nice, you know, cause I’ve had beautiful things in my life.” But “that’s how it is.” Very few residences could likely have accommodated the home life of Mary Niemi and her extended family and network of friends. They had been fortunate for many years on Langside and less so thereafter. Their addresses changed, but their home persisted.

In April 2006, 299 Furby Street was sold to a housing revitalization group that planned to renovate the house into five apartments. The former landlord and neighbours at the time of purchase were relieved that the house, which they wrongly described as a “crack house” and “party house” would be put to more respectable occupancy.

TRYING TO FORM FAMILIES, TRYING TO FIND HOMES

Donald Travis [pseudonym] lived in an apartment at 300 Furby for several months in 1991.¹³ He was twenty-nine years old and remembered the time as “really lonely,” even though a few blocks

13 Donald Travis [pseudonym], interview by M. Maunder, June 2005.

on Young Street and Balmoral Street he had friends and family. A few blocks seemed a long distance.

Travis was born in his grandfather's home on the Northwest Angle Reserve on Lake of the Woods, but grew up near Keewatin, Ontario. His mother and father separated when he was young, and for much of his childhood, his older brother cared for him. After his mother's death, his father "went off on a tear" and sold the family home. As a sixteen-year-old, he was given the choice of being on his own or joining his younger siblings in foster care. On his own, he went Thunder Bay, where people at the Indian Friendship Centre befriended him. With them he got work fixing up houses and acting as a middleman for Aboriginal people in the bush who made beadwork and other crafts. He also became friends with a number of young people in group homes. He began drinking and getting into trouble for smashing windows and being drunk and disorderly. He was fined and sentenced to short terms in jail.

After about four years, Travis wanted a change of scene and came to Winnipeg. Shortly after his arrival, he was drinking at the Clarendon Hotel on Portage Avenue and tried some magic mushrooms. He blacked out. When he came to, he was wandering around the West Broadway area where he bumped into his sisters, who lived at the Carlyle Apartments on Balmoral Street. He stayed with them, particularly because he was worried about one whose husband was abusing her regularly at the time. "It was pretty violent," he explained. "I'd grown up with it since a baby, but didn't understand it." It was 1985. Travis was twenty-three-years-old, "just another Indian in the crowd." He grew his hair long, got "tattooed up" and began hanging with a crowd who drank, did drugs, sniffed, committed break and entries, and went to jail.

In 1988 his son was born. In re-



Fig. 5.2. Trevere Apartments, 300 Furby Street, built 1926

sponse, Travis said, "I tried to maintain some kind of stability." He made a bit of money working in a lumberyard. He and his partner got on welfare together; a daughter was born; they went through a rehabilitation programme. When they got out of rehab, they moved onto her reserve where they were provided with a house and new furniture. But it did not work out. "I just didn't get along with her relatives. They were totally different. They'd party. It was a brand new house and they didn't care if they kept their shoes on." In the end, he decided to leave and take his four-year-old son with him.

Then Travis found an apartment at 300 Furby Street. He had just been walking along the street when he saw a sign in the window. After moving in, he recalled, "It was pretty lonely—just the two of us." He found a place for his son in daycare at nearby Crossways-in-Common, a multi-facility complex of churches and social organizations at the corner of Broadway and Furby Street. But the apartment was not suitable and shortly thereafter he moved one block over, to rooms at 306 Langside Street, then 305 and finally 278 Langside. He moved often because others in the buildings were too loud and boisterous. Or, sometimes, he was the one being loud and boisterous and he got

evicted.

When his daughter joined him, he feared he would not do a good job as a single parent and so he gave custody of the two children to his sister. In the years since, he has had another relationship and three more children who live with their mother. Reflecting back on the twenty years since he first stayed with his sister at the Carlyle Apartment, and all of the disappointments that he has experienced, Travis considered West Broadway as his home, the place where he knew lots of people and was close to several family members whom he helped and who helped him.

Like Donald Travis, Margaret Bonnette had a hard time finding any place on Furby Street to call home.¹⁴ For several weeks in 1998, the nineteen-year-old young woman and her boyfriend stayed in a rooming house at 260 Furby, and then for a few months later that year they lived in another rooming house at 276/278 Furby. These brief stays were part of a cycle of moves, at least twenty-three moves in twenty-nine years, which characterized most of Margaret's life.

Bonnette grew up in Winnipeg's North End with one brother and one sister. Her mother was from Gordon's Reserve in Saskatchewan, her father from Newfoundland. They separated when she was twelve. She lived with her father for a while, then with her mother. But she and her mother did not along and her mother, Bonnette reported, finally "signed me away", because they fought all the time. A succession of group homes and programmes followed, including the Knowles Centre, a residential facility, and the Seven Oaks Centre, a facility for high-risk children. When she was fifteen years old, to prevent Child and Family Services from sending her out of Winnipeg, she moved

back in with her mother.

Her mother was living in a nursing home on Mayfair Avenue where she had a contract providing care. For the next four years, Bonnette too lived and worked there as a health care aide. But she did not get along with her brother, who was also there. When she was nineteen and pregnant with her first child, she joined her boyfriend, Brad, at the rooming house at 260 Furby Street. It was a big apartment on the third floor with a hide-a-bed and kitchen. The house was quiet, she remembered, with a lot of older people. After a few weeks, though, she was lonely and went back to her mother.

After her daughter, June, was born, Bonnette moved in with Brad at 276/278 Furby Street, while continuing to work at the nursing home. A couple of months later, Margaret, Brad, and June all moved in with her mother on Mayfair Avenue and Brad too worked at the home. Their apartment, however, was much too small for all of them. They all found a bigger place to rent on Hargrave Street. Bonnette was pregnant again, so she and Brad moved into their own apartment nearby on Hargrave.

Then, they traveled to Saskatchewan, to stay with Brad's mother on her reserve. Bonnette hated it. "He was listening to what his Mom was always saying," she said. "I couldn't shop where I wanted. They'd tell me what to buy. I didn't like it." To keep the peace between them, they moved to friends and relatives elsewhere in Saskatchewan, first Moosomin and then Regina. It all ended when her aunt caught Brad in bed with Bonnette's cousin. Brad left. A phone crisis centre in Regina paid for a bus ticket to get Margaret to Winnipeg.

Back in Winnipeg, Bonnette went on welfare for the first time and found an apartment on Balmoral Street in West Broadway. She lived there for a year and gave birth to her son, Jonah. Other boy-

14 Margaret Bonnette [pseudonym], interview by M. Maunder, June 2005

friends entered her life, including Brad's brother who had been in jail. At Brad's request, she had phoned him when he was in jail and he kept phoning and phoning her back. When he got out, he kept turning up at her workplace. She then moved to an apartment on Wolseley Avenue; then to an apartment on Canora Street, where her third child was born; then, to an apartment on Broadway, where her fourth child was born; and eventually to a house on Langside Street. Her circular movements covered the West Broadway and adjacent Wolseley neighbourhood, where she knew the services, could make use of the drop-in programmes at Art City for her children, and could keep in touch with her friends at Wolseley Family Place. "I just went in one big circle," she observed.

CONCLUSION

These examples from Furby Street describe only a few possible experiences of home for the Aboriginal people and their children who moved into Winnipeg after the Second World War. And, of course, the range of accommodation that was available on the street limited those possibilities. By the 1990s the houses on Furby had been divided into suites, few larger than two bedrooms, many deteriorating, and some attracting the interest of organizations planning their revitalization. Tenants moved in and moved out.

Even those, like the Morrisettes and Niemis, who stayed for more than a couple of years found their apartments cramped and ill suited to offering hospitality to the extensive networks of family, kin, and friends who dropped in for a drink and some conversation or who stayed for a time until they found their own places or returned to their own

places.¹⁵ Their experiences were frustrating because previously they had enjoyed larger living spaces that easily accommodated friends and kin. Their homes had been anchors, points of reference, for people whose lives were highly mobile, at times unstable, and occasionally in need of support. Leaving their residences of many years, they were unsettled and moved frequently, trying to find a place in which they could re-establish the rootedness of their family and home life. The disruption in their living arrangements no doubt occasioned similar disruptions in the lives of those who had from time to time relied upon them. Living on Furby was just not the same.

For those, perhaps in some ways like Donald Travis and Ruth Paterson and Margaret Bonnette, who tried desperately at times to establish their own families, life was lonely on Furby Street. To some degree, their experiences resembled those of the young people who moved through the more stable homes of those like the Morrisettes and Niemis. Being single parents, being in unstable relationships with partners and parents, suffering drug and alcohol problems at times, and getting into difficulties with the law and social agencies upset their lives and compromised their ability to give their children all that they wanted for them. When under stress and in need, they did occasionally seek assistance from the system in which they had been entangled for much of their own lives, but more importantly they could draw upon a network of friends and family and in tough times staying in a

15 Others, studying elders for example, have noted the the extensive social networks of Aboriginal people. Less attention has been given to possible disruption of those networks through mobility. Laurel A. Strain and Neena L. Chappell, "Social Networks of Urban Native Elders: A Comparison with Non-Natives," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 21 (1989):104-17.

neighbourhood where they were known provided some reassurance. As Ian Skelton has observed in his study of the residential mobility of Aboriginal single mothers, decisions about moving were rooted in a different logic than that evident in the mainstream population. It occurred within a known area, keeping close to friends and relatives, and often moving was more an assertion of the will to control one's life and situation than a decision based on the relative quality and affordability of housing.¹⁶ Living on Furby gave some moments, brief moments, of joy and hope with their children. However, home was elusive.

16 Ian Skelton, "Residential Mobility of Single Mothers in Winnipeg: An Exploratory Study of Chronic Moving," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 17 (2002): 127-44.

Living in “Murder’s Half-Acre”, 1996 – 2005

Early on the morning of 6 October 2001, John Edward O’Brien was brutally murdered in the rooming house at 276/278 Furby Street where he had the week before been hired as caretaker.¹ Responding to an anonymous telephone call, the police found O’Brien’s battered body in his ground-floor suite where he had apparently been dragged after suffering a vicious beating in the blood-spattered hallway. The forensic pathologist observed that the victim had suffered “a fairly prolonged and violent assault, received a very large number of blunt force injuries concentrated around the head which resulted in bleeding inside of the skull and the accumulation of blood between the brain and the skull and, therefore, my conclusion that the cause of death was blunt trauma of the head and the neck.” Besides numerous abrasions and contusions to his body, blows from fists, feet, and a long blunt instrument had broken O’Brien’s nose, both cheeks, and his upper and lower left jaw; his neck had been severely stretched, with the hyoid bone and the larynx fractured; eight ribs had been broken and the liver torn.² A former tenant of the rooming house, who had been evicted a few days before, was

charged, but later acquitted of John O’Brien’s murder at trials in 2004 and 2006.

276/278 Furby had become one of the worst rooming houses in Winnipeg. One roomer described it as “a noisy place...a pretty rough house. It’s like party there all the time.”³ The police photographer described a disgusting crime scene: “It was just a mess. Things were broken inside and the floor was littered with broken items and garbage and furniture.” It was a “pretty rough house” in what had become a pretty rough neighbourhood. In mid-December 1996 Winnipeg Free Press editor Buzz Currie, while reviewing a story about a recent homicide in the West Broadway area with reporter Doug Nairne, had examined a street map and located a cluster of crime sites—six murders and a hundred knife-related incidents—on Spence, Young, Langside, and Furby Streets. “Murder’s Half-Acre,” Currie pronounced and the Free Press reported.⁴ The name stuck.

Many of the family homes on the block ended up as rooming houses—260, 261, 266, 274, 276/78, 282 Furby, and others. As the older couples who had purchased houses on the block in the postwar years aged and died, and as their heirs sold their childhood homes in a de-

1 David Schmeichel, “Furby St. Slaying,” Winnipeg Sun, 7 October 2001, 3; “Police Probe Suspicious Rooming-house Death,” Winnipeg Free Press, 7 October 2001, A3.

2 Court of Queen’s Bench, Winnipeg Centre, Her Majesty the Queen and Daniel Norman Buck, Accused, CR03-01-24083, vol. 2: Testimony of Proceedings, 30 March 2004, 82-4.

3 Ibid., vol. 1, Testimony of Proceedings, 29 March 2004, 104-6, 118.

4 Doug Nairne, “Murder’s Half Acre,” Winnipeg Free Press, 13 December 1996, A1; Buzz Currie, conversation with M. Maunder.

preciating inner-city real estate market, the former residences of proud working-class immigrants were purchased by absentee landlords as investment properties. Some of the owners were good landlords and put money back into maintaining and improving the homes and carefully screening tenants. Others were not and performed little work on the premises beyond putting up partitions and nailing unneeded doors shut in order to add more suites. In the late eighties and nineties in Winnipeg, as in many other Canadian cities, cutbacks to social assistance and housing programmes produced a steady demand for the meanest shelter that could be obtained for the minimum that welfare would pay. The rooming houses were one sector in what a 2002 study of inner-city Winnipeg termed "the industry of poverty", an integrated economy of volunteer and profit-seeking organizations called into existence to deal with those who apparently could not fend for themselves in a liberal capitalist society.⁵ Different paths led people to rooming houses like those on Furby Street: working people whose health failed or who became disabled on the job, the poor for whom social assistance had long been a way of life, those troubled with mental illness, aboriginal people from impoverished rural and northern communities, the drunks and druggies—the "lost souls", as a downtown beverage-room bouncer once described them to one of the authors—who welcomed oblivion. Only a very few found a home on Furby Street, even if many were sheltered there.

"A PRETTY ROUGH HOUSE"

John O'Brien had been hired about a week before his death to "clean house" at

276/278 Furby Street.⁶ A British Columbia investor had recently purchased the house and his Winnipeg property manager wanted to introduce a new regime. The previous caretaker, a scatter-brained woman in the manager's view, had quit without notice. In any case, she had set a poor standard herself, with a live-in boyfriend, a younger boyfriend around from time to time, and other men coming and going from her suite.⁷ O'Brien had worked for the property manager before and shown skill in dealing with difficult people in difficult circumstances. A man of slight stature—perhaps five feet six inches tall and 140 pounds in weight—he prided himself on his ability to manage rooming houses in a non-confrontational way and welcomed the challenge of improving the building and the neighbourhood in which he had lived for some time.⁸

276/278 Furby, with its seventeen rooms and one self-contained suite for the caretaker, was a challenge. As the property manager described it, "It's a big house and you have a clientele that easily can move and likes to party, they've got a lot of...time on their hands."⁹ Tenants came and left frequently and their acquaintances were in and out at all hours, often staying overnight unknown and without permission. Visiting led to partying, noise and loud music, and partying led to fighting and damage to the building. At the end of the month and beginning of the next month, after the welfare cheques were cashed, the parties carried on night after night, as five, six, or ten people crammed into one small room.¹⁰ One roomer, who kept to himself, described the parties,

5 Jino Distasio, Michael Dudley, and Mike Maunder. *Out of the Long Dark Hallway: Voices from Winnipeg's Rooming Houses* (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, 2002).

6 Her Majesty the Queen and Daniel Norman Buck, *Accused*, 1: 96.

7 *Ibid.*, 1:81, 131.

8 *Ibid.*, 1:87.

9 *Ibid.*, 1:95.

10 *Ibid.*, 1:101.

men and women, as "kind of rough", "people that are street-smart...people that live on the street that are fighters".¹¹ Even the manager, who professed to not being "really easily intimidated [sic] by my tenants," felt uncomfortable going into the building unaccompanied by the caretaker. Security and safety were problems, for the women roomers especially, O'Brien felt.¹²

The testimony of several of the residents of 276/278 Furby at the trial of Daniel Buck, who was found not guilty of the murder, provides another form of oral history and the residents' reports of their activities offer a rare perspective on the range of rooming house life.¹³

Jimmy Blair [pseudonym], thirty-eight years of age at the time of the murder, had lived in the house for about a year. He had spent the evening of 5 October 2001 drinking beer in his room with a friend, Bonnie Spence [pseudonym].¹⁴ He could not say what time he and Bonnie had arrived; he was even uncertain whether he owned a clock or watch at the time. The two had started drinking much earlier in the day in their friend George's room with several of the evicted tenants who returned daily to party. Blair thought he had probably passed out several times already when George told them to leave because he did not want to drink any more. So, some time after dark, Blair and Spence went to his room to drink and watch television.¹⁵ Danny Buck, who had been evicted several days earlier, dropped in briefly to say hello on his way up to

visit his brother, who also was being evicted. Buck's brother also came by later to borrow Blair's vacuum cleaner so he could clean his room and get his damage deposit back.¹⁶ Some time later Blair passed out in a chair and Spence on the floor.¹⁷

Loud banging, shouting, and screaming wakened Blair, but he did not think much about it since "there's always fights in the house."¹⁸ He was used to the racket and was a bit of a scrapper himself. In fact, he been rather bruised and bloodied in a fight the day before with his half brother; they fought regularly, several times a week. Most of the time he forgot he had been fighting and had to rely upon those who had been less intoxicated to tell him where the blood came from.¹⁹ When questioned by the police, however, he did know the source of the blood on his pants: it was already there when his neighbour, who was moving out, had given them to him.

After the noise had stopped for a few minutes, Blair stepped out into the hall and saw someone downstairs going out the front door. He thought that he recognized the man, but under cross-examination from the defense attorney he had to admit that as a chronic alcoholic his powers of observation and memory were unreliable.²⁰ Then he went downstairs to investigate, saw the blood-soaked carpet in the hallway, and went back upstairs to waken Spence. She needed a cigarette, so the two left the house, stepping over the puddle of blood, on their way out, and went to the convenience store down the street on the corner. They returned from the store and went back to Blair's room—stepping over the blood

11 Ibid., 1:129.

12 Ibid., 1:88, 96.

13 Mike McIntyre, "Jury Clears City Man of 2001 Rooming-house Murder," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 February, 2005, B6.

14 Her Majesty the Queen and Daniel Norman Buck, *Accused*, Transcript of Proceedings, vol. 5: 2 April 2004, 3; Mike McIntyre, "Violence Was Way of Life at Home where Man Slain," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 April 2004, B7.

15 Ibid., 5:17.

16 Ibid., 5:6.

17 Ibid., 5:20.

18 Ibid., 5:8-9.

19 Ibid., 5:25.

20 Ibid., 5:10.

again—and passed out until the police roused them a few hours later.²¹

On the other hand, things might not have happened as Jimmy Blair remembered. Under cross-examination, his testimony proved inconsistent with his earlier police interview and testimony at the preliminary inquiry. Whom he was with, where he was, and whom he saw were all under dispute. What was certain was that Blair had a lengthy criminal record; he was a "chronic alcoholic" who drank daily with friends and neighbours, some of whom he knew only by first name; when intoxicated, he got into fights with those in his company; he passed out frequently and had little memory later of what he had been doing.²²

Other residents too lacked credibility in court. Katrina Foster [pseudonym] had lived at 276/278 Furby Street for about four months. In October 2001, she was awaiting trial for her participation in a 1999 murder. At the February 2002 trial for that earlier homicide, her charges were reduced to assault in return for her testimony against the man who was subsequently convicted of the murder. At that trial, Foster, who had a lengthy criminal record, revealed that she had been an alcoholic and, "most of the time" during the previous year, she was drinking heavily and intentionally overdosing on the anti-depressant drugs she had been prescribed. As well, at the O'Brien murder trial in 2004 she denied that she had gotten into fights while on Furby Street, although she did not dispute the defense counsel's contention that she was "a violent person" with "a terrible temper". Her character, plus an admission that she had lied during her previous trial, thoroughly discredited the evidence that she gave concerning John O'Brien's murder.²³

Not all who lived in the house partied. One or two had jobs. Michael Boucher [pseudonym] had been a roomer for about four months, spending weeknights there and returning to his family in southern Manitoba on the weekends. His room was cheap accommodation and to him nothing more. Most evenings he cooked in his room on an electric frying pan and watched television before going to bed early. He knew some of the residents by name, but other than occasional passing conversations he kept to himself. It was a rough building and he was careful, affixing a deadbolt to one of the two doors to his room.

During the night of the murder, a load crash that shook the walls and ceiling of his room wakened Boucher from a sound sleep and he heard a loud voice, which at first he thought he recognized, say, "I don't give a flying fuck." Later on reflection at the trial, he decided that he had not. The disturbance did not last long, and he did not leave his room to determine what had happened. "I didn't know how many people were out there, and I didn't want to get involved," he admitted.²⁴

Boucher's experience and reaction were not unique. Like him, another resident was wakened by banging and voices. Nor did he leave his room to see what was happening. Those who did not party kept their relations with other roomers to a minimum, politely acknowledging others, but maintaining a separation and disconnection from what was going on. At the same time, they were isolated from their neighbours and must have been on edge, aware that the drinking around them could become arguing, and, unpredictably, fighting.

In many ways, more sociable were those with drinking, solvent, and drug problems. Even if they did not know each other's names, they visited daily, drank

21 Ibid., 5:11-12.

22 Ibid., 1-50.

23 Ibid., 2:60, 68.

24 Ibid., 1: 105, 107

together, and shared the descent from conviviality to belligerence. A place like 276/278 Furby suited them well. Lots of similar people living there meant that there was always a party and always friends coming and going. The case against the accused imputed a motive for murder in the anger that eviction provoked. Perhaps it was the inconvenience of having to find another place, or the disappointment over losing what seemed a good place, or perhaps the indignity, in a life full of indignities, of being tossed out onto the street. The Crown's argument, however, depended either on the testimony of residents whose lack of involvement assured that they saw nothing, or of those whose character made unreliable what they claimed to have seen.

PARTYING, "IT WAS EXCITING FOR US"

The unpredictable possibility of partying to turn violent nearly killed Lisa Cameron [pseudonym] within a year of her renting an apartment at 300 Furby Street in the early 1990s.²⁵ Just eighteen years of age when she and her girlfriend moved in, the two young women quickly joined the party scene in the West Broadway and inner-city area. On her own for the first time, she explained, "It was exciting for us. We were really young."

Lisa Cameron had been taken into care when she was thirteen years old. Her mother had tried to raise her and her siblings as best she could, but her father was an alcoholic who terrorized his family. The children on occasion hid from him in a closet so that he could not get at them. "He was a very violent man," she explained. "He was abusive and so I was taken from the home and placed in a group home" on Garfield Street in Winnipeg's West End. While in the home, she

attended school, skipped school; she "rebelled and all that kind of stuff." After leaving the group home, she shared an apartment with another girl, but she wanted to track down a young man who had been a resident of another group home nearby and with whom she had fallen in love. She learned that he was in a correctional facility in Edmonton and so went there to be with him on his release. The two young lovers shared a house and planned to get married, but after about a month, or perhaps a bit longer, together the relationship "soured" and Cameron returned to Winnipeg.

Cameron stayed briefly with a close friend from the home who had moved back in with her parents. In a short while, the two "sisters", as they came to feel about each other, decided to move into an apartment in a building on Furby Street. They were on social assistance, so her friend's parents provided the necessary reference to secure their lease. Thinking back, Cameron admitted, "We should've worked, but we didn't."

Instead, on their own, the two "did a lot of crazy things...We did a lot of partying and we followed a lot of bands and were groupies." They stayed up all night and slept all day, leaving their telephone answering machine on so they could find out where the parties were going to be when they woke up. As she explained, "It was almost like there was a different life when you stayed up late...On the street...there was all kinds of people moving, more at night time than during the day...It was all about partying, getting stoned or getting drunk...Let's go the next person's place; I had enough to drink here.'" She met a lot of interesting people, including a gay man who wanted to experiment with heterosexual dating. With him and other friends, she would hang out some evenings at Giovanni's, a gay club in the neighbourhood.

But there were hard times, too. Social

25 Lisa Cameron [pseudonym], interview by M. Maunder and C. Sinclair June 2005.

assistance did not provide enough money for partying and living. So she regularly visited the pawn shop, wondering whether she get enough money to tide her over until the cheque arrived. And the party scene turned ugly.

"I dated a lot of guys when I lived [there]...and had a lot of sex," Cameron explained. "I have to say that and—umm—but it was just that, you know, friends having sex with each other; it wasn't like [a relationship]. It wasn't like that, it was friends that's it, having the urge of doing it." One evening when she was getting ready to go out to party at a friend's house, another male friend, Andrew, arrived at her apartment with his brother, Bob, to have a couple of drinks. "They just happened to be Aboriginal, which makes no nothing on it." Since she was on her way out, she invited them along to the party. Once there, things got out of hand, things were said. Bob, who had been drinking earlier and was intoxicated, began insulting Cameron, calling her "a fucking slut...a fucking bitch" and criticizing his brother when he stuck up for her. Bob, who was a big fellow, well over six feet tall and about 250 pounds in weight, came at her threateningly, so Cameron, who was skinny and only 120 pounds at the time, broke a beer bottle over his head in self-defense—"It didn't even faze him." She ran and hid in a bedroom upstairs, but Bob forced open the door to get at her. "He started just pounding me and throwing me around...and swinging me around by my hair....There was blood everywhere; it was a really bad scene....His anger got the best of him and he couldn't control it." Andrew found them and was able to pull his brother off of her before the police arrived to sort things out. No charges were laid, because, in the opinion of the police, Cameron had incited the attack by hitting Bob with the beer bottle. After being treated in the hospital, she went

back to her apartment wearing a neck brace and being so battered and bruised and frightened that she could not stand long enough to go out of her apartment for three weeks. Her parents looked in on her regularly and nursed her. "I was traumatized and that's what made me want to move out of the area....It kind of wrecked the whole scene for me. I didn't feel safe any more."

After recovering, Cameron looked for a new place to live, without ever really finding any place that felt right. She tried rooming houses, apartments, sharing a house, moving to different neighbourhoods in the city. One summer she moved seven times. She fell back into partying, with all sorts of people, bikers, whoever. But she was "getting sick of things the way they were." "I wanted more for myself," she sighed. "I wanted to settle down." She went back to school.

Then, she happened to see an advertisement for an interesting looking apartment back in the West Broadway neighbourhood. Even though she did not have bus fare so that she could go to view it, she telephoned the owners. To her surprise, when she told them she was a poor student and had no money, they offered to pick her up and bring her to the building. Their kindness startled her; "they were incredibly nice," she remarked, "because they're Christian people." The suite and the landlords impressed Cameron. She took the place and stayed there for five years. She felt safe and, despite her earlier experiences and the violence in the neighbourhood, the area came to feel like home to her. After she became pregnant, she got a larger apartment in a Manitoba Housing Authority block at 25 Furby Street, four blocks from her earlier residence on the street. She stayed there for six years. During that time, she developed a relationship with a neighbour, got pregnant again, and got married. The marriage did not work out, and with her two chil-

dren she moved into another apartment in West Broadway, where she was awaiting the finalization of her divorce at the time of her interview.

CARETAKER OF A ROOMING-HOUSE RAT HOLE

In 1998 Nelson Giesbrecht moved into 264 Furby.²⁶ The rooming house had started deteriorating twelve years earlier, by the time Doug Crawford [pseudonym] had decided to move out, and ownership had shifted from an owner who regularly visited and maintained the rooming house to a numbered corporation that collected the rent. In 1997 the owner of several rooming houses, including 282 Furby, bought 266 Furby and hired Giesbrecht as caretaker. Giesbrecht described his landlord/employer as a "slum landlord" and the rooming house as a "rat hole".

Giesbrecht took the job because the self-contained suite—the best in the house with bedroom, bathroom, and kitchen—was cheap, just \$236 a month. That he could afford on the disability cheque that he received monthly in compensation for injuries he suffered as a passenger in a motorcycle accident. After the accident, he had spent some time living with a married sister in Ontario, but decided to return to Winnipeg.

The house, he quickly discovered, was infested with cockroaches. The landlord took three months to get rid of them. When he did nothing about the mice, Giesbrecht bought poison and laid it down in his own suite, deducting the cost from his next month's rent. Physically the house was also deteriorating. "Lots of



Fig. 6.1. Rooming House at 264/266 Furby Street where Nelson Giesbrecht was caretaker

windows got broken when I was caretaker," he explained. "I just boarded them up. The landlord only came to collect the rent. He never fixed a window in his life." The back door offered no security: when pushed, it popped open. The doors to the rooms were none too secure either. Giesbrecht remembered one night, "I came home from the bar and my key doesn't work. I kicked the door in....One shot, and I'm in." Tenants caused damages, kicking holes in the wall and leaving their rooms a mess when they moved out. Giesbrecht, a large man, tossed drunken tenants into the yard when they were disruptive, but given the quality of the accommodation, it was hard to attract more respectable roomers.

In one way, the landlord's lack of concern for his building benefited Giesbrecht. From his younger years in Morris, Manitoba, he had developed an interest in woodworking and had used the little money he had to put together a collection of tools, mostly from pawn shops. So keen was his interest that he saved money

26 Nelson Giesbrecht, interview by M. Maunder, April 2005.

for tools and materials by relying on food banks. Another owner might have worried about the reaction of his insurance company to a tenant using the basement for a workshop, with power tools, sawdust, and solvents. However, Giesbrecht's landlord saw an opportunity to charge him another \$20 a month for electricity. The opportunity to do wood work made all the difference and helped Giesbrecht feel more at home in the neighbourhood. He became active in the drop-in centre at West Broadway Community Ministry, working as a volunteer, enjoying the sandwiches and fellowship every afternoon, using the laundry facilities, and, of course, through widening connections there, acquiring more tools.

Still he had no illusions about the neighbourhood and the prevalence of crime. "There were crack houses everywhere," he remembered. "If you'd walk across the street, they'd mug you." One incident, distressing at the time, worked out well. A friend who had just retired from the railroad visited Giesbrecht, who put him up while he was waiting for a lump-sum pension settlement. When the cheque for \$55,000 finally arrived, he set out for the bank, but was jumped not far along the street. The muggers were later caught trying to cash the cheque. Giesbrecht's friend got his cheque back and, settling up for his room, he gave Giesbrecht enough to buy a new table saw.

Giesbrecht stayed at 266 Furby for five years as its deterioration became more and more serious. Ultimately, a task force of health, fire and building inspectors closed the house down in 2003. "A lot of guys came in with their badges and told us we had to leave the premises right now," he remembered. Then they boarded it up.

"THE WORST I'VE EVER FELT"

At the time of the O'Brien murder, Larry Ciprick [pseudonym] had been liv-



Fig. 6.2. Rooming house at 261 Furby Street where Larry Ciprick lived

ing in a self-contained suite at 261 Furby Street for about five years and he was still there in 2005 when interviewed for this study.²⁷ Since most rooming houses had been "rooming homes", often each possessed a larger apartment that had been the accommodation of the former owner-occupants—in this case, the Barkowskis forty years earlier. Landlords might reserve this larger living space for a live-in caretaker, as at 276/278 Furby, or rent it to those able to pay more than the welfare rate for what was the premium accommodation in the house. The other five suites at 261 Furby shared kitchens and bathrooms, while Ciprick enjoyed his own facilities.

When he moved in, Ciprick was about fifty years old, had worked in construction and other physically demanding jobs all his life, and his health had suffered. He grew up in Sandy Hook, cottage country on the shores of Lake Winnipeg, north of

²⁷ Larry Ciprick, [pseudonym], interview by P. Chorney, June 2005.

the city. "It was great growing up there—the lake right there." His parents worked in hotels in the area and accumulated substantial real estate that they subsequently sold for development. When he was eighteen or twenty years of age, in the early sixties, he moved to Winnipeg and found work in a plumbing supplies distribution centre. Then he worked at Bristol Aerospace and at the race track; he got married and divorced. After living in St. James, a west end suburb, for much of his life, he wanted a change and moved to Vancouver where he worked as a dry-waller. In Vancouver he came to enjoy life in the centre of the city. His apartment at Thirteenth and Main was close to his job and walking to and from work while others were stuck in rush hour amused him.

In Vancouver his health began to fail. He suffered a heart attack. A second heart attack and open heart surgery put him in hospital for six months. When got out, he went back to work, but after a few months decided to move back to Winnipeg where he had family. A friend recommended the house on Furby and Ciprick moved in.

At the time, many of the other tenants drank or did drugs on the premises. "It's booze and drugs that cause all the problems," explained Ciprick. The Kresz family owned the building, and several others in the area, and in Larry's view, "They just let anyone in." He complained to the landowner, "I have to go to work in the morning. I'm not as fortunate as these people are, that they can just sit and do drugs." In protest, he threatened to withhold his rent until the trouble-makers were evicted. Perhaps his complaints worked or perhaps it was sale of the rooming-house to a new, more concerned landlord, Rick Kathler. In any case, by 2005 Larry could say, "Right now, we don't have a person who drinks in here. The house is so quiet, it's like a morgue—it's beautiful."

His house may have improved during the decade, but Ciprick still found the neighbourhood "a little scary" at times. His television was stolen from his suite and his van was stolen out of the garage. That and his increasingly poor health left him uneasy and insecure.

He felt himself noticeably weaker, and besides his damaged heart, he developed diabetes. "The diabetes has really, really slowed me down," he commented. "I thought that insulin was supposed to be good for me. It does help keep you alive, but it's the worst I've ever felt. I've never felt like this in my life." He kept working, as hard as he could, as he always had done. However, most times when he came home, he had no energy left to do anything more. "Lots of times in the morning, I just don't want to get up. I was never like that in my life."

Home in some of the best rental accommodation on the block had been for Larry Ciprick an often tense respite from hard work and bad health. Even as his rooming house was improving, his declining health increased his worry and limited what he could enjoy.

"I LIKE MY FREEDOM"

The lack of physical security and safety of many rooming house residents on the block, as exemplified in the O'Brien murder, the assault suffered by Lisa Cameron, and the occasional apprehensions of Larry Ciprick, exacerbated the uneasiness arising from earlier unhappiness in their lives and inherent in their social marginality.

Robert Wilson [pseudonym] had lived at 282 Furby for over a year and a half when he agreed to be interviewed for this study on 26 December 2005, Boxing Day.²⁸ The rooming house was of compa-

28 Robert Wilson [pseudonym], interview by M. Maunder, 26 December 2005.

rable quality to the other building on the block owned by the "slumlord" for whom Nelson Giesbrecht had been caretaker years before. The building, filled with six other roomers when Wilson arrived in 2004, gradually lost residents over the next year and a half. Four moved out, leaving broken televisions, soiled mattresses, filthy clothes, broken furniture, rotting food, used syringes, and unrecognizable detritus. The remaining tenants—Wilson and two others, one of twelve years' residence—kept the shabby kitchen neat and the two bathrooms clean, although those wanting to wash in the only bath tub had to compete with others who left their clothes soaking there. Security in Wilson's building was illusory and depended upon the willingness of residents to leave each other alone. For example, Wilson's landlord had reinforced the door to his room by nailing sheets of plywood to both sides and fastening a metal plate around the door lock. The door had been damaged after another tenant, a heavy crack-cocaine user, had tried to kick it in to get at Wilson, against whom he imagined he held some serious grudge. Wilson was able to wedge a chair back under the doorknob and keep his would-be assailant out until the police responded to a call placed by another tenant. The repairs to the door were ineffective: when Mike Maunder arrived for the interview, he knocked loudly to wake Wilson from his sound sleep and the locked door popped open. Wilson maintained that he lived in squalor of necessity, not by choice; it was what he could afford. His monthly social assistance covered rent of \$271; food banks and missions helped him stretch the \$140 balance, less than \$5 a day, to cover his other living expenses. He would have had another \$20 a month, but the welfare administration was deducting that amount to cover what they claimed had been an

overpayment of more than \$800. He hoped to appeal the decision with the assistance of a friend he had made at the West Broadway Community Ministry.

Wilson, thirty-six years old in 2005, explained that he had been on welfare, in care, or in jail most of his life. His childhood had been painful and as a young boy he had been confused by the criticism and rejection that his mother and step-father directed at him. Even worse, more than once, his parents drove him to distant parts of the city and beyond and threatened to drop him off where he would never know how to find his way home. They physically abused him and sent him to school badly bruised until at age fourteen years a concerned teacher sent him to the school nurse for examination. Questioned about conditions at home, Robert explained in despair and angrily declared, "I gotta leave. I don't want no more of it." He was taken into care.

Some years earlier, Wilson had discovered the reason for his mistreatment. "I was told by two aunts [sisters of his step-father] that my mother was raped and I was the one born." His mother, about twenty years old, had been living with her parents at the time of the assault. Not long afterwards, she moved in with Wilson's step-father. After his birth, they married and subsequently had a daughter and a son. Reflecting on his upbringing, he speculated, "I probably kept the memory of that one guy that did it to her and she took it out on me....She had no answers for me back then....So I always looked at her negative."

Once Child and Family Services had taken Wilson into care, social workers found difficulties in finding a foster home to take him. Instead, he was placed in the Seven Oaks Youth Centre, a custodial facility for young offenders, troubled youth, and youth at risk. He stayed there for three years, until he was old enough to get out at age sixteen years; "there was times I

just kicked the doors open," he revealed, "just to get out." In the Centre, he made some friends, including one who got him "onto the street" soon after he arrived at the Centre. He needed money, so, he confided, "I guess I might as well admit that too, I did my drug dealing then, my criminal act then....The criminal life started from there. Drug dealing was the main issue....I tried to break into a store and steal cartons of smokes." He was caught, charged, convicted, and ended up with a youth record.



Fig. 6.3. Rooming house at 282 Furby Street where Robert Wilson lived

When he got out of the centre, Wilson found a place in a group home run by Father Albert Boufard. He stayed there for two years; it was a good place, with concerned and helpful staff, and Boufard himself "was a good person; he showed a lot of care." The home had to close, however, after one of the residents "hammered Albert in the head with a bat" as he slept. Seeing the blood on the pillow greatly disturbed Wilson. After that, he was out on his own, got on welfare, and lived in a series of rooming houses, when he was not in jail.

Wilson wanted to change his life, but encountered a new issue: the violence that boiled from his anger. "I went from stealing stuff to getting violent." At the time, he could not understand why he acted as he did, although anger management courses that he took later while in prison helped him to understand "what I went through and the type of person I went through with". Women most often provoked his anger and women most often suffered his violence. "I'm not too happy about that either and like I know what I did wrong there....I didn't get sexually violent; I got physically. The smallest little thing fired me off." One of several episodes occurred in the late 1990s when he

struck up a friendship with a woman whom he met over the telephone. She had been trying to contact a resident of another rooming house where Wilson had lived, but he had not been there, Robert took the call and got into a conversation with her. A friendship developed. He wanted to help her with her alcohol problem, but became frustrated when his advice and support did not seem to work. "I exploded about it....She wasn't listening." He yelled, he screamed, he hit her. Another time, while earning money under the table from a trucking company, he beat up his employer who refused to pay him. Wilson's violence got him incarcerated, the longest term being two and half years.

After getting out of Headingley prison in 2000, Wilson decided that he had to change. "I decided either I smarten up now or it's not going to happen," he said, and, as he looked around his run-down room, explained, "I like my freedom." As well, over and over he promised his mother, with whom he maintained some contact, that he would change. She occa-

sionally tried to help and gave him money, but they never fully reconciled before her death in 2005. His step-father and step-siblings wanted nothing to do with him and told him to keep away.

As part of his attempt to find a new life, Wilson tried to find work. To the time of the interview, he had been unsuccessful. His criminal record, he believed, made it difficult. Complicating his search as well was the epilepsy from which he suffered since birth. One potential employer told him directly not to apply for a job for that reason. He had attempted to obtain a disability allowance because of his condition, but his neurologist, who had treated him since childhood, refused to support his application, Wilson believed, because he disapproved of his lifestyle.

Another facet of trying to change was getting advice on spending his money and staying in the rooming house at 282 Furby for longer than had ever been his habit. As decrepit as it was, it was better than some of the other rooming houses where he had lived and because the remaining residents were not drug users, he was not tempted to use again. As well, staying put provided one of few stable experiences in Wilson's life. He worried, however, that the recent sale of the house to a landlord who wanted to fix it up would result in his

eviction.

Wilson was not evicted. A few months after the interview, he got into a fight with another roomer and moved out.

CONCLUSION

The rooming houses, and some apartment buildings, on Furby Street in the last decade of the twentieth century and into the next offered few chances for finding a home. Poverty, addictions and other illnesses, and violence made day-to-day life routine and, at the same time, unpredictable. The boozy, blurry sociability of people who regularly drank and did drugs in one another's company could erupt into anger, rage, and violence with scarcely a warning. Those uninvolved in beatings and scuffles paid little attention to the incidents or the participants, either because they did not want to know or because they were not always certain about what they had witnessed.

Those who tried to stay apart and who struggled with the misfortune and adversity in their own lives could not completely isolate themselves. Victims of crime—robberies and random assaults—they needed to be on guard to anticipate the next threat. Their poverty left them with few options but to live on Furby Street.

Revitalization on the Block, 1995 – 2006

FOUNDATIONS FOR REVITALIZATION

From 1999 to 2006, community groups purchased nine of the eighteen remaining houses on Furby between Broadway and Portage Avenue. By late 2006, six had been totally renovated, and three were scheduled for renovation. The process for most was similar: a house was purchased; if there were residents (two houses had been boarded up), they were moved out; the house was renovated; new tenants moved in. The process produced a better quality house, but it also involved getting tenants who were considered better quality.

This intense period of renovation was only possible because of events throughout the inner core of Winnipeg just prior to this period, from 1995 to 2000. Those events themselves occurred within the changing context of government renewal programmes. Of particular importance was the birth of a new kind of revitalization programme.

Urban renewal had long been an issue in Winnipeg, since shortly after the Second World War. However, the renewal projects had originated from the top, from governmental planning, with very limited local input, and had bulldozed neighbourhoods and dislocated residents.¹ The 1969 federal Task Force on Housing and Urban Development gave legitimacy to

the protest from neighbourhoods under threat of renewal across the country. Its support for resident consultation was ultimately translated into the intergovernmental Neighbourhood Improvement Programme (NIP) of the 1970s, while its preference for rehabilitation rather than demolition was implemented in 1973 through the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Programme (RRAP). NIP projects in Winnipeg addressed the physical deterioration of older neighbourhoods.² From 1981 to 1991 Winnipeg's aging central areas received special attention from another tri-governmental programme, the Core Area Initiative, which pumped \$196 million into the city.³ Subsequently, more general intergovernmental programmes—the Winnipeg Development Agreement (WDA) from 1995 to 2001, and the Winnipeg Partnership Agreement, from 2004 to 2009, each worth \$75 million—have pursued redevelopment throughout the city.

Concerns about the end of the WDA coincided with a frightening epidemic of arson in Winnipeg's North End in 1999–

1 David G. Burley, "Winnipeg and the Landscape of Modernity, 1945–1975," in *Winnipeg Modernism, 1945-1975*, ed. Serena Keshavjee. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 29-85.

2 Deborah M. Lyon and Lynda H. Newman. *The Neighbourhood Improvement Program, 1973–1981: A National Review of an Intergovernmental Initiative*, (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, 1986); *An Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Improvement Program in Winnipeg*, (Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1981).

3 Dana G. Stewart, "The Winnipeg Core Area Initiative: A Case Study in Urban Revitalization," (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1993).

2000.⁴ Local media coverage drew national attention. For example, in January 1999 the Winnipeg Free Press printed a photograph that showed the ruins of one burnt-out house on Manitoba Avenue beside a derelict bungalow on which someone had painted "Burn Me Now". Arson also acted as a catalyst in drawing together the three levels of government not only to commit new funds, but also to simplify their allocation.⁵ During the last two decades of the twentieth century, community groups had confronted an extensive and often bewildering array of government funding opportunities for their redevelopment projects. Beginning in 2000, ten housing funds, previously addressed in a wide range of specific municipal, provincial, and federal programmes, as well as the umbrella agreements, became consolidated through the "single window" of the tri-level Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative.⁶

What happened on Furby was part of a new revitalization process and a local politics that stressed community participation and community direction in the pursuit of public and private funding for projects of community interest.⁷ The seeds of

the new revitalization process in West Broadway were sown in the dying days of an earlier revitalization process, Winnipeg's Core Area Initiative (CAI). That collaborative undertaking, a long-term arrangement among the three levels of government, expressed the vision of Lloyd Axworthy, the Liberal Minister for Employment and Immigration in the Trudeau government whose Winnipeg South riding included sections of the core area. Axworthy wanted to demonstrate that the federal government could participate constructively in community-level development. As well, he was convinced that Winnipeg's economic development depended on its success in revitalizing its deteriorating inner city and in providing employment for the growing Aboriginal population.⁹

In addition to several large-scale renewal projects and social and training programmes for disadvantaged groups, CAI also introduced programmes to encourage the building of new housing and the rehabilitation of old dwellings. The goal was to create vital and stable neighbourhoods that would attract "return migration" to the older areas of the city.¹⁰

Perhaps an unintended consequence of CAI was the stimulus that it gave to grass-roots community organizations. As Dana Stewart observed in the major academic study of CAI, "the level of community input into decision-making was non-existent at the planning and formulation stage of the CAI, and low and ill-conceived throughout the duration of the Initiative." Some critics thought that too

4 Jim Silver, *Building on Our Strengths: Inner-city Priorities for a Renewed Tri-level Development Agreement*, (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2002).

5 Holli Moncrieff, "Arsonists Targetting Firefighters," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 4 January 1999, A1; Mike Maunder and Virginia Maracle, "North End Residents Patrol Mean Streets," *Ibid.*, 11 January 1999, A4; "Arson Epidemic in Winnipeg Brings \$12m in Relief from Ottawa," *Daily Commercial News and Construction Record*, 22 December 1999, A5.

6 Christopher Leo and Martine August, *The Federal Government and Homelessness: Community Initiative or Dictation from Above?* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba, 2005), 5-6.

7 Many of the community initiatives taken in West Broadway and noted in this chapter were identified in Cy Gonick, "All Politics Are

Local," *Canadian Dimension*, 33 (Fall 1999): 18-22.

9 Stewart, "The Winnipeg Core Area Initiative," 86.

10 Stewart, "The Winnipeg Core Area Initiative," 105-6, 116-7.

much bureaucracy was the problem, but others thought that, although untapped expertise existed in the community, community groups often missed out on opportunities because of their own time-consuming commitments and difficulties in forming connections and establishing alliances.¹¹ Awareness of those disadvantages convinced some in West Broadway to strengthen networks within the neighbourhood.

Among the most active was Linda Williams, who had been a City worker for the Core Area Residential Upgrading and Maintenance Project in West Broadway. As the programme wound down in the early nineties, Williams and other workers, landowners, and agencies created the city-wide Winnipeg Housing Coalition. By 1993 the Coalition had spawned the West Broadway Neighbourhood Housing Resource Centre with Williams as coordinator. Her group sought specific grants for specific projects, for instance, a grant from the Social Planning Council to build community capacity. From 1995 to 1999, when the Housing Resource Centre secured core funding from the United Way, Williams organized residents in a variety of the earliest revitalization activities: a 1995 safety audit; barbecues at apartment buildings to develop tenant groups; a street-strolling programme to enhance safety; and the Tenant Landlord Cooperation (TLC) programme, in which a committee of tenants and apartment owners developed standards and inspected buildings to earn recognition for good apartments.¹²

Like Williams, others believed that community development needed to origi-

nate within the community, the residents, the businesses, and the agencies that actually lived and worked in a particular neighbourhood. To get people together, the West Broadway–South Sherbrook Business Improvement Zone organized regular meetings at the Resource Centre, which ultimately evolved into a Neighbourhood Council. In 1995 the community club was renamed the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre as part of a new contract in which the City pledged funds for new inner-city programmes. This new programming quickly re-established the Centre as a neighbourhood gathering place.¹³ As well, in this concerned yet hopeful context, the West Broadway Residents' Association articulated the community's interests to government.

Similarly committed to community development was Paul Chorney, an activist who had arranged in 1996 to work in the neighbourhood on the Eco-Village Project funded under a three-year Urban Issues Grant from the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation.¹⁴ Sponsored by the Wolseley Residents' Association and Clinic, a community health service, the project implemented a "community assets model", which acknowledged that neighbourhood well-being and development depended on more than just financial assets (even broadly defined to include in-kind transactions), but also re-

11 Stewart, "The Winnipeg Core Area Initiative," 215–7.

12 Linda Williams, "A Neighbourhood in Bloom: The Revitalization Process in West Broadway, a Central, Inner City Neighbourhood in Winnipeg," *Heritage Canada* (May/June 1997), 6.

13 Mike Maunder and Virginia Maracle, "Broadway Offers a Positive Place for Hangin' Out," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 4 July 1997, A6.

14 Alexander G. Stuart, "Regulatory Reform and Eco-Development in Winnipeg: The Westminster Square Eco-Village," (MCP Thesis/Practicum, University of Manitoba, 2000), 1–3; The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, *Urban Issues Recipients, 1996–1999, "Eco-Village: A Sustainable Neighbourhood Project."* <<http://www.bronfmanfoundation.org/urban/English/recipients/ewolseley.htm>>. [Accessed 15 August 2006]

quired social networks and collaboration; human assets, including education, leadership, and health; physical assets, like transportation, child and elder care, and sources of information; and personal assets, such as motivation and self-confidence.

One of the project's first initiatives, in June 1996, involved Chorney and residents from Balmoral and Spence Streets, including long-time homeowners Wanda Koop, an artist, and architect Ron Basarab, painting colourful murals on the former Klinik building at Broadway and Colony Street, which had become an eyesore since Klinik moved to a new location on Portage Avenue.¹⁵ The group also came together that summer to consider housing plans. With Basarab's expertise, they developed a streetscape of Young Street, between Broadway and Portage Avenue, showing derelict buildings and different possibilities. With that as inspiration, they then organized a meeting in December 1996 to consider housing. About twenty people attended this meeting: city planners, government departments and organizations such as the Neighbourhood Housing Resource Centre (Linda Williams), Westminster Housing Society, Habitat for Humanity, Assiniboine Credit Union, and Lions Club of Winnipeg Housing Centre. Calling their activities the West Broadway Housing Initiative, these groups began talking and dreaming about housing projects and seeking funds.

But revitalization meant more than housing. While the first housing projects were getting started, in March 1997 Chorney and his group organized a larger meeting of all those interested in the neighbourhood: schools, agencies, residents, businesses, community organizations, planners, university researchers—

more than fifty groups, as well as individuals on their own. They called it the West Broadway Alliance.¹⁶ "People sat at small tables," recalled Chorney. "We started strategic planning. But also, something else was happening at those tables. Many people had never met. Relationships were beginning to form, trust was being built, people's energies spread to other people." This spreading energy generated support for a proliferation of community projects in the next few years. Early on members of the Alliance recognized the need for a more formal legal identity and so the West Broadway Development Corporation (WBDC) was chartered in 1997 to undertake, among other things, applications for funding from a variety of sources.

At the time, some active in West Broadway came to believe that their community was not receiving what it needed under the Winnipeg Development Agreement because of rivalries and mistrust among municipal politicians. Whatever the consequences of political differences might have been, Lloyd Axworthy, Winnipeg's senior Member of Parliament and the federal Minister for Western Economic Development, was able to direct some funding to the neighbourhood. Axworthy found money for housing renovations, for the West Broadway Education and Employment Centre, for a community art programme, for the start-up costs of the Development Corporation and for the Corporation to hire a director, Paul Chorney. Also sympathetic to West Broadway's interests was its member of the provincial legislative assembly, Jean Friesen, who served in the critical years from 1990 to 2003. As Deputy Premier

15 "Community Organizing: People's Energies Spread to Other People," *Neighbourhoods Alive Forum*, 14 June 2001, 5.

16 Ayoka Anderson et al., *Housing Intervention and Neighbourhood Development: Harnessing Change in West Broadway. Report 2: Housing Interventions and Market Responses* (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, 2004), 14.

and Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs from 1995 to 2003, she was deeply involved in the negotiations to secure the co-operation of the three levels of government in funding renewal programmes.

In 2002 WBDC was one of five neighbourhood renewal corporations to receive a commitment of five-year funding from the provincial government. In June 2006 the government renewed its funding for another five years and increased its annual grant.¹⁷ While funds were received from a variety of public and private sources, the extent of support from the province's Neighbourhoods Alive! programme gives some indication of community-building activity in West Broadway: in its first five years, from 2000 to 2005, the government approved \$1,310,615 for fifty-four projects—many of which, like WBDC, predated Neighbourhoods Alive!¹⁸

The WBDC fostered a variety of programmes through advising, bringing potential partners together, seeking grants from private and public sources, administering funds for unincorporated neighbourhood groups, and collaborating with other community organizations throughout the city. Its activities, too extensive to mention in detail, and its funding, too varied to describe fully, built

community assets in several fields.

Besides such volunteer activities, like the annual spring clean-up and the community gardens, the Alliance and WBDC promoted specific projects to improve the environment of the neighbourhood, aesthetically and ecologically.¹⁹ The Greening West Broadway Group undertook a recycling plan, composting, and river-bank clean-up using money obtained by WBDC from the City's Community Incentive Grants programme, as well as from the Government of Manitoba's Neighbourhoods Alive! programme. Spirit Park on Young Street was the first new inner-city park in many years.²⁰ As well, murals brightened the streetscapes in the neighbourhood. The West Broadway–South Sherbrook Business Improvement Zone, which had been strengthened financially when Great West Life Assurance Co. joined the BIZ, initiated street beautification and graffiti cleaning projects and purchased a van for the community club.

To make the neighbourhood safer, security concerns drew attention. WBDC received funding for a programme to improve residential security lighting.²¹ Through the energy and commitment of foot patrol police officers—like towering

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- 17 Government of Manitoba, News Releases: "Neighbourhoods Alive! Invests in Community Economic Development," 22 February 2002. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2002/2002-02-22-01.html>> [Accessed 15 August 2006]; "Minister Announces West Broadway Neighbourhoods Alive! Funding," 14 June 2006. <http://www.gov.mb.ca/ia/programs/neighbourhoods/news/documents/NA!WBDC_June_14_06.pdf>. [Accessed 15 August 2006]
- 18 Government of Manitoba, News Releases: "Province Celebrates and Expands Successful Neighbourhoods Alive Initiative," 8 June 2005. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2005/06/2005-06-08-02.html>> [Accessed 15 August 2006]

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- 19 Michael Marshall, "Annual Spring Cleanup Unites West Broadway," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 May 2004, 3.
- 20 Government of Manitoba, News Releases: "Neighbourhoods Alive! Invests \$115,000 in West Broadway Projects," 26 September 2003. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2003/09/2003-09-26-02.html>>. [Accessed 15 August 2006]; Karen Wade, "Oasis of Peace Created in West Broadway Area," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 8 October 2003, A3; Aldo Santin, "West Broadway Group Turns Empty Lots into Green Space," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 July 2003, A3.
- 21 Government of Manitoba, News Releases: "Inner City Safety Supported by Neighbourhoods Alive! Funding," 28 April 2003, <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2003/04/2003-04-28-04.html>>. [Accessed 15 August 2006].

Brad Richardson and Rick Morris, who also put their own time and money into community events, including a pow-wow—the Winnipeg Police Service's community policing promoted safety and new levels of trust among residents.²² As well, Linda Williams introduced the West Broadway Restorative Justice Program, which provided a forum for victim and offender to work out mutually acceptable restitution.

Working with young people received special concern. In the summer of 1998, Wanda Koop, with assistance from Alliance partners and federal government funding, created Art City, an art drop-in centre for young people.²³ An Aboriginal head start programme, Little Red Spirit, opened in the Neighbourhood Centre. Drawing on funding from Health Canada, Aboriginal children between the ages of two and five years, with their parents' involvement, receive instruction in culture and language, health and nutrition, and social support.²⁴ The Housing Concerns Group of Winnipeg Inc. undertook an Odd Jobs for Kids programme in West Broadway. In 2002 the programme received \$30,000 from the Government of Manitoba's Neighbourhoods Alive! Fund. Inspired and run by Linda Williams, Odd Jobs found employment for youth between eight and twenty years of age at which they might earn \$20 or \$25 a week. As Williams explained, "It's the equivalent to an allowance that they would otherwise never get."²⁵ Gordon Bell High School

set up a satellite programme for at-risk children and in 2000 formed a partnership with Lions Housing to create Youth Builders, a programme through which young adults could learn construction skills by working on neighbourhood projects. Later, after Lions Club of Winnipeg Housing Centre encountered financial difficulties, WBDC sponsored Youth Builders and received provincial funding for the programme.²⁶

Projects were also initiated to improve the employment prospects of neighbourhood residents. Investors Group and Assiniboine Credit Union helped to fund the establishment of a Skills Bank. With federal funding, WBDC helped establish the West Broadway Education and Employment Centre, which provided various courses for those on employment and income assistance to improve their skills, and also a drop-in Jobs Resource Centre where people could look for employment and receive assistance with applications.

Other WBDC programmes fostered even more community assets. Tune Time/Music Zone promoted music in local youth programming. The Good Food Club established a food buying co-op.²⁷ An Aboriginal Liaison project gave

News Releases: "Neighbourhoods Alive! Invests in Winnipeg's Inner City," 25 February 2002. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2002/02/2002-02-25-01.html>>. [Accessed 15 August 2006]

22 Mike Maunder and Virginia Maracle, "Elders Teach Traditions to Answer Native Dreams," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 July 1998.

23 Mike Maunder and Virginia Maracle, "Kids Paint Brighter Future," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 July 1998, A4.

24 Mike Maunder and Virginia Maracle, "Happy Kids Lead Parade to Healthy Community," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 27 June 1997, A3.

25 Linda Williams quoted in Gonick, "All Politics Are Local"; Government of Manitoba,

26 Government of Manitoba, News Releases: "Neighbourhoods Alive Supports Recreation, Education and Training Initiatives," 19 December 2001. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2001/12/2001-12-19-01.html>>

[Accessed 15 August 2006]; "WHHI Funds Homeless Emergency Shelter and Youth Programs," 10 May 2004. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2004/05/2004-05-10-05.html>>. [Accessed 15 August 2006].

27 Government of Manitoba, News Releases: "Neighbourhoods Alive! Projects to Benefit West Broadway Area," 24 June 2003. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2003/06/2003-06-24-05.html>> [Accessed 15 Au-

support to the West Broadway Aboriginal Residents' Association.²⁸ The list could go on. Of course, not every community-building effort can be attributed to the Alliance and the WBDC, but those organizations were at the centre of the action.

Housing then was part of this much more extensive revitalization in West Broadway and from its first December 1996 meeting the Alliance and subsequently WBDC promoted collaborative initiatives. In attendance at that December meeting was Westminster Housing Society member Charles Huband, a judge sitting on the Manitoba Court of Appeal. Westminster Housing Society undertook the first housing project in 1997 with its renovations of a donated boarded-up home on Spence Street. The Society had been founded in 1989 by a group of Westminster United Church members who grew concerned as the neighbourhood around their church had deteriorated.²⁹ They decided that provision of good quality housing for people in the neighbourhood was a meaningful contribution. First was a four-storey thirty-seven-unit apartment co-op near the Church at Maryland Street and Westminster Avenue, the ownership of which was turned over to its occupants. The success of that undertaking convinced its participants to incorporate in 1993 in order to develop and operate low-income housing projects. Their second project was a

twelve-unit townhouse further up Maryland. As a result of the neighbourhood meeting, Westminster decided to continue its efforts to provide neighbourhood housing by seeking boarded-up homes in West Broadway that could be donated or purchased cheaply and then raise funds to renovate them as affordable, good quality rentals. The first renovation was the house on Spence done in partnership with Habitat for Humanity.

Another enthusiast for housing renewal was Al Davies, Executive Director of Lions Club of Winnipeg Housing Centre (LCWHC). In 1997, Lions Housing set up West Broadway Housing Inc. to purchase and renovate homes in a tight cluster on the block of Langside Street between Broadway and Sara Avenue, a block with many boarded-up derelict houses. West Broadway Housing concentrated on the single-family re-sale market. It obtained funding for its first renovation from Rotary Clubs and formed a partnership with Pierre Radisson Collegiate for its students to do the work. Students hauled ten refrigerators out of that house. It was gutted and renovated and put up for sale as a single-family home in November 1997. Over three years, Lions renovated thirteen houses on the block and sold them for about \$75,000 each.³⁰

The Lions Club had developed a complicated corporate structure to operate a variety of housing projects, several in the West Broadway area and others elsewhere in the city. Since 1964, Lions Club of Winnipeg Senior Citizens Home had grown to operate a twin-tower at the cor-

gust 2006]; Michael Marshall, "Good Food: Club Benefits West Broadway Residents," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 8 September 2004, N1.

28 Government of Manitoba, News Releases: "Neighbourhoods Alive! Helps Older Neighbourhoods: Mihychuk," 18 December 2003. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2003/12/2003-12-18-02.html>>.

29 Ardythe Basham, *Rising to the Occasion: A Community History of West Broadway, Wolseley and Armstrong's Point*, (Winnipeg: Robert Steen Memorial Community Centre, 2000), 89.

30 Mike Maunder and Virginia Maracle, "Lion's Block Project Will Help Renters Buy in Community," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 November 1997, A9; Ayoka Anderson et al., *Housing Intervention and Neighbourhood Development: Harnessing Change in West Broadway. Report 2: Housing Interventions and Market Responses* (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, 2004), 14.

ner of Sherbrook Street and Portage Avenue, as well as an Alzheimer Residence and Research Centre on Maryland Street and four adult day clubs. In 1994, it also had incorporated LHC Associates Limited, a for-profit company providing property management and consulting services; West Broadway Housing was its subsidiary. The Lions had developed another high-rise seniors' residence on the southeast corner of Furby Street and Portage Avenue in 1981, where Shipley Court had been, and set up a separate corporate entity, Lions Club of Winnipeg Place for Senior Citizens Inc. to operate it. Its other interest in West Broadway was Lions Club of Winnipeg View from the South Inc. at 311 Furby Street. SOS [Society of Self-Help] Co-operative Housing Inc. had acquired and demolished three of the houses on Furby Street (307, 311, and 313) in the late 1980s and built this thirty-two-unit housing project for special needs individuals living on low-income or social assistance. By 1998 the Society had encountered financial difficulties and turned the building over to the Lions. Five other Lions' housing corporations operated in other parts of Winnipeg.³¹

LEARNING FROM THE FIRST PROJECTS

The next four years proved to be an intense period of learning, both for the community groups attempting housing projects and the government structures attempting to support them. Despite the intentions of WHHI to streamline fund-

ing, frustrations continued. The Winnipeg Free Press in November 2001 quoted Stefano Grande of Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation who lamented that "the process is still pretty much a challenge" and he had to spend most of a week filling out "yet another application" for a project for which he had already submitted an application.³⁵ Inevitably, delays, successes, and failures occurred on the block of Furby Street between Broadway and Portage Avenue, as they did throughout the city.

Operation Go Home (OGH)—a West Broadway-based service for street youth formed in 1994 as the Winnipeg chapter of the national organization of the same name—proposed the first community renovation project on the block for 288/290 Furby.³⁶ OGH had participated in the meetings that had created the West Broadway Alliance and the West Broadway Development Corporation. Its executive director, Margaret Church, had a vision of a big house where girls from the streets would be able to have their own room, while being mentored by young women also living in the house. A resident OGH staff person would supervise the home, while other OGH staff members would drop in to provide services. This more interventionist role departed from OGH's original mission, which had been to re-unite youth with their families as soon as possible; work on the streets convinced Church and others that that was not always the safest or the best solution. The large house on Furby Street, which its former long-time residents and owners

31 Government of Manitoba, Office of the Auditor General, Report on Compliance and Special Audits, March 2001, 68–9.

35 Paul McKie, "Red Tape Harming Inner City: Critics," Winnipeg Free Press, 19 November 2001, A11.

36 In July 2003, the Winnipeg chapter of Operation Go Home merged with another street-youth assistance organization, Powerhouse Winnipeg Inc., to form Resource Assistance for Youth. The new organization retained an affiliation with Operation Go Home. "RaY: Resource Assistance for Youth—History," <<http://www.rayinc.ca/history.html>>. [Accessed 9 August 2006]

Peter and Mary Trimpolis had rented out as a rooming house for several years, was boarded up, but it seemed an ideal location for this experiment. Not only was it spacious, but also the neighbourhood was familiar to many of the young women whom the organization served and it was just around the corner from the OGH office at Broadway and Young Street. Proximity to the University of Winnipeg would facilitate the recruitment of student volunteers to act as mentors. Margaret Church's vision, discussed at Alliance meetings, interested several others who formed a small group to promote the project. In particular, Ursula Neufeld, a neighbourhood coordinator with Lions Housing, worked with Church to develop funding applications and a strategy to get the project moving in advance of funding decisions.

The project took its first step in 1999–2000 when the Lions' West Broadway Housing Inc. acquired the property. That organization took responsibility for renovations and involved Youth Builders, the job-training programme at Gordon Bell High School that the Development Corporation had taken under its wing. The renovations stopped, however, in 2001 when Lions Club of Winnipeg Housing Centres (LCWHC) encountered financial problems and a provincial investigation into its affairs.

In April 1999, the Province of Manitoba, through its Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (MHRC), had taken over the responsibility for managing the federal government's social housing agreements in the province from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Following a request from LCWHC for additional funding, MHRC through the Minister of Finance requested a provincial audit on 14 July 2000. The Auditor General submitted a devastating report: from 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2000 financial losses eroded the equity position of

LCWHC in its properties and compromised the financial well-being of it and its holdings. The situation had arisen from "incomplete and inaccurate financial information that negatively impacted decision-making" and "questionable decisions regarding the future direction of the organization" that involved LCWHC in several projects including housing in West Broadway, of which the Furby project was one part. The report faulted the governance of LCWHC and its Board for placing too much power with its Executive Director, for countenancing real and perceived conflicts of interest among its members, for lacking clarity in its defining the roles and responsibilities, and for the quality of information that it accepted for decision-making. For these reasons, the Board approved unrealistic business plans for its housing initiatives and had unrealistic expectations for its ability to recover the foreseeable cost of the extensive renovations required by its West Broadway properties: it failed to appreciate "the reality that properties in the West Broadway area of the city have a limit on their maximum market value". The Auditor General estimated LCWHC's losses in West Broadway to be \$654,200, which included repayable grants of \$162,800. Further criticism was leveled at LCWHC's accounting practices, which co-mingled funds from different sources, making it impossible to determine whether they were used for their intended purposes, obscuring cost allocations resulting in overpayments, and drawing upon replacement funds required under provincial agreements covering its four seniors' residences. As well, the report discovered "numerous breaches of funding agreements". Further, the Auditor General concluded that the complex corporate structure, along with management practices and accounting transactions, had been influenced by the desire of some at LCWHC to "keep...governments at

bay".³⁷

After receiving the report, Manitoba's Minister of Family Services and Housing, Tim Sale, concluded that LCWHC had made "questionable uses of Manitoba taxpayers' money" and appointed an interim manager to oversee LCWHC, pending its re-organization. Among the numerous results of the report was the withdrawal of LCWHC from "non-core lines of business", principally its participation in West Broadway housing revitalization projects.³⁸

By this time, the Development Corporation had arranged with Winnipeg Housing and Rehabilitation Corporation (WHRC) for that body to act as the development arm of the Development Corporation's own housing programme. WHRC had been set up by the City of Winnipeg in 1978 to operate as a non-profit developer of affordable housing. Because of the weakness of the re-sale market for inner-city properties, the corporation also began in 1981 to engage in the re-development and management of rental housing.³⁹ Its expertise as a property developer and manager attracted community organizations seeking its expertise and its partnership in projects of interest to their neighbourhoods. Stefano Grande, executive director of WHRC, arranged the purchase of 288/290 Furby in early 2001 and undertook the renovation work. All through this period, OGH had worked to develop a variety of funding sources: government support required community organizations to attract other backing. Significant support included

grants from Canadian Tire Foundation for Families, the Royal Bank, and Home Depot. This private sector confidence in the project drew major funding from the federal and provincial governments, a commitment of over a half million dollars. The largest component came through the WHHI, which allocated funds from two programmes: the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), provided \$162,684 for intervention and support services, including emergency services, prevention education, and a housing registry, and another \$91,570 for furnishings and staffing costs; the federal-provincial Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) contributed \$126,000 for renovations. The federal government's National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention offered \$36,800 to hire a Housing Project Coordinator. The Province of Manitoba provided \$38,000 through its Healthy Child Manitoba and Neighbourhoods Alive! Programmes for operating costs; Healthy Child Manitoba committed another \$20,000 for short-term transitional expenses.⁴⁰ The complexity of OGH's funding matched the complexity of organizations involved in getting the project off the ground: WBDC, LCWHC, WHRC, and OGH itself—altogether an alphabet soup of programmes and agencies. In the fall of 2001, 288/290 Furby opened its doors, the first totally renovated house under the new community revitalization process that was happening in West Broadway.⁴¹

Transition House operated for a year. The plan called for four University of Winnipeg students to mentor five homeless teenage girls. Gearing up to full

37 Office of the Auditor General, Report on Compliance and Special Audits, 70–4.

38 Government of Manitoba, News Releases, "Interim Manager Appointed to Oversee Lions Club of Winnipeg Housing," 5 February 2001. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2001/02/2001-02-05-01.html>>. [Accessed 10 August 2006].

39 "Housing Agency Sees Future in Old Buildings," Ottawa Citizen, 1 October 1994.

40 Government of Canada, Manitoba News Releases, "WHHI Funds Youth Transitional Housing and Support Programs," 18 January 2002. <http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/mb/news-releases/news_01_02/youthtran.shtml>. [Accessed 11 August 2006]

41 Winnipeg Free Press, 20 May 2001, A3.

occupancy required time as OGH staff knew that taking on five troubled teens at one time could create a volatile situation. Also, the eight-month academic year of university-student mentors meant that they might leave the House during the summer months for other work, to be with their families, or to take permanent employment after graduation. Seasonality complicated maintaining an adequate balance of mentors and youth and meant fewer youth could be taken during the summer. Still, those involved with its work believe that during its operation there were several success stories of young women who found enough stability to get jobs or return to school.

However, a change of executive directors at OGH demonstrated just how important continuity in management was for the success of community organizations. The transition in directors caused the annual application for SCPI funds to be late. Despite appeals to SCPI for flexibility, Transition House's funding was not in place for its second year.⁴² The OGH board, like all non-profit groups, was constantly struggling for funds and could not cover operating costs until alternate funds could be secured. And so, in 2002, 288/290 Furby was closed up once again.

It sat empty for a year. Then a community meeting of residents considered three proposals for the house: a safe home for former prostitutes, a shelter for children with Child and Family Services, and housing for University of Winnipeg students. The community decided on the university housing. Beginning in 1999 the university had sought to provide safe housing for students in the inner-city neighbourhoods adjoining its campus. Drawing on WHHI funding, it acquired and renovated five properties on Balmoral Street in West Broadway, ready for stu-

dents in 2000, and the following year made rooms available in four former rooming-houses on Spence Street in the Spence Neighbourhood. Subsequently, rather than owning residences the university struck a development and management agreement with Kinkora Developments for an apartment block on Young Street in the Spence Neighbourhood and then with WHRC for 288/290 Furby.⁴³

At the same time that Transition House was winding down, next door Westminster Housing Society opened its first renovation on the block, a three-storey triplex at 294/296 Furby. In the years since their first house on Spence in 1997, Westminster had been seeking out boarded-up houses and renovating them on three streets in West Broadway. 294/296 Furby was its tenth project.

Unlike many of Westminster's previous renovations, 294/296 Furby had been in such good condition that renovations preserved the original floor plan and ambience of the house, with its wooden inlaid floors, mantels, and several built-in bookcases and cupboards. Charles Huband considered the house to be the "jewel in the crown" of Westminster properties in West Broadway, when it opened in June 2002—just as Transition House next door was beginning to wind

42 Ian Marcil to Mike Maunder, 5 August 2006 [E-mail].

43 Moira Farr, "Residents in Urban Renewal," University Affairs, January 2002, 18-21; CanEquity News Releases: "University of Winnipeg Opens Second Phase of Student Housing," 2 November 2001. <http://www.canequity.com/mortgage-ews/archive/2001/2001-11-02_CMHC-university_of_winnipeg_student_housing.stm>. [Accessed 16 August 2006]; Service Canada, Manitoba News Release, "WHHI Helps Fund Inner City Affordable Housing Renovation Project," 19 July 2002. <http://www1.servicecanada.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=/en/mb/newsreleases/news_07_02/july19.shtml&hs=mb0>. [Accessed 16 August 2006].

down.⁴⁴

In the period from 2000 to 2004, as housing money began to flow from the WHHI, housing had become the major programme of the WBDC. In its partnership with WHRC, it renovated fifteen houses throughout West Broadway, many of them as rent-to-own duplexes.

Housing development and grant applications called for a high degree of financial and technical expertise. All three inner-city neighbourhoods involved in housing projects—West Broadway, the West End and the North End—had formed partnerships with WHRC to provide this expertise. But where the North End and the West End each hired two housing coordinators to coordinate the flow of projects now eligible for WHHI support, West Broadway had hired only one, Brian Grant. His work became even more complex because of WBDC's attempt to renovate houses under a Community Land Trust arrangement. The renovation of run-down houses, the Corporation feared, would increase land values and tempt those who had initially bought them under various assistance programmes to sell their homes, driving up prices even further. The potential gentrification of West Broadway that rising property values might promote concerned those who enjoyed its diverse composition and who did not think that community development should drive out moderate and low-income individuals and families.⁴⁶ A Community Land Trust offered an alternate form of housing tenure, one which

was promoted as socially progressive and environmentally sustainable approach to community development in numerous American cities since the 1960s and subsequently in Canadian cities, including Montréal and Toronto's Island Community.⁴⁷

Working with WHRC, WBDC obtained part of a \$1 million grant from the federal government's Winnipeg Homelessness and Housing Initiative to acquire fifteen houses. WHRC took initial ownership of the properties and renovated them, with the intention of turning them over to the Land Trust. (The rest of the grant enabled WHRC to rehabilitate fifteen houses in the Spence neighbourhood, north of Portage Avenue from West Broadway.) WBDC secured additional development money from Assiniboine Credit Union, which also offered mortgage funds and financial advising to prospective buyers.⁴⁸ Rather than selling the houses outright, the West Broadway Community Land Trust would retain ownership of the land in perpetuity and sell life-leases or trust agreements, which would give residents equity in their homes. A rent-to-own plan would make it possible for low-income people to finance their purchase. When residents left, they could sell their life-leases and trust agreements for a profit, but the Land

44 Charles Huband to Mike Maunder, September 2005.

46 Jim Silver, *Gentrification in West Broadway? Contested Space in a Winnipeg Inner City Neighbourhood* (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba, 2006).

47 Ed Finkel, "Affordable Forever," *Plan*, 71 (November 2005): 24–7; Mark Roseland, "Linking Affordable Housing and Environmental Protection: The Community Land Trust as a Sustainable Urban Development Institution," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 1 (December 1992): 162 ff; Lance Evoy, "Claiming What Is Ours: The Building of a Community Land Trust (Grand Plateau District of Montreal)," *City Magazine*, 13 (Winter 1991): 26ff.

48 Aldo Santin, "Rent-to-own Helps Core Poor Afford Homes," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 9 October 2001; Geoff Kirbyson, "Assiniboine Credit Union Grows despite Tumult," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 21 February 2003.



Fig. 7.1. 287 and 297 Furby Street in 2003

Trust could effectively screen and bar prospective residents through its ownership of the land. The community members of its Board would give voice and influence to those who lived in the neighbourhood.⁴⁹ As well, community spirit was encouraged when members of the Trust cooperated in making neighbourhood improvements, such as building fences on each other's properties.⁵⁰ The Trust did allow the Development Corporation some control over land prices, but its innovative form of tenure also complicated and slowed sales. Still, by the spring of 2004, Paul Chorney reported that "17 homes with a total of 22 units have been renovated by Winnipeg Housing in partnership with West Broadway Development Corporation and sold on a five year rent-to-own basis under our land

49 West Broadway Development Corporation, "Housing Development and Coordination." <<http://www.westbroadway.mb.ca/housing.html>>. [Accessed 11 August 2006]

50 David Kuxhaus, "Good Fences Making Good Neighbourhood," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 20 June 2003.

trust to families with household incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000 a year."⁵¹

As WBDC was proceeding with work on its fifteen houses on adjoining streets, neighbourhood attention turned to the block of Furby between Broadway and Portage Avenue. One community resident expressed the general concern in a complaint to the City about the houses and residents on the block in January 2002.⁵² Its

observations reflected the attitudes of many committed to development at the time:

It has come to our attention that there are many particular unsavory and illicit activities taking part in a number of Furby Street houses. The houses in question on Furby Street are as followed: 275, 276, 277, 278, 287, 297 and 299.... The general people theme involves prostitution, addictions, drug & alcohol abuse, booze can-parties, gang activities (Warriors & Duce), and general aberrant behaviour by the residents. The second theme is the conditions associate with the houses on Furby Street. These houses are run down, aesthetically substandard and derelict in nature.

Responding to neighbourhood concern WBDC planned for the rehabilitation of the houses. Over the next year WHRC formulated a plan to turn four properties—271 Furby acquired from the Yaremchuk estate and 283, 287, 297 Furby from the Correia family—into a strip of "model" rooming houses for transitional tenants along the lines proposed in a Winnipeg Inner City Research Alli-

51 Paul Chorney, "Letter to the Editor: West Broadway Diverse Neighbourhood," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 29 March 2004.

52 Copy in possession of Mike Maunder.

ance report by Jino Distasio, Michael Dudley, and Mike Maunder entitled *Out of the Long Dark Hallway: Voices from Winnipeg's Rooming Houses*. A partner with WBDC and WHRC in the project would be the West Broadway Community Ministry (WBCM), "a joint social justice ministry of All Saints Anglican and Young United Churches." Started in 1970 in response to the influx of transient young people "in search of their own kind of peace", the ministry grew in collaboration with other churches and organizations to offer a range of social services and become one of the major contact points in West Broadway for low-income people.⁵³ WBCM, WBDC, and WHRC engaged in considerable community consultation and held two public workshops to obtain input from many of the people likely to live in such rooming houses.⁵⁴

Other phases of the project became more problematic. In early 2004 a proposal for SCPI funds was submitted to WHHI. That programme, however, had recently come under criticism for insufficiently drawing upon community groups, especially Aboriginal ones, in setting priorities and deciding the allocation of funds.⁵⁵ In response, in the fall of 2003

the federal government approved changes to the Winnipeg Initiative that required fifty per cent Aboriginal membership on a newly constituted Proposal Fund Allocation Committee (PFAC), established in February 2004. PFAC would henceforth approve applications to fund homelessness projects. As well, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg was authorized to engage in activities that would cultivate community capacity so that responsibility would shift from a "shared delivery model", in which community representatives advised WHHI, to a "community entity model", in which a community body—in this case, PFAC—made decisions on its own.⁵⁶ This model rooming-house proposal from WBCM, WBDC, and WHRC coincided with this transition in decision-making. In April 2004 it was rejected. PFAC decided that, since "transitional housing" would serve residents who in the main would be Aboriginal, organizations that applied for funding ought to be administered by a Board and to hire staff that were fifty per cent Aboriginal. WBCM, WBDC, and WHRC could not meet that standard.

Since the people who had lived in the houses had already been removed, 271, 283, 293 and 297 Furby remained boarded-up and empty for a few more years yet. The failure of this project exacerbated the personality conflicts that had

53 Basham, *Rising to the Occasion*, 90; Our Church Is Not a Building: Restoring the Tower of Young United Church (Winnipeg: Young United Church, [1995]), 4. <<http://www.panterra-man.com/showcase/YoungChurch%20Proposal.pdf#search=%22%22west%20broadway%20community%20ministry%22%20winnipeg%22>>. [Accessed 17 August 2006]

54 Stephanie Noga, "WBCM, WHRC, and WBDC Partnership: Results of Brainstorming Session at the 31 July 2003 Furby Street Rooming House Project," draft planning document.

55 Harry Lehotsky, "Urban Future Hijacked," *Winnipeg Sun*, 16 November 2003; Lehotsky, "Let Real Citizens Step Up," *ibid.*, 4 January 2004. See, Manitoba Urban Native Housing Association, "Initiatives," <<http://www.munha.ca/index.php?pid=4>>. [Accessed 17 August 2006]

56 Leo and August, *The Federal Government and Homelessness; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, A Community Plan on Homelessness and Housing in Winnipeg*, (Winnipeg: Social Planning Council, 2001) and *A Community Response to Homelessness and Housing in Winnipeg: Enhanced Shared Delivery*, (Winnipeg: Social Planning Council, 2004); Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, "Homelessness Resources Winnipeg: About Us," <<http://www//spcw.mb.ca/pfac.html>> [Accessed 17 August 2006] and "Homelessness Resources Winnipeg: About Us: Background," <<http://www//spcw.mb.ca/pfacbackground.html>> [Accessed 17 August 2006].



Fig. 7.2. Residents of 276/278 Furby Street, Nelson Giesbrecht on left

"Sometimes the garden is growing; sometimes it needs to rest."⁵⁷

arisen, perhaps inevitably, within and among community groups struggling to secure resources in a development system with complex funding and decision-making processes. Frustrations arising from delays in funding, contracting difficulties, the quality of workmanship in job training, and difficulties in finding residents for renovated properties strained personal and inter-organizational relationships. Symptomatic of this was the removal of Paul Chorney as Executive Director of WBDC in 2004.

Despite these problems, a lot of housing was built, bringing significant change to the neighbourhood. And lessons were learned. Reflecting back on these years, Paul Chorney drew an analogy between community revitalization and gardening:

THE TURNAROUND YEAR? 2004

Just as the murder of John O'Brien at 276/278 Furby in 2001 had been the low point for the block, the opening of a completely renovated 276/278 Furby in 2004 was its symbolic turnaround. Thereafter, successful renovations totally changed the block.

Six months after the murder, a fire destroyed parts of 276/278 Furby and it was boarded up and empty for over two years. The landlord who owned 260, 264, and 282 Furby bought the building, quite literally, at a "fire-sale price" in late 2003 or early 2004. In conversation with Mike Maunder some time later, he explained that he recognized the importance of the

57 Paul Chorney and Mike Maunder, interview by D. Burley, May 2006.

building on the block. As a large, centrally located house, its condition affected houses on either side for some distance: when it had been a drug house, drugs spread into other houses; were it to become a good house—and he remarked that someone with deeper pockets than his could make it so—it would affect the rest of the block. He must also have recognized its importance to community groups wanting to revitalize the neighbourhood and considered it a promising investment, for he did little to the property in the short time that he owned it.

He was right in anticipating the redevelopment interest it would attract. In 2004 Westminster Housing acquired and renovated it, according to an innovative design that converted the rabbit warren of seventeen rooms into seven suites. On the second and third floors, four spacious “loft-style” suites were built, each stretching from the front to the back of the building.

Nelson Giesbrecht was one of the new tenants who moved in 2004, and he used the same kind of hopeful language that Dixon had employed to explain his time in the house.⁵⁸ “Since I left Morris,” he explained, “I’ve been running around like a chicken without his head. I can build roots here. Already it feels like home.” After a team of health, fire and building inspectors had closed down his old rooming house at 266 Furby in 2003, he had shifted from place to place. When 276/278 Furby opened, he moved into a ground floor suite and was permitted to use the basement to build his best workshop yet. “This is home,” he said. “I can really start something here, not all those rinky-dink workshops I had. This is where life starts. This is where it gets interesting. I’ve paid my dues.” Giesbrecht praised the

renovated house for its quietness, its privacy, its security. “It’s heaven on earth,” he summed up after he moved in. “It’s brand new. I’m the first tenant ever—no mice, no bugs, new paint, new rug.”

Unfortunately, although the house was changed, Furby Street still had many echoes of “Murder’s Half-Acre”. Two years after Giesbrecht moved in, arsonists set fire to the house yet one more time. The structure escaped serious damage, but tenants had to move out to allow renovations. Giesbrecht found temporary accommodation for several months through his connections at West Broadway Community Ministry, but was able to move back in to his dream home in early 2007.

Across the street, the combined apartment building and big house at 275 Furby and 277 Furby also reopened in January 2004 after a complete renovation. Kinkora Developments completed renovation in a unique development arrangement with the University of Winnipeg. Kinkora bought, renovated, and managed the units; the university provided students as tenants. Kinkora was a development corporation run by Maureen Prendergast and Sharon Pchajek, which was incorporated in 1999. For a dozen years prior to that, the partners had redeveloped properties in Winnipeg and Calgary. In that experience they developed a business model based on non-profit-style budgeting in the reconstruction process. They could project a narrower profit margin than most private developers, if they secured a stable supply of reliable tenants—and hence lower vacancy rates and tenant defaults on rents. That was something the university provided. The partnership with a non-profit institution also allowed Kinkora obtain WHHI funding. Kinkora had participated from the beginning in the university’s housing plans, with the exception of 288/290 Furby Street. It also reached a similar development agreement with Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council

58 Nelson Giesbrecht, interview by M. Maunder, 6 April 2005.

for a twenty-eight-suite downtown apartment block.

When Kinkora began the project, the partners decided to add a third-storey loft-apartment to the house at 277 Furby for an on-site property manager for the apartment building and house. That job belonged to Sharon Pchajek's sister, Sherri, who also managed several of the company's other properties.⁵⁹ After the end of her marriage and living for a time in a small apartment, she welcomed the new space. Special to her was the family effort that went into its design and construction: her former husband, an architect with whom she still got along, assisted her with laying out the space and she worked alongside her father on the construction and finishing of the loft. After the completion of the renovations, she lived on Furby with her two children, aged seven and ten years old. While she welcomed the new start, Pchajek admitted, "I was pretty nervous the first three months living here" because of the neighbourhood's bad reputation. "I had a bat at my front door for three months." Also the condition of the house before renovations shocked her: "It was pretty nasty. Apparently this house, 277, was a crack house and there was a great deal of cheering when it was boarded up and shut down and we took over—that's the going story anyways." As she got to know her neighbours and as revitalization progressed, she came to feel safe in the neighbourhood. She still recognized problems, including someone on the block who was a high risk sexual offender, but she grew confident in her ability to recognize and anticipate dangerous situations. "There's things you do to keep yourself safe," she explained. And she grew more committed to building the community. Having a presence in the

neighbourhood helped advance that goal. She regularly worked outside on the landscaping, even cutting the neglected grass in front of other houses; she started conversations with people on the street and walked everywhere even late at night. As well, even though her children have continued to attend a private Christian school, they joined neighbourhood sporting programmes and made friends in the area.

Pchajek ran the house and the neighbouring fifteen-unit apartment block as an experience in community-living, as she described it, "a pod of community" within the neighbourhood. With the exception of the self-contained loft apartment, 277 Furby had a conventional rooming-house configuration: on the ground floor were two rooms adjoining a multi-purpose space for a kitchen, dining room, and living room with television and on the second floor were four bedrooms. Each floor had a bathroom. Pchajek ran the six rooms as a dorm-house for women, who pay \$315 for a room. The apartment block at 275 Furby had fifteen suites, which were rented to men and women, singles and families, for about \$410 for a one-bedroom suite. Kinkora's goal for their tenants was to have eighty per cent students and twenty per cent low income.

When she interviewed prospective tenants, Pchajek stressed that studies are the number one priority. To facilitate study, there were restrictions on visitors and noise—none of either after 10:00 PM on weeknights, midnight on weekends—and no smoking or illegal drugs. But just as important as conformity to the rules was Pchajek's commitment to building a community. Her judgment of the character of tenants was a factor in her decisions about whom to take in. Prospective tenants were informed about the regular potluck dinners, the importance of people being comfortable with one another, and the opportunity to use the backyard bar-

59 Sherri Pchajek, interview by M. Maunder, 15 June 2005.

becue area for impromptu gatherings. Once approved, many tenants became like family—"my girls", as she constantly referred to the roomers; "We've become a family."

Other neighbourhood residents recognized the changes to 275/277 Furby. On one occasion, a passerby stopped in surprise to remark to Pchajek, "I used to live there when it was terrible." Others, walking by looking for accommodation, asked about vacancies. "There's always this look of disappointment on their face" when she told them that the buildings were student housing and they would not qualify as tenants.

One of the first students to qualify was Cindy Johnson [pseudonym].⁶⁰ She arrived in January 2004, even before the renovations were finished completely. She was twenty-four years old. As a child, she and her single mother had lived in a public housing project in St. James, which she remembered fondly as a place where she had many friends—even though in retrospect she recognized that some residents there suffered poverty, alcohol and drug problems, and occasional visits from the police. Her mother was ambitious and got a good job with Manitoba Telephone Systems that enabled them to move. Her mother and her mother's partner later bought a house in suburban St. James, something which meant a lot to her mother who herself had grown up in poverty. As she grew into her teen years, Johnson came to hate the boredom of the suburbs and was drawn to the more interesting Osborne Village area. On finishing high school, she went to college in Bismarck, North Dakota, on a music scholarship, but did not enjoy the small town or the United States. When both of her "dads" died within six months of each other, she came home to live with her

mother. After being on her own for about a year and a half, she could not get along with her mother and got "kicked out". The next three years she "couch surfed" and lived in eight different residences, several of them party houses. Then, having returned to university, she wanted to get serious, did not want to party at all, and appreciated Sherri Pchajek's "no bullshit" approach. More than the rules, which she did like, she really connected with Pchajek and looked forward to the sort of place she wanted to create, a building where residents could "walk around the hallway in our pajamas...which we do, all the time." After moving in, with Pchajek's approval, she got the landscapers to leave a patch of lawn open for gardening. Gardening in the spring and summer helped her to get to know many of the area residents: Joe, who was part of an informal neighbourhood watch; Ginny, a "character and a half" who also enjoyed gardening; or sometimes someone who the night before had been drunk—"they're real people too when you see them during the day," Johnson said.

Attracted first by her building's proximity to the university and then by Pchajek's ambitions, Johnson developed a deep fondness for her "pod of community" and its neighbourhood. She loved her spacious apartment, its hardwood floors, its bathroom with a "nice old tub, with claws," the bright front room with bay windows, "all of it brand spanking new." She enjoyed the company of the other tenants; she got to know a diverse group of students and people living on low incomes. They watched television; "I share food with people," she said.

But she also recognized that the community beyond the "pod" could be different. She called the police when from her window she saw someone "get the crap beaten out of them." Such experiences prompted her to think.

60 Cindy Johnson [pseudonym], interview by M. Maunder, 15 June 2005.

“Community is the good, bad and the ugly,” she decided. “You know, like—there’s hard drugs, there’s hard drug dealing, there’s alcohol problems on the street. But guess what? It’s in the suburbs too. It’s just not as visible. I knew that there was a drug dealer on my street on Wharton Boulevard. I knew it. I know lots in St. James. And guess what, they’re middle class, white, white-collar guys who go to work. So here, because they’re on the street and they’re walking around inebriated and they’re not white, there’s a whole other perception. And it’s called racism, first of all, but classism, ‘cause they’re poor, you know, not dressed right, not that clean. It’s like they’re dangerous—but I feel way safer being downtown than I ever did in St. James because there’s nobody on the street in St. James... I feel a little nervous at night walking here, but as soon as I get in my building, or as soon as I see my building, I’m, like, I’m fine.”

As much as she enjoyed her time in her apartment and on her block, Johnson also worried and felt guilty about her good fortune. She knew that the former tenants of her building, run-down as it was, had been evicted to make way for renovations. “Who knows where they are?” she asked. She even knew several students who had been told to leave and who felt that Kinkora had not treated them well. They claimed that they had not received sufficient notice and that renovations started before everyone had left and the noise disturbed their ability to study. Angry tenants reacted. “I know that they had a big apartment party—where they kind of went to town on the place—and I can even understand that,” Johnson said. “It also left an impression on the people who are living here that it’s like, that’s how they were perceived as living. But they trashed the place, I think.” Having lived on the block for more than a year at the time of her interview, she had come to sense that “there’s unhappiness about

people being basically kicked out of where they live so nice students can move in.” She mused, “Everyone has to live somewhere, and I don’t know what the solution is.”

Revitalization gave Nelson Giesbrecht a home and workshop, Sherri Pchajek employment and a home until she moved out in September 2006, and Johnson a home and an understanding of “the community...the good, bad and the ugly.”

“I’M NOT A SOCIAL WORKER”

Can a community be revitalized without becoming gentrified? West Broadway, a recent study argued, was beginning to become gentrified.⁶¹ Arguably, gentrification can be defined more broadly than the purchase of run-down character-homes by upwardly mobile middle and upper middle income people. Market-based revitalization, which increases real estate prices by adding value to properties, and government policies, which encourage and even subsidize home ownership among some low-income people, effectively push some residents, the poor and the dependent, out of the housing market in a revitalizing area. Historically affordable housing has been achieved within private real estate markets through the construction of new housing in new neighbourhoods and the gradual deterioration of older housing in older neighbourhoods. In some instances, in some neighbourhoods, and for some individuals and families, this deterioration has provided opportunities, as was the case for the predominately immigrant group who moved onto Furby after the Second World War. Perhaps, even for the impoverished, the private market could be said to have worked to provide a supply of degraded, often disgusting and unhealthy accommodation. But can a revitalized market, in which housing rehabili-

61 Silver, *Gentrification in West Broadway?*

tation and home ownership are subsidized, offer better quality shelter to those for whom ownership and even apartment rental is not even a dream? Even if “model rooming houses” were built, would the necessity, which landlords confront, of purchasing maintenance materials and services lead inevitably to the deterioration of houses in the future? Expenses grow. To the extent that accommodation in improved buildings remains part of the private rental market, revitalization risks gentrification: renovate the houses; sell or rent them at a price that will bring a return on investment; increase the rents—better residences, better tenants, revitalized neighbourhood. But has it pushed out “the good, bad, and the ugly”?

In 2005-6, on the block of Furby between Broadway and Portage Avenue a number of community organizations and private individuals tried to develop housing that answers some of these questions and that faces more squarely some of the social realities of the people who already live in the neighbourhood. But these realities were becoming harsher. One landlord, who has successfully run profitable and decent inner-city homes for twenty years, mused on the new realities. “I’m not a social worker,” he admitted. He has stopped renting to welfare recipients because the basic housing allowance became insufficient for him to cover his costs and earn a reasonable profit. He came to accept only tenants who do not abuse alcohol or drugs and who appeared to have their lives in reasonable order. Of course, he was often disappointed. Then he evicted problem tenants, until in the end he filled his properties with “good tenants”. Dealing with the lowest income tenants, he has observed, had become more and more difficult because of the growing prevalence of drug usage and

gang involvement. “In twenty years, I’ve never seen anything like what it is now.”⁶²

Another private landlord, Richard Fulham of Thunderbird Holdings, in 2006 acquired three badly run-down rooming houses, 260, 264, and 282 Furby. The owner, who at one time had four properties on the block, and others elsewhere downtown, had decided to unload his rooming houses: he was retiring from the business and the buildings had reached the point where he could not squeeze much more revenue from them without investing in some minimal improvements. He also recognized that the redevelopers had built a market for inner-city properties previously of little value.

Touring 282 Furby after Fulham had started the renovations, Mike Maunder observed substantial changes from the tour that Robert Wilson gave him six months earlier, on Boxing Day 2005. New locks had been installed on the front doors, now with a storm door; as well, improvements included a new door, new lock, new hinges on Robert Wilson’s old room, which had not shut properly while he lived there; new linoleum and flooring; new box springs and mattresses still in their plastic bags; a new shower in the washroom; fresh paint on the walls; pictures hanging in the hallway; new curtains. The rooms were reconfigured and made bigger with more natural light and ventilation; a boarded-up staircase was opened up leading to a new third floor kitchen; new drywall; improved fire exit. But Thunderbird Holdings had also set a new rent rate and imposed a much more stringent application procedure. Wilson, who had moved out during renovations, would have been unlikely to get back into his old building.

Across the street, redevelopment finally began in 2005-6 on the four houses

62 Conversation with Mike Maunder. The landlord asked not to be identified.

that had been acquired for the failed model rooming house project in 2004. Westminster Housing Society had acquired 283 and 287 Furby Street in 2005 and completed renovations in February 2006. Six apartment units became available for low-income residents. Funding from WHHI of \$420,000 covered the greatest part of the estimated project cost of \$452,540.⁶³ The Society's rental policy for these properties was in keeping with its long-standing commitment to neighbourhood diversity.

Westminster considered questions like neighbourhood diversity and gentrification since it began renovating houses in 1997. In all their houses, they strove for a mix of rents, for both welfare and working tenants. In the early years, Charles Huband recalled, this involved spending a lot of time interviewing prospective tenants and setting rates that would achieve the right mix of people.⁶⁴ When Westminster got too large to manage its properties in this way, it hired SAM Management, a large not-for-profit manager of affordable housing. SAM and Westminster together

have tried to maintain the diversity of tenants—welfare, low-income, and market rent—to keep their portfolio sustainable. Rising expenses, especially from heating, made this a growing challenge, as it has for many landlords and owners.

The Society recognized that among a diverse group of tenants are those who confront the social realities of living on assistance or low incomes. To help them, Westminster formed strategic partnerships with a number of social agencies. Like other landlords, Westminster president Tom Ford pointed out, "We're not social workers." However, he added, "We know plumbing. But by working with people familiar with the other problems our clients face we can be of even more help to them." To that end, the Society formed partnerships with social agencies, such as New Directions for Children, Youth and Families, to recruit tenants and to help support them in their tenancy.⁶⁵ As well, two of Westminster's houses were renovated in 2003 under an arrangement with Winnipeg Regional Health Authority specifically for tenants who have mental health problems.⁶⁶

One way in which Westminster tried to build community was in its support it for tenants—some on assistance, students, and low-income workers—who wanted to create their own community of three or four houses on Spence Street. Residents shared pot-luck dinners and they organized shared laundry facilities. They

63 Ironically, at the official opening of the renovated houses politicians applauded the rehabilitation of former rooming houses to apartments. The buildings had never been rooming houses per se. Until the 1970s they had been occupied by owners who took in roomers and subsequently had rented as flats. After renovations, they remained what they had been, only much better in quality. The label "rooming house" is a designation fixed by the City of Winnipeg's building regulations, which define any older home converted to suites and having only one front door as a "rooming house". This categorization distorts the domestic histories of the residents of such accommodation. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, News Releases, "Affordable Rental Housing Units Opened in West Broadway," 16 February 2006. <<http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/nero/nere/2006/2006-02-16-1300.cfm>> [Accessed 3 September 2006].

64 Conversation with Mike Maunder.

65 Government of Manitoba, News Release, "Refurbished Home Will Benefit Participants of New Directions Program," 14 June 2001. <<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/press/top/2001/06/2001-06-14-01.html>>. [Accessed 16 August 2006]

66 Government of Canada, National Homelessness Initiative, News Releases, "WHHI Funds Transitional Supportive Housing Project in Winnipeg," 3 October 2003. <<http://www.homelessness.gc.ca/news/shownewsrelease.asp?id=336>>. [Accessed 16 August 2006].

worked together in the garden and, in the fall, they banded trees. At Christmas they helped provide gifts for children.⁶⁷

When 283 and 287 Furby opened in 2006, Westminster filled two of the six units through partnership agreements. One was again with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. The second was with an organization devoted to developing tenancy skills in young people, many of whom experienced broken families, years of "couch-surfing" with friends, and poor rental histories.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the young tenant needed more supervision than could be provided and he was evicted. This failure, however, did not terminate the partnership.

In 2006 Westminster also had plans to re-develop 299 Furby Street into a building with six "pocket apartments" of 280 to 410 square feet to rent at welfare rates. The "pocket apartment" design was similar to that used by Kikinaw Housing in its Langside Street project. A partnership among West Broadway Development Corporation and its West Broadway Land Trust, A.S.H. Management Group, and Young United Church, Kikinaw developed twenty-seven small apartments in two buildings, with features including ceiling fans, frost-free refrigerators, new stoves, microwave ovens, and internet connections and computer, if the tenant requested. A committee, including some low-income residents, selected tenants and required a commitment from them not to use alcohol or drugs. Many of the units rented for less than \$360 a month, within

the reach of welfare recipients.⁶⁹

By 2006 few blocks of Winnipeg's inner city had received such intensive rehabilitation from community organizations and improving private landlords as Furby Street between Broadway and Portage Avenue. Boarded-up and run-down houses had been fixed up or were under reconstruction and new residents had moved onto the block. Many of those who had lived on the street in the last decade, however, were gone and, even if they had somehow remained, in all likelihood new management would have evicted them for drinking, for partying, for being dirty, or for abusive behaviour.

LEAVING THE SUBURBS

Alexandra Penner [pseudonym] bought her house on Furby Street in October of 1998, when she was in her early twenties, and moved in between Christmas and New Years.⁷⁰ For several years she had been involved in athletic programmes for inner-city children and was unhappy that, having grown up in the suburbs, she "couldn't relate to them well enough....I needed to get my head out of my suburban butt." A friend, who also worked in sports in the area, lived in the last "rooming home" on the block and informed her that she could easily afford to purchase the house next door to him. The owners who had grown elderly in their home had died one soon after the other and their children had found it difficult to sell the house. "They were kind of just dumping it," Alexandra thought. A commitment to the children with whom she worked inclined her to moving. Dis-

67 Sam Thompson, "Creating Community—Westminster Housing Society Promotes Unique Group Living Model," *The Metro*, 2 March 2006.

68 Tom Ford, "Westminster Housing Society Opens Two Houses on Furby Street," Westminster Housing Society news release, [1 February 2006].

69 Government of Manitoba, Legislative Assembly, Hansard, 15 March 2006, "Kikinaw Housing Inc." <http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislation/hansard/4th-38th/vol_39/h39.html>. [Accessed 3 September 2006]

70 Alexandra Penner [pseudonym], interview by P. Chorney and D. Burley, February 2005.

covering that “mortgage payments were cheaper than rent” convinced her that it made financial sense. Getting to know the neighbourhood and its residents in the first six months convinced her that she had made the right decisions and that she wanted to stay.

The “busyness” of the neighbourhood appealed to her, as did “the fact that I never knew what would happen when I stepped out the door—that wasn’t always a good experience—there was some pretty distasteful stuff going on at times.” She had rented an apartment on nearby Langside Street for about six months, so that she had few illusions about the crime and other problems in the area. Still, at times she found it “pretty surreal”. Bored kids were hanging out together, not really in gangs, but still getting into trouble. She got along with them, as other inner-city residents have done, by hiring them to do odd jobs, but when they were not busy, they reverted to their old boisterous habits and found mischief where they could. “I don’t want to term it neglect...but when you see kids who want to be outside running around and playing and all they’ve got to play with is garbage in the back lane, that’s the kind of thing that would grate on me a little bit...My first couple of summers here we were calling the police almost weekly...‘Someone’s getting their ass kicked in the middle of the street; can you get down here?’...‘There’s a guy with a gun out on the street.’...There was just always something.”

Alexandra did get discouraged, stressed, and depressed occasionally about where she and her husband were living. “I don’t want every minute of my life to be a big social drama,” she admitted. Still, she never felt unsafe. “I don’t know if that was me just being naïve or—umh—misplaced Christian faith, thinking that I was invincible...I think I would have felt at risk being a fourteen-year-old boy in this neighbourhood.” Her husband had

different experiences. “We had an awful lot of posturing, a lot of ‘yo yo yoin’ going on—a general gangsta shtick, act, thing that goes on...These guys down the street, there was a string of houses and—some of the guys—they were actually not—I mean the lifestyle and the choice, you know, of job aside—they weren’t actually bad guys.” They left Alexandra alone because they knew who she was and she made a point of saying hello and meeting their eyes when she walked past. Rather than seeming intimidated, she chose “to present like I’m not the most vulnerable person.” On the other hand, her husband observed that when he walked past the crowds congregating in front of the houses, they would confront him, posturing and challenging him—“What the fuck are you looking at?” When he walked past the same groups with his children, however, they ignored him.

Learning how to read the behaviour and comportment of others and adopting appropriate responses were ways of living safely on Furby. Once Alexandra learned that, the people in the neighbourhood became less threatening and more of an occasional irritant. One summer, for example, she and her husband were building a back fence. A constant stream of “junkies and prostitutes” wandered through the lane, stopping for brief commentary and conversation. Their interruptions made the work progress slowly, and she just wanted to get the project finished without “one more transvestite stopping for a chit-chat.”

But, as revitalization efforts started to have an effect on the block, with people from different backgrounds, including university students, moving in, Alexandra felt re-assured that the neighbourhood was changing. Probably some families were displaced from her block, but she still saw many former residents in the neighbourhood and concluded that they

had not gone too far. She noticed more people, even families, walking along the street in the evenings. She especially welcomed the growing ethnic diversity in the area as she observed more African families, some of whom were university students, and a few more Asian families. When she first moved to the neighbourhood, she felt out of place among what she perceived as the largely Aboriginal population; "Now I'm part of the mix...I see the diversity getting broader," she observed. "OK, well, there's still some social issues, but it's not, it's not in your face every second of every day." She felt better about raising her children in the area; "there's no better place to do it 'cause I want them to see a range of stuff."

For Alexandra Penner and her family, buying a house on Furby Street and working in the neighbourhood were parts of their social conscience. At times the experience was trying, and it took time and knowledge to feel comfortable. The beginnings of revitalization confirmed for them that they had made the right choice.

EPITAPH: THE VIEW FROM THE FRONT PORCH

On 1 August 2006, renovation work began on 299 Furby. The night before, the last remaining members of Mary Niemi's extended family—the last members of the D.A. Gang—sat on the front porch and thought about what was happening on their block. Front verandahs were always gathering spots in older neighbourhoods, places from which to watch and to be seen, although not always to be understood by the passersby. The view from the front porch that night was very different after six years of revitalization.

But the view of the inside of the porch still revealed the identities of some of the house's residents. Carved on the column supporting the porch roof were

their names or initials. "Schimmitt '03, '04, '05"—Mary Niemi's son, moved out. "Leech"—Roxanne Niemi, moved to Thunder Bay, like her mother. "Angel"—almost raised by Mary Niemi, who was like a mother to her. And many other marks, perhaps only recognizable to their creators and friends—a marking post. "Look at that pole," a family friend of the Niemis, said to Mike Maunder. As he fingered the carvings, he asked, "What happened to their heritage—living in this neighbourhood for twenty years? But progress is progress; things go forward; money's gotta be made."



Fig. 7.3. The view from the front porch, 299 Furby Street

CONCLUSION

Over a century and a quarter, hundreds of families and individuals have lived in the thirty or so residential buildings on the block of Furby Street between Broadway and Portage Avenue. Through that period the neighbourhood has changed from one on the edge of Winnipeg's residential development to one in the midst of the inner city. The quality and types of accommodation too have changed. Looking at the built environment alone, without seeing the people who lived there, leaves the impression of a history of aging, deterioration, and struggling revitalization. The human narrative, however, has been the search for home. The quest for comfort, security, and intimacy may well express a deeply seated human need.

But in a capitalist economy, when shelter has become another commodity allocated by markets, the built forms within which home is pursued both constrain and enable the ways that need can be expressed and the extent to which it can be realized. The narrative of home, then, involves the interaction of the history of housing with the multiple and recurring histories of individuals and families as they too age through their life cycles. The intersections of the two histories, of people at various stages of their life with dwellings of changing quality, present the opportunities for home. This study has explored those opportunities in their variety over time.

Never a neighbourhood for the city's wealthiest, the block in its earliest decades nonetheless attracted middle and upper-middle class families, many of whom were on their way up in society. After the so-

cial ruptures of the First World War and the Winnipeg General Strike—perhaps, symptoms rather than causes of profound urban changes—their departure opened residential space, at a time of a deepening housing shortage, for lower-middle-class and working-class families and individuals to secure shelter in cramped, but still good quality buildings. Flats or rooms in former single-family dwellings regrettably proved through the Depression of the 1930s to be points of residential pause for people often moving down in the housing market. When the economy recovered after the Second World War, the hard times of the interwar years had taken their toll on many of the houses, which were showing their age and lacked appeal to many families eager for a new life and lifestyle in the suburbs.

Housing deterioration was not inexorable, however, and the need for repair and the lesser appeal of downtown living created an opportunity for immigrant and working-class families. Taking in roomers helped to finance home ownership and physical renovations. The houses of Furby Street had fulfilled their strategic role for families wanting to acquire “a better life” and to advance the life chances of their children. That recovery lasted a generation, but did not extend into another generation.

Old, wood-frame houses on Furby Street, in which a generation proud of its hard work, the success of its children, and the strength of its cultural heritage had grown elderly, never appeared as opportunities for ownership to those moving into or up in the city in the 1980s. Immigrants, smaller in numbers in the last quar-

ter of the century than earlier, had a much greater variety of inexpensive housing from which to choose. Their ethnic neighbourhoods formed elsewhere, but not in West Broadway.¹ Instead, the houses on Furby Street were converted to rooming houses that catered to poor and low-income tenants. By the end of the twentieth century houses, too often sadly run-down, seemed to community activists to be inhabited by people who came and went quickly and who partied too frequently and noisily when they were there. The quality of the house became associated with the quality of the people.

The personal problems of many of the block's residents and the violence that they could provoke, so tragically as in the murder of John O'Brien or the beating of Lisa Cameron, were undeniable. But for many others, even when the housing on the block, had reached its lowest quality, being poor had not destroyed the value that they placed on home, even if poverty did compromise their ability to seize its enjoyment, if ever so briefly. Ruth Paterson's Christmas on Furby was unforgettable. Others, like the Morrissettes and the Niemis, stayed together, remembering a former house that had more easily accommodated their extensive networks of kin and friends. Their homes, though movable, were inextricably bound up with other people, of helping and being helped by others who gave life its meaning. In that sociability they found dignity and home of its own sort.

Very different were the homes of the postwar home owners, many of whom were immigrants or came from immigrant backgrounds. They made their residences

the corner stone of family and communal success. Their homes were places of work, occupying husbands, wives, children, and roomers in evening and weekend renovations and improvements. Wives worked for their husbands and children daily and went further in providing domestic services to roomers who could seem "like family". The communities that they forged differed significantly from those that more recent community development activists have cultivated. The former were not localized in the neighbourhood, but tied together a diaspora of people who had left earlier ethnic enclaves. No better exemplified than in the commitment of the Monastyrski family, they reformed their communities regularly at church, at literary and dramatic societies, at women's sewing circles and charity groups, and at cultural and educational programmes for children.

The extent and persistence of their homeownership in the three decades after the Second World War offered a dramatic contrast to transient tenancies of the interwar years and the increasing densities in dwellings occasioned by a housing shortage and Depression. Residents from those years left the fewest traces. Perhaps their movement through the city is itself evidence of the difficulties they confronted in securing a home. The announcements of ordinary events submitted to the "Society" pages of the newspapers, informed friends and acquaintances that widows or separated women, like Lottie Thompson, were well and getting on with their lives. That balance could teeter. P.J. Rykers raged against the City when its bureaucratic response to the problem of Depression unemployment denied him what he claimed as human dignity. His home, a room with the relics of his professional accomplishment, was all that remained of who he had been. The block on Furby had changed quickly

1 Of twenty-five neighbourhoods in the Downtown and North End area of Winnipeg in 2001, West Broadway, of which Furby Street was part, ranked nineteenth in the percentage of population that were immigrants. It ranked sixth in the percentage of population declaring an Aboriginal identity.

in the 1930s, much as it changed quickly in the 1950s and the 1990s.

Because of the physical presence of the houses themselves, all of those changes came to be weighed against what the houses originally had been and to be embellished by the contrast of new and old and of well-off and poor. Yet, looked at more closely, the middle and upper-middle class homes reveal some unexpected characteristics. Fewer than in later years were owner-occupied, and families were more mobile than was the case after the second war. As well, the large residences were needed by large families, but families were not constantly large through their life cycles. Households changed in composition as the family matured, expanding to take in relatives, roomers, and servants and contracting as the family itself required more space. That elasticity should qualify a view of the privacy of the bourgeois home. Social reform campaigns also qualified that assumed privacy, as the women on Furby Street went beyond their domestic sphere, or rather extended their domestic sphere to include other economic and cultural groups and spaces within the city. Their articulation of the bourgeois ideal of home as a model for others informed their understanding of what ailed society.

That bourgeois ideal and its profound frustration during the interwar years have greatly influenced the ways in which home has been understood and the sorts of government policies intended to promote its accessibility. Other types of homes have existed on Furby Street, however. The narratives of home in this study, we hope, have revealed a range of possibilities equally satisfying and deserving of acknowledgement.

What's History Got to Do with It?

Historians, more than they were in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have grown cautious about offering prescriptions and remedies derived from their research. In their important and influential study, *Housing the North American City*, Michael Doucet and John Weaver modestly questioned whether their findings on the relationship between “the democratization of housing” and “the will to possess” would “serve human betterment”. Instead, they hoped to “have a place in discussions about shelter.”¹ In contributing to the latter, they have contributed to the former.

We can only hope that this study in a small way can also contribute to the discussions about shelter and home. At the outset, we found several questions with policy implications that emerged from our own curiosity and in our discussions with those associated with Westminster Housing Society, especially Tom Ford, Charles Huband, and Ian Skelton.

1. By what process do neighbourhoods deteriorate and become revitalized? What are the signs of imminent decline and renewal?

Often the physical deterioration of the inner city has been associated with the development of suburbs and the movement of population from central to peripheral areas of the city. Whatever the

effects of suburbanization may have been in recent years, the development of suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s arguably contributed to inner-city revitalization. By reducing the decades-long housing shortage and at the same time by not increasing real estate values beyond the reach of working-class purchasers, the movement to the suburbs contributed to greater home ownership. That opportunity, however, rested on the strategic perception of home buyers that they could help finance ownership by taking in roomers. Their willingness to compromise nuclear-family privacy was not just an economic necessity, but was also a variation on much older immigrant practices of mutual self-help and an ethnic sociability, which was the resource of minorities adapting to a new society. Moreover, “the will to possess” was strong for people whose apprehension of limited economic prospects had provoked immigration and who often confronted job discrimination and low wages in their new country.²

- 2 One might argue that a preferable resolution of the interwar and postwar housing shortage, one that promised greater and longer term stability for downtown neighbourhoods, would have entailed the retention and promotion of population densities higher than in the suburbs. High-rise apartment towers and large-scale social housing projects in Winnipeg presented problems of their own, beyond the scope of this study. Housing projects, like the identification of in the 1950s and 1960s as slums slated for redevelopment, had the effect of depreciating the values of homes owned by residents and threatened to erode life savings in real property. Another form of accommo-

1 Michael Doucet and John Weaver, *Housing the North American City* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), xv.

The increase in home ownership on Furby after World War Two reversed a physical deterioration that accompanied the conversion of single-family dwellings to flats and rooms in buildings with absentee owners. That conversion to rental properties after World War One, like the proliferation of rooming houses in the last two decades of the twentieth century, coincided with a demographic transition. As the first families on the block aged through their life cycle and as the working-class and immigrant/ethnic owners reached old age, they gave up their houses. No comparable demographic group, one able to secure relative permanence of occupation, replaced them. Instead, economically vulnerable or marginal groups, the insecure and (potentially) downwardly mobile lower-middle class of the Great Depression and the poor, Aboriginal or otherwise, found shelter they could afford.

The Furby Street experience demonstrated the importance of demographic change in explaining the quality of inner-city housing, much as John R. Miron, for example, has emphasized such factors at

dation, much more humane in scale than projects or towers, might have been row housing. But deterioration of downtown terraces attached a stigma to such dwellings that convinced builders that they could never sell them, even if they could afford the costs of land assembly in older neighbourhoods. Had terrace redevelopments ever been undertaken, they probably would have contributed to an inflation of downtown property, which would have then been priced beyond the means of many working-class families. Cf. Jim Silver, *North End Winnipeg's Lord Selkirk Park Housing Development: History, Comparative Context, Prospects* (Winnipeg: CCPA Manitoba, 2006); David G. Burley, "Winnipeg and the Landscape of Modernity, 1945–1975," in *Winnipeg Modernism, 1945-1975*, ed. Serena Keshavjee. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 29-85.

the national level in postwar Canada.³ However, as well it revealed the significance of the conjuncture of demographic change with other socio-economic conditions: the departure of first families with class conflict and recession; the aging of post-Second War home owners with the migration of Aboriginal people from marginalized reserves and rural communities and with the lowering of social assistance for the vulnerable in the last few decades.

Policy initiatives need to be informed by an awareness of the demographic characteristics of neighbourhoods. Programmes need to facilitate the replacement of one demographic group as it grows old with another, younger group. Whether the promotion of "rooming homes", so successful for post-Second War owners, would work for more recent immigrant and migrant families might well be worth exploring.

2. To what extent has the sense of home been associated with particular forms of housing tenure and household organization?

The twentieth century has witnessed the substantial increase of home ownership well beyond the point that most homes are owner occupied. Two thirds of Canadian homes were owner occupied in 2005.⁴ In fact, home ownership has been

3 Miron notes "a substantial conversion of rented detached dwellings during or shortly after the war." He attributes this to the release of "pent-up" demand, but the scope of his study does not enable his investigation of how that occurred in neighbourhoods across the country. John R. Miron, *Housing in Postwar Canada: Demographic Change, Household Formation, and Housing Demand* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 169.

4 Jim Adair, "Home Ownership Rate Soars in Canada, But Has the Market Peaked?" *Realty*

“normalized”, made the norm not by only individual choices, but by financial instruments and government policies intended to facilitate acquisition. Home ownership has been a historical phenomenon and, as such, the present condition can be too easily interpreted as the logical and necessary realization of something wanted, but unattained in the past.

Why was home ownership not higher among the first families on Furby Street, surely the group in the block's history best able to own their residence? Inferentially, it would seem, their lifestyle, the quality of their shelter, its symbolic value, the security of their tenure, and their sense of home did not require ownership. Conversely, how could the block's poorest residents ever enjoy a home in cramped and run-down accommodation? The dignity and vibrancy of the homes of some Aboriginal families attested to the greater importance of interpersonal connections than tenure. What frustrated the realization of home was the inability of poor families to secure accommodation that was flexible and expansive. The first families, with their greater financial resources, had confronted no such difficulty, and the ability of their large houses to accommodate elastic households—stretching to include boarders and then replacing boarders with more children, and then vice versa—suggests a model of housing perhaps suited to the generous and sharing sense of home in Aboriginal culture.

Policies that concentrate on ownership as the most desirable tenure to secure shelter create norms rather than achieve them. Security and stability of occupancy, not tenure, enables home. Large houses, of the sort rented but

lost by some Aboriginal families in this study, accommodate the expansive homes of Aboriginal people. As well, such places can become points of reference and resources for adjustment as Aboriginal people move from reserve to city and back and from city to city, much as the working-class immigrant/ethnic homes functioned. Programmes should promote such shelter that accommodates elastic homes.

3. What have been the costs and benefits of rehabilitation projects on one block?

Surprisingly, this study discovered that two eras of revitalization have occurred on the block, the post-Second War era and the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries.

The first occurred in an unplanned way as a particular demographic group with common housing ambitions perceived a niche opportunity in the shelter market. Lest one conclude that a free market can and will resolve problems of housing rehabilitation, Furby Street must be put into a larger urban context. In the postwar years, when older immigrant neighbourhoods in the city were badly deteriorated and subject to large-scale renewal by bulldozer, Furby Street was a step up.

If the block was not at the very bottom of inner-city property values by the end of the last century, it was close. Within a system of market allocation, much of its shelter was valued so low that, to use the language of the nineteenth-century English Poor Law, it had reached the level of “least eligibility”, a condition intended for those dependent on government assistance and below that obtainable by or attractive to those working to earn

News, 10 March 2005. On-line at: <http://realitytimes.com/rtpages/20050310_canmarket.htm> [Accessed 21 March 2008].

the lowest of incomes.⁵ Into the most marginalized space in the city moved those who had become the most marginalized, an under-class of the poorest and the ill. A great deal of money, imagination, and energy went into planning, acquiring, and rehabilitating houses of Furby Street. Creative community-building programmes provided organizational nodes for personal connections, support, and resources. Rehabilitation of buildings raised the street, perhaps ever so slightly, above its former "least eligibility". And so, few places were left for the "least eligible" people.

The revitalization of inner-city neighbourhoods demands not only policies for housing rehabilitation but also policies for sheltering those "least eligible" who may never be rehabilitated, as well as those who may improve the quality of their livelihoods and their health. Rehabilitation must be about people as well as houses.

4. Can an understanding of the history of neighbourhood that has experienced decline contribute to a better appreciation of the experiences of the people who have lived there?

This study has intended to attach names and life histories to the houses on Furby Street. Recognizing that what has affected the buildings has also been experienced by the people who lived there is a necessary step in understanding the changes that have occurred. Embedding the history in the physicality of the neighbourhood also provides an opportunity for empathy in a way that looking at buildings alone does not.

Far beyond the capacity of this project, as it turned out, was the involvement

of the neighbourhood in the discovery of its own history. However, as Dolores Hayden's non-profit corporation The Power of Place demonstrated in Los Angeles, historical awareness and local history projects stimulate neighbourhood pride and renewal. The value that history places on experiences of the invisible, ordinary men and women living and working in the city's nondescript neighbourhoods contributes to the awakening of collective memory and lets contemporary residents know that their experiences are important and can teach others about the meaning of urban life. The urban landscape of houses, streets, shops, and green spaces then becomes the scaffolding for connecting people in the present and the past that sustains a neighbourhood.⁶

Policies on neighbourhood history programmes need to be developed that will engage residents in communicating and recording their own histories and discovering the histories of those who have gone before them.

5 Cf. Deborah A. Stone, *The Disabled State* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1984), 39.

6 Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995).

APPENDIX

Statistical Tables

Table 1
Number of Residential Buildings and Units, 1911-1991

	Year								
	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
Residential buildings:									
Single family dwellings	27	26	24	18	18	15	15	15	6
Multiple unit buildings	4	4	5	11	9	8	8	8	13
Apartment buildings			4	4	4	6	6	6	7
Commercial buildings with suites	1	2	2	1	1	1	1		
Total	32	32	35	34	32	30	30	29	26
Residential units:									
Single family units	26	26	24	18	18	15	15	15	6
Units in multiple family buildings	10	7	18	57	47	44	38	40	66
Apartment units			110	110	110	144	143	141	162
Units in commercial buildings	4	6	5	5	8	8	8	8	
Total	40	39	157	190	183	211	204	204	234

Table 2
Number of Women Householders, 1911-1991

	Year								
	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
Women:									
Women householders	2	6	42	83	72	99	99	48	28
Vacant, no return			4	4	2	6	16	46	59
Per cent women householders	5.0	15.4	2.6	44.6	39.8	48.3	52.7	30.4	16.0

Table 3
Home Ownership, 1911-2001

	Year									
	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1980	1991	2001
Owners	17	15	5	5	13	20	17	15	8	3
Residential build-ings	31	31	28	28	25	23	24	24	20	18
Per cent owners	54.9	48.4	17.9	17.9	52.0	87.0	70.8	62.5	40.0	16.7

Table 4
Number and Percentage of All Householders Residing for Ten-Year Interval, 1941-2001

	1941-51		1951-61		1961-71		1971-81	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Detached and Semi-detached	1	4.0	9	45.0	13	65.0	11	55.0
Flats	5	11.6	5	12.8	3	12.5	2	9.0
Apartments	21	18.6	22	18.8	32	23.2	16	12.3

Table 5
Occupational Categories of Householders, 1911-1991

Occupational Group	Year								
	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Men:									
Professions	21.7	18.5	3.3	4.4	4.9	6.5	7.7	4.5	9.1
Managerial	17.4	14.8	13.3	11.1	9.8	6.5	10.3	18.2	9.1
Business	34.8	25.9	6.7	2.2	6.1				
White collar	17.4	29.6	56.7	60.0	34.1	29.9	33.3	22.7	45.5
Trades	8.7	3.7	11.7	17.8	20.7	19.5	28.2	22.7	27.3
Service .		3.7			8.5	15.6	15.4	22.7	27.3
Labour/misc.		3.7	8.3	4.4	15.9	23.4	12.8	13.6	
Number	23	27	60	45	82	77	39	22	11
Women:									
Professions			47.4	44.4	19.1	18.3	16.3	5.9	20.0
Managerial					6.4	8.3	4.1		
Business		100.0							
White collar .			52.6	51.9	60.0	61.7	61.2	58.8	80.0
Trades					2.1	1.7			
Service .					6.4	10.0	16.3	35.3	
Labour/misc.							2.0	5.9	
Number		1	17	27	47	60	49	17	5

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Archives of Manitoba:

Figures 1.1 McLean, William James 2 (N13962); 1.5 Deacon, Thomas Ross 1 (N9505)

Archives of Manitoba, Hudson's Bay Company Archives:

Figure 1.2 Family portrait of W.J. "Big Bear" McLean's children. Original loaned to HBCA for copying; original remains in the possession of Ruth Evans of Winnipeg (a descendent) HBCA 1991/55/1

City of Winnipeg, Department of Planning, Property, and Development

Figure 2.3

Correia, José

Figure 3.9

Dietz, Norma Panaro

Figure 2.5

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Figure 1.4

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Figures 1.6; 1.7; 2.4; 2.6; 3.1; 3.4; 3.7, 3.8; 3.10; 4.4; 5.3; 5.5; 6.1; 6.2; 6.3; 7.1; 7.2; 7.3.

Monastyrski, Taras

Figures 3.5; 3.6

Western Canadian Pictorial Index, University of Winnipeg:

Figure 1.3

Winnipeg Free Press

Figures 2.1; 2.2; 2.7; 3.2; 3.3; 4.1; 4.2

Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation

Front cover; Figure 7.1

Winnipeg Tribune Collection, University of Manitoba, Department of Archives and Special Collections

Figure 4.3 [PC 18/3512/18-2470-006]

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