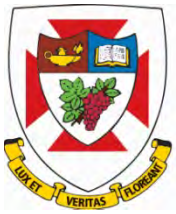
The Rooming Houses of Furby Street

by Mike Maunder with David Burley
2008

The Institute of Urban Studies



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

FOR INFORMATION:

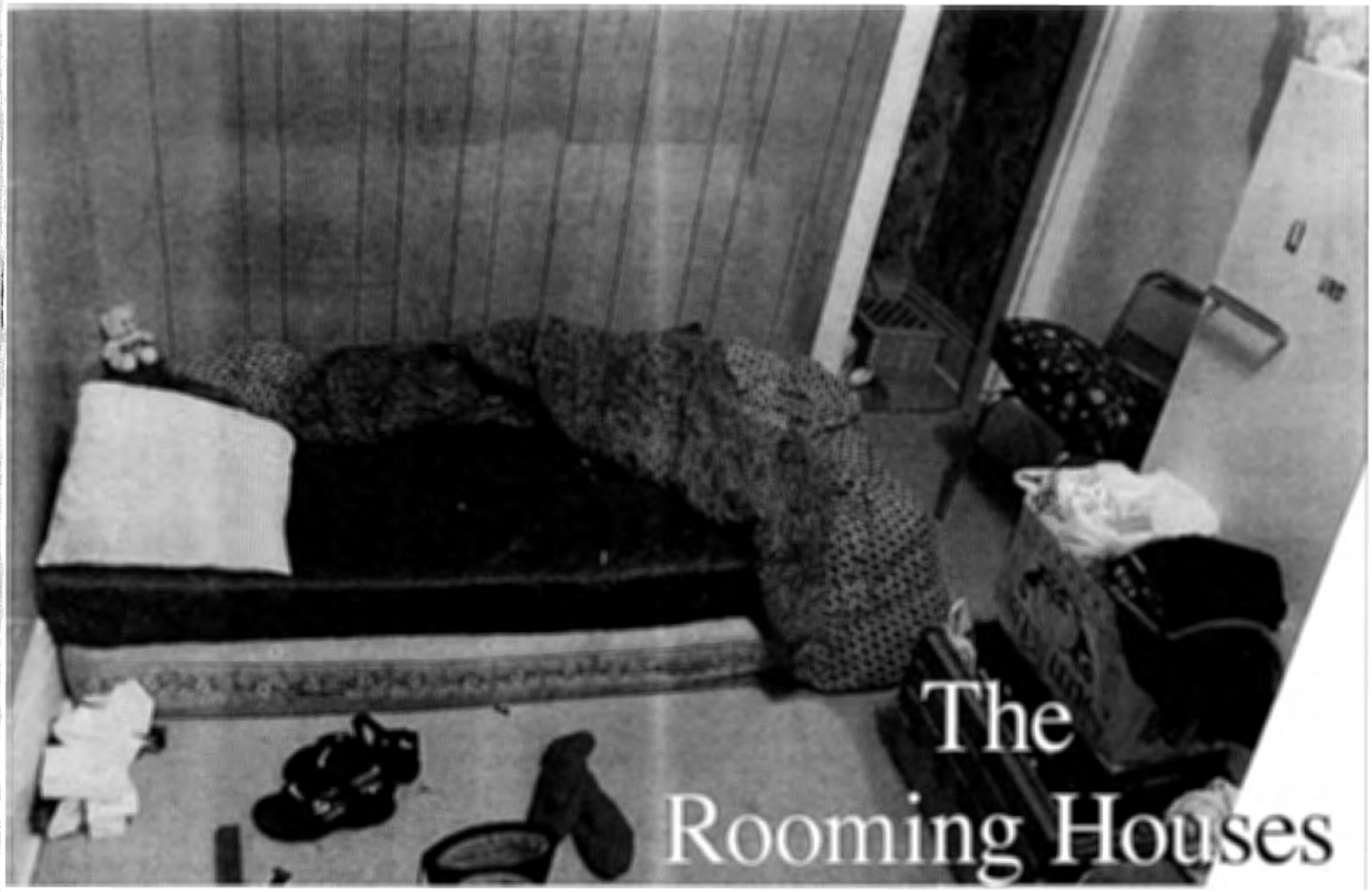
The Institute of Urban Studies
The University of Winnipeg
599 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg
phone: 204.982.1140
fax: 204.943.4695
general email: ius@uwinnipeg.ca

Mailing Address:
The Institute of Urban Studies
The University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 2E9

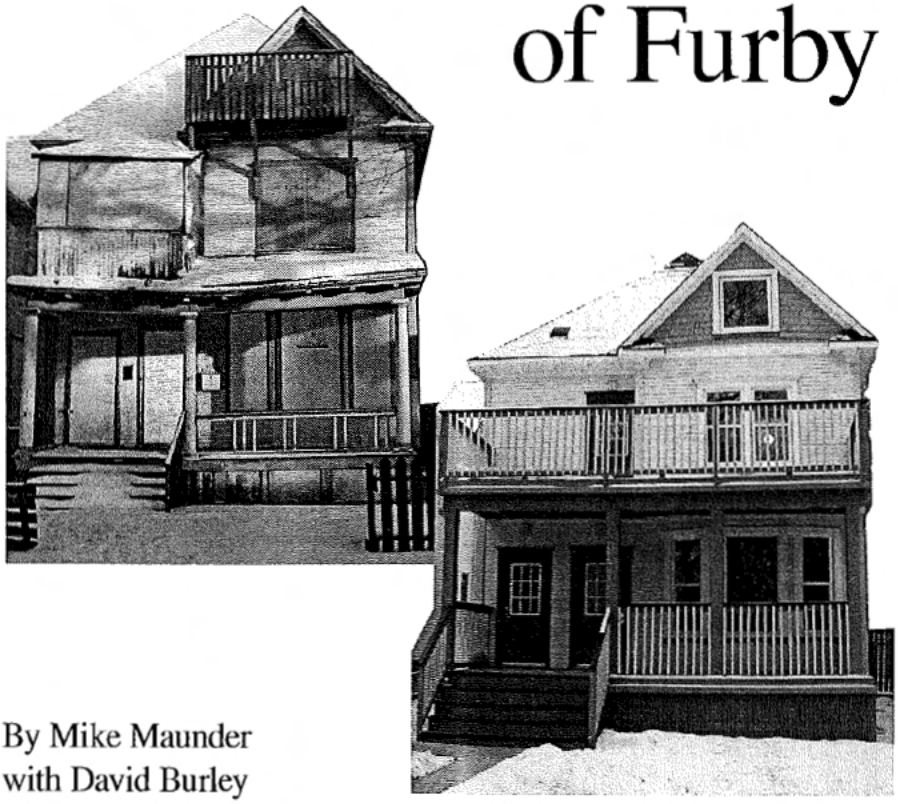
THE ROOMING HOUSES OF FURBY STREET
Published 2008 by the Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg

Note: The cover page and this information page are new replacements, 2016.

The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.



The Rooming Houses of Furby Street



By Mike Maunder
with David Burley

The Rooming Houses of Furby Street

By Mike Maunder
with David Burley

This magazine is part of a much larger historical study, *Living on Furby, Narratives of Home*. The larger study is a detailed history of one block of Furby, between Portage and Broadway, from its beginnings to the present day. This magazine extracts and elaborates material from the main study to focus on one aspect of the block's history — rooming houses.

The understanding of rooming houses on the block has changed throughout its history, from a commonly accepted and respectable way of life in the block's first century, to a way of warehousing low-income people in substandard housing in the last 20 years. To show this change, the history of the block is divided into four periods:

BEGINNINGS	-- First Nations times to the Forties
ROOMING "HOMES"	-- The Forties to the Seventies.
POVERTY	-- The Seventies to 2003
REVITALIZATION	-- 1996 to 2008

Each period is described with three to five chapters. These chapters tell the stories of many people who lived in the houses. Their stories are placed in the wider context of historical events and trends in the city and the country.

At the end of each period, there is a brief discussion of some historical themes which we encountered as we did this research. These discussions include an explanation of how the research was conducted. We hope these discussions and explanations might encourage and assist individuals and community groups who want to undertake similar historical research.

This magazine focuses on the rooming houses on Furby. But there is much more to the history of this block than simply rooming houses.

The broader and more complex history can be found in the main historical study:

Living on Furby, Narratives of Home,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1880 - 2005,
University of Winnipeg, 2008

http://ius.uwinnipeg.ca/WIRA/wira_publications.htm

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have worked to create this magazine. More than anything, it is an attempt to be true to the stories which people have shared with us—a cross between journalism and history. Community resident and journalist Mike Maunder did most of the writing, guided by the wisdom of historian, David Burley. They were assisted in research by Ian Keenan, Paul Chorney and Carey Sinclair. Preliminary copies were read and edited by Tom Ford of Westminster Housing Society and Buzz Currie of the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Dianne Morrison worked endless hours on the typesetting; Doreen Cooper contributed far more than her excellent proof reading skills. Mike would particularly like to thank his colleagues at New Directions for Children, Youth, Adults and Families who are daily showing him the wisdom and compassion of social workers whose clients face inconceivable depths of poverty and powerlessness. He would also like to thank Virginia Maracle who continues to teach him in every way.

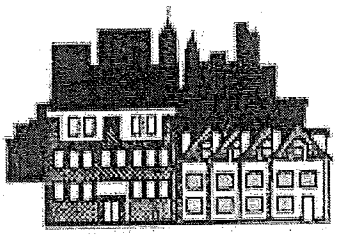
But the major thanks must go to the 27 former and present residents of Furby Street who agreed to be interviewed. Their stories form the heart of this history.

Published by:

Institute of Urban Studies
The University of Winnipeg
#103 - 520 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3C 0G2

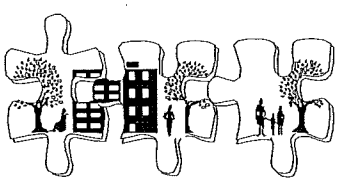
ISBN: 978-1-894858-23-6

This research was financially supported by the Winnipeg Inner City Research Alliance (WIRA) which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The Institute of Urban Studies provided administrative support for WIRA. The opinions of the authors found herein do not necessarily reflect those of WIRA, SSHRC or the Institute of Urban Studies.



WESTMINSTER HOUSING SOCIETY INC.

WINNIPEG INNER CITY RESEARCH ALLIANCE



Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

The Rooming Houses of Furby Street

Beginnings

BEGINNINGS

1. From Prairie Homeland to a City Block

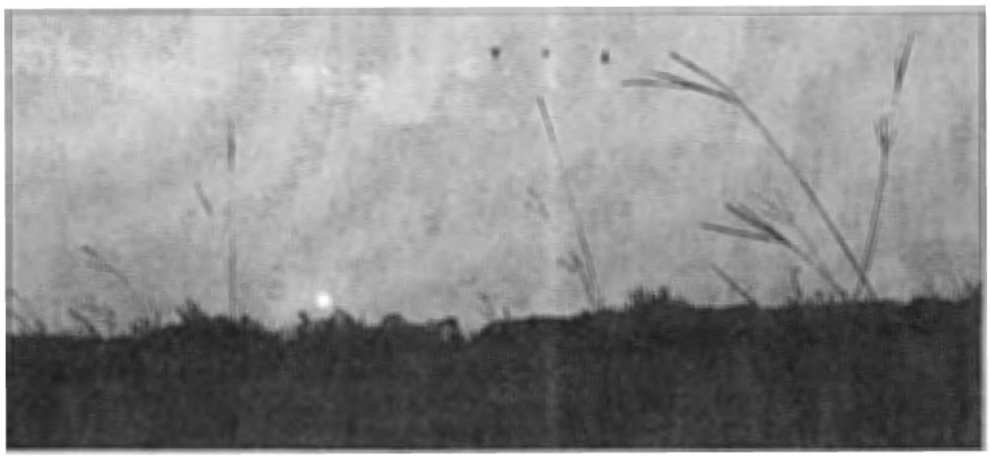
The story of Furby begins with the land. Red River was always a meeting place: of cultures and, in the beginning, of landscapes—the vast prairie stretching out seemingly forever to the west and south, the mixed aspen parkland bordering it on the east and north.

The First Peoples found this mix a rich environment. Assiniboine, Cree and Anishinabeg all met here and all called this land their home. It fed them, nourished them, gave them their identity. They honoured the four seasons that Creator so richly gave them; the fragrance of summer grasses bending in the ever-present wind; the thundering of bison in the fall hunt; the winter stars wheeling overhead while songs and stories were chanted inside the winter tipis; and then, every spring–reincarnation–snow melting, water lying on the land, geese returning home, life bursting again from the rich soil. "Earth! Mother!" the Anishinabeg prayed. "From your bosom I draw nourishment, In your mantle I seek shelter. To you, reverence." [1]

It was landscape reduced to its lowest common denominator: earth and sky; "a land," as prairie novelist W.O. Mitchell once said, "that makes mystics." [2]

But that landscape was overwhelmed by a European imperial vision. In 1670 King Charles II of England granted all of the land draining into Hudson's Bay to a company of merchant adventurers, the Hudson's Bay Company. Until the 1730s few Europeans ventured into the Canadian prairies. Many of those who did developed intimate relations with the First Nation people upon whom they relied heavily for their survival. Some took wives, fathered children and lived a new way of life between Aboriginal and European cultures. From this contact between European and First Nation people arose a new people, conscious of themselves as Métis. [3] Many of them settled along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers; creating permanent homes; a little farming, fishing, hunting; the annual buffalo hunt and production of pemmican, the fuel of the fur trade.

This way of life was threatened in 1812 with the arrival of Lord Selkirk's settlers who brought a more sedentary agricultural society. When Lord Selkirk's Scottish settlers scratched out their farms near the Forks, there was conflict with the Métis already here, who saw settlers and restrictions on trading pemmican as a threat to their own way of life. The conflict erupted into gunfire and death at Seven Oaks. One response was the first survey dividing the land into parishes respecting the different groups of the settlement: Kildonan, St. Andrew, St. Boniface, St. Vital, St. James. It was a different vision of the land: land as legal lines on a piece of paper, a commodity, private property, land title and land surveys. That vision carried on at Red River for the next 50 years. Métis, French, English and Scots continued to live together, occupy their river lots and develop their mixed way of life.



Prairie Homeland:
"It must be seen at sunrise when the boundless plain suddenly flashes with rose-coloured light, as the first rays of the sun sparkle in the dew on the long rich grass."
H.Y. Hind, 1858 [4]

That way of life was declining with the buffalo and the fur trade, but the death knell came when the newly created Dominion of Canada purchased the Hudson's Bay Company lands and sent surveyors to map out new lots for new settlers. The settlers already here, Métis and European, resisted and Canada acquiesced by admitting Manitoba as a province in 1870. Over the next ten years, the federal government grudgingly recognized the right of the Métis to the land by issuing "scrip" -- certificates for varying amounts, often a $160 credit toward purchase of land. Much of the scrip was sold to speculators; much may never have reached the Métis who were increasingly leaving Red River as the buffalo and their way of life vanished. Hordes of Ontario settlers brought the new way of life and they were not sympathetic to Metís or First Nations ways.

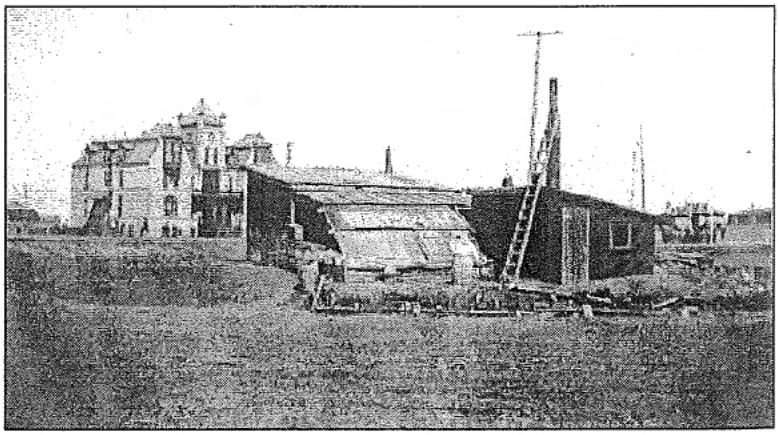
In 1871, Canada turned its attention to gaining title from the First Nations of the prairies. Lieutenant-Governor A.G. Archibald made clear the intent: "Your Great Mother, the Queen... wishes her red children to be happy and contented. She wishes them to live in comfort. She would like them to adopt the habits of the whites, to till land and raise food and store it up against the time of want." [5] To accomplish this, First Nation people were given reserves of land, 160 acres for each family of five, which would be theirs, administered by the government. In exchange for this and other benefits, the First Nations surrendered the land that had given them their way of life, their identity and their dignity. The story of the land as their "Great Mother" had ended. Now their lives would be controlled by another "Great Mother."

The new story of the land they ceded would be written by a young city that was about to be born. In the year Treaty No. 1 was signed, 12,000 people lived along the Red and Assiniboine, 87% of them First Nation or Métis. [6] Only about 215 of these people lived in that part of the settlement that was starting to be called Winnipeg.

One of them was James Mulligan who owned several lots out on the prairie, including lot 79 in the Parish of St. James — soon to become the west side of Furby Street. Mulligan was born in Ireland in 1814 [7] and had arrived in Red River around 1846, the time of the Irish Potato Famine. Known in Winnipeg as "Colonel," Mulligan possibly arrived with troops garrisoned to Red River in 1846 because of concerns about American expansion in Oregon. [8] Mulligan operated a ferry in the settlement in the 1860s and had acquired land, including the Furby lot, which he bought in 1856 from Edward Sharpe, a member of the Chelsea Pensioners, also

1874 Plan
Furby is printed in the upper left corner the third street down.

Perched on the extreme western edge of the city:
This view shows the Deaf and Dumb Institute on the north side of Portage at Sherbrook, circa 1900. Visible to the east past the shanty are the peaked roofs of houses on Furby.



garrisoned at Fort Garry. Mulligan subdivided his side of the street into lots in 1873.[9] The next year, the name "Furby" entered the historical record for the first time: on a plan for the recently incorporated City of Winnipeg, Furby was the name for a block of lots perched on the extreme western edge of the city, nothing but prairie reaching out beyond it. That plan [10] showed the new vision of the land—legal lines on a map, private lots for sale. It was an amazingly ambitious plan given that Winnipeg at that time was just a tiny cluster of buildings near what is now Portage and Main. It was a vision of the flood of settlers then starting to pour in to settle the wide open West, the city's first and greatest real estate boom. Very few who purchased lots on Furby at this time had any intention to build. They were riding the wave. Some of Mulligan's lots increased 800% in value by the end of the boom in 1882.

Among those who bought Furby lots from Mulligan were Kenneth McKenzie and George Murray. They became the first to build and live on the block. By 1884, McKenzie had built a two-storey, six-room wooden house at 254 Furby. It originally had no basement and rested on timber sills. He and his wife Sarah lived there for one year and then moved into a smaller house (four rooms) he built at 248 Furby. In 1889, he built another house at 274 Furby (eight rooms) which he rented to a school principal. In 1900, McKenzie doubled the size of the original house at 254 Furby, adding a two-storey, five-room addition, making it an 11-room house with nearly 2,000 square feet floor space and a stone foundation, all at a cost of $1,500. [11] He rented out the big home to families headed by business and professional men.

The only other house on Furby in the 1880s was George Murray's house at 260 Furby (six rooms). He and his wife Alice lived there until his death in 1912. [12]

For six years, these four houses (four to eight rooms each) were the only homes. But as Winnipeg's great expansion began, another 15 houses were added from 1890 to 1901, all of them large. Half of the 19 houses on the block by 1901 had ten or more rooms. From 1901 to 1906, 15 more large houses were built. Four of these were even larger — three built as duplexes and one built as a triplex. By 1906, Furby was almost completely developed, a block of 34 big, substantial houses, all of them two or two-and-a-half storeys, most of them 10 or more rooms.

That environment—a city block of big houses—would shape Furby's next century as surely as the great prairie landscape of earth and sky had shaped Furby's first 5,000 years. For the next century the story of Furby would be these big houses and the people who lived in them.

254 Furby in 2005: *This is the oldest house still standing on the block.*

3000 Square Feet: *The houses built on Furby were large. In 1917, when this new 3,000 sq. ft. home was being built at 260 Furby, a city official wrote on the building permit, "The applicant distinctly understands that this dwelling is for one family only." [14]*

Forces Within and Without

1874 to 1913 were dynamic years for Winnipeg — years when the city rode the tiger of enormous forces.

The arrival of the CPR in 1880 began three decades of growth "unequalled in the history of Canadian urban development." [13] Winnipeg was gateway to the "Last Best West," the hoped-for homeland of immigrants being dislocated in the old Europe. Fortunes were made in railroads, wholesale and retail, commerce and real estate. There was great wealth, but also great poverty.

This disparity created forces that would dominate the city right to the present day. Winnipeg's pattern of development separated economic and ethnic groups. The Anglo-Celtic elite built mansions in exclusive southern neighbourhoods, like Wellington Crescent and Armstrong's Point. The impoverished immigrant class was concentrated in the North End. Neighbourhoods in the middle, like the West End, south of Portage, were homes to the middle-to lower-middle-income strata.

The division of the city into these layers of social and racial stratification would erupt in conflict and would still be a dominant force in the Winnipeg of the 21st century.

2. A Fur Trade Family
William "Big Bear" McLean

William J. "Big Bear" McLean and his nine adult children moved into 276 Furby Street in 1906. Their home was half of a three-storey semi-detached rental property recently finished by local builders, Ford and Foster, for W.T. Peace, a city merchant0.[1] Their half, at 276 Furby, was a single-family unit, while the other side, 278 Furby, was divided into two suites.

Born in the Scottish Hebrides in 1841, William 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 then served 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 close relationships with and respect for First Nation people. William's wife, Helen, had First Nation ancestry. The family spoke Cree and Anishinabeg. William had earned his nickname in 1885 when he was Chief Trader at Fort Pitt.[2] When fighting broke out at nearby Duck Lake and Frog Lake, the Cree chief, Big Bear, consulted with William. Under McLean's leadership, the occupants of Fort Pitt agreed to evacuate the fort and join the protective custody of Big Bear's camp. For two months the McLean family and others traveled with Big Bear's camp as they were pursued by the Alberta Field Force. At one point, shots were exchanged. At another, the Cree evaded the Field Force by a mile-wide muskeg crossing.[3]

The McLean family home from 1906 to 1915: *William "Big Bear" McLean and his family of nine children moved into the left side of this three-storey home in 1906. The right side contained two suites.*

On his retirement from Hudson's Bay in 1892, at age fifty-one, William, his wife Helen, and their twelve children had rented a semi-detached home in Point Douglas. By the end of the century, the 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. As well, the family itself was changing: Helen died in 1899, three children had married and moved on. So William and his nine remaining children moved to Furby. William was also embarking on his second career. In 1906, he was hired by the Department of Indian Affairs as an assistant pay officer, responsible for travelling to northern reserves to distribute annual treaty payments and to forward 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 for Aboriginals in that district. He also took on the James Bay payments for 1910-12. William continued to work and travel extensively until he was 82 years old 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.[4]

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." [5] Often asked about his experiences in the fur trade and in particular his encounter with his namesake, William responded, "Big Bear never bothered 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." [6]

On Furby Street, William lived with nine of his 12 children, all adults between 21 and 42 years of age in 1911 when the census enumerated them. Two daughters,

Elizabeth and Helen, aged 42 and 32 respectively, reported no occupations and probably managed the household. (Elizabeth subsequently worked as librarian at the Christian Science Reading Room, which may not have paid more than a nominal sum.) 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 $7,000–a considerable amount, but not huge for such a large family.

William remained at 276 Furby until 1915 or 1916. By then, several more of his children had married and moved out. Two sons left for military service overseas. William decided in 1915 to rent a smaller, two-storey, detached house at 259 Clare Street in the new subdivision of Riverview. As with the move to Furby back in 1906, it seems family changes occasioned residential changes.

The McLeans had much in common with their neighbours on Furby. Families on the block were not homogeneous in their ethnic, class and family backgrounds, but neither were they representative of Winnipeg's growing diversity. The city's housing market was becoming increasingly stratified and Furby Street was becoming a comfortable, respectable, middle-class, British-Canadian neighbourhood. [7]

The McLean children, c. 1895, when the family was living in Pt. Douglas: *Left to right, top row: Helen, Duncan, Kitty, William; middle row: Freda, John, Eliza, Angus, Amelia; bottom row: Murray, Lillian, Lawrence.*

The People of the Plains

In 1906, William's eldest daughter, Amelia Paget, who had married and moved to Ottawa, visited the family at Furby Street on her way west to interview Aboriginal elders for a book, *The People of the Plains,* which would be published three years later.

The book sympathetically described the traditional life of First Nation people. Amelia was well-suited to the job. She had grown up in the north and on the plains, like her mother Helen and many generations of mixed-ancestry women before her.

Although William was a relatively new arrival at Fort Simpson when Amelia was born in 1867, Helen's roots went deep into the land. Her European lineage could be traced back three generations through the fur trade. The family's fur trade connection began with a North West Company trader, John McGillivray, who, around 1796, married a First Nation woman "in the manner of the country." Their daughter, Elizabeth McGillivray, married Colin Campbell, who had come from Upper Canada. Their daughter, Anne Campbell married Alexander Hunter Murray, the founder of Fort Yukon. Their daughter, Helen, (Amelia's mother) was born in the Yukon territory in 1847. [8]

Amelia, like her mother Helen, and her grandmother Anne, grew up in the far north, but also had strong ties with the Red River Settlement. Like many children in fur trade families, they went to boarding school at Red River, a two to three month journey. Several generations of Amelia's family were part of the northern Hudson's Bay hierarchy and the old fur trade elite in Winnipeg. Amelia's grandfather ended his career in charge of Lower Fort Garry. He died in 1874, but grandmother Anne continued entertaining at their Winnipeg home, "Bellevue," until her death in 1907.

But Amelia never mentioned anything about her own First Nations heritage in *The People of the Plains,* nor did any of the McLean family mention it. "Like members of other fur-trade, mixed-ancestry families of the later 19th century, the McLeans did not acknowledge, and even took steps to obliterate this heritage," explains Sarah Carter in her 2004 introduction to Amelia's book.[9]

So poorly were "half-breeds" regarded in turn-of-the-century Winnipeg that Amelia might portray First Nation people sympathetically in her book, but could never acknowledge that part of her own heritage.

3. Neighbours in 1911

The 1911 census, in combination with other sources, gives a snapshot of "Big Bear" McLean's neighbours, around the middle of his stay on Furby. [1]

UPPER INCOME

Almost half of the 41 households on the block were occupied by families headed by men who held professional, business or management roles. There were four doctors (each with an office in his home) and businessmen like George J. Stewart, western superintendent for Massey-Harris, the agricultural implement company; and Alexander Hargraft, partner in grain merchants Hargraft and Gooderham.

Most prominent were the Deacons–Thomas, Lily and their four children. Thomas R. Deacon was president of Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works. He would be elected Mayor of Winnipeg in 1913-14. He and his family bought 299 Furby when they arrived in Winnipeg in 1902. They lived there until building the most stately house on the block at 251 Furby in 1905. As mayor, Deacon is remembered for his role in promoting the construction of the aqueduct to Shoal Lake to bring safe, abundant water to the city. He's also remembered for his opposition to unions and his refusal to accept industry-wide contract negotiations. The breakdown of bargaining at Manitoba Bridge was one of several disputes that precipitated the Winnipeg General Strike in 1919. On Furby Street, stories of the Mayor, his substantial house and his policies, were undoubtedly topics of conversation, but neighbours knew a more personal side. Deacon's youngest son, Alfred, was diagnosed with polio. It was the Deacons' good fortune that the city's leading orthopedic surgeon was to move next door.

From affluent to working class: There were a diversity of people living on Furby and a variety of home settings. The mayor lived at 251 Furby (top). Two doors down, a house painter lived at 261 Furby (bottom).

Dr. Herbert P.H. Galloway established his residence and gymnasium at the corner of Furby and Broadway in 1907 (661 Broadway/249 Furby.) Alfred and other patients came to the gymnasium for physiotherapy. In 1911, the largest annual incomes on the block were those of Dr. Galloway ($10,000) and Thomas Deacon ($5,250). It was inevitable that a member of the city's elite like Deacon would move from Furby. Although homes on Furby were large, they were nowhere near the size of the mansions that were being built by the city's elite in areas like Crescentwood. In 1918, the Deacons moved to their new home on Yale Avenue. Dr. Galloway also moved, but two years later bought 251 Furby and converted it to a private hospital. [2]

MIDDLE INCOME

Almost one-quarter of the 41 households on the block were headed by men, like "Big Bear" McLean, holding administrative, office or sales jobs. They included Robert Creelman, assistant general passenger agent for the Canadian Northern Railway, who rented one half of 282 Furby and Frederick W. Clark, of 266 Furby, Registrar of Manitoba College. One such family were the Breens at 308 Furby. Richard Breen was a clerk in the Dominion Land Office. His three adult sons still lived at home. In 1911 they had started Breen Motors Co. at Broadway and Sherbrook, one of the city's first automobile dealerships. Thomas managed the automobile business. "Billy", who had played on the Winnipeg Rowing Club's hockey team that had tried for the Stanley Cup in 1904, was secretary-treasurer. Nixon remained an inactive partner, devoting his time to several enterprises: general manager of Lake of the Woods Milling; president of North West Fire Insurance Company; director of Great West Life, Winnipeg

Electric Railway and the Manitoba Power Commission. By 1911, the Breen brothers were becoming leaders in many of the technologies from motor cars to milling to electricity that were changing the face of Winnipeg. [3]

Many houses on the block took in lodgers, but the most unique was the Canada Permanent House Club at 262 Furby. The club appears to have been created by William Cockburn, an accountant with Canada Permanent Mortgage Company. Seven young bachelors "clubbed" together to support a comfortable lifestyle on their combined income of about $9,000.

262 Furby: *The Canada Permanent House Club provided accommodation for about seven young bachelors who "clubbed" together to support a comfortable lifestyle and hire Maw Ong, a 41-year-old Chinese immigrant, to be their cook and house manager.*

LOWER INCOME

Four families on the block were working class — skilled tradesmen like Peter Winning, locomotive engineer; Alexander Gray, a cooper who rented 300 Furby, and David Oswald, housepainter, whose family lived at 261 Furby. Oswald and Gray earned incomes around $1,000. Three men were retired and lived on their investments, including George Murray and Kenneth McKenzie, the original pioneers who still resided in the houses they had built in the 1880s.

There were three widows who took in lodgers to supplement their income. Sarah Davidson, 50, rented 274 Furby, the house next door to the McLean's. She lived with her 29-year-old daughter, Edith, who was a bank stenographer, and they took in two boarders. Clara Johnston, 58, owned the duplex at 288/290 Furby. She lived with two adult sons, Charles, a druggist, and Alexander, a clerk. They also took in a lodger. The other side of the building, she rented to James Norton, a wood and fuel dealer. Charlotte Logan, 33, ran a boarding-house at 311 Furby to support herself and her three sons: John, 16, a clerk; Frank, 14, and George, 11, still in school. With the help of a 16-year-old live-in servant, she provided room and board for six lodgers.

The diversity of incomes on the block–from Dr. Galloway's income of $10,000 to the lower incomes of $1,000 or less–shows the diversity of people. According to a study by J.S. Woodsworth at the time, a minimum standard of living in Winnipeg in 1913 required an income of $1,200. [4]

This block of Furby was a mixed street of not affluent, but comfortably well-off families.

Big Houses, Flexible Families and Space for Roomers

The households on Furby show a more flexible concept of household than the narrower concept of the nuclear family that is understood today.

Families had more children and households often included a collection of grown children, in-laws, other relatives, servants and lodgers. The intimacy and privacy of domestic environments that we now associate with the nuclear family did not exist to the same degree.

In 1911, almost 60% of the homes (30 households) had in them at least one person who was not a member of the nuclear family: eleven homes had resident servants; ten had extended family, sometimes including married children with their children; and nine had lodgers.

Lodgers often had similar occupations to households, but they were usually unmarried. "Lodging" or "boarding" was a major housing option, both among the working class and the middle class. (A 1914 report examining the lives of the increasing number of women working in department stores recommended a list be developed of respectable and clean boarding houses for women.) [5]

The big houses of Furby were ideal for this purpose, their size making easier the interaction of relatives, servants and lodgers, all living under one roof. The lines between big houses, big families, and rooming spaces would become increasingly blurred as times (and housing) got tighter in the years ahead.

4. Furby during the Depression
The Well-Off and the Hard-Up

By 1913, Winnipeg's great boom was bust. The next 40 years would be challenging–two world wars, a general strike, the Great Depression. As other western cities grew in influence, Winnipeg would lose its exclusive economic role in the West. But, even in decline, Winnipeg was a grand city. Railroad was still king. Fortunes were still being made (and lost) on the Wheat Exchange. Eaton's and The Bay ruled prairie retail from their citadels on busy Portage Avenue. The North End crackled with energy and languages. The city was full of characters and stories, and Furby held its fair share—from the well-off to the hard-up.

One scion of a well-off city family was Cam Chisholm, whose family lived at 294 Furby. His father, architect James Chisholm, had been a city pioneer, coming from Ontario in 1877. After contracts dried up in 1882, James left Winnipeg to find work in the United States. When Winnipeg boomed again, at the turn of the century, he returned. Cam joined his father and brother in the firm James Chisholm and Sons, Architects. The Chisholm firm designed many commercial, residential and institutional buildings, including 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.[1] In 1906, when these two projects were under construction, James bought the large white, frame house at 294 Furby. Cam and his wife, with their two children, moved in with his parents in the early years of the First World War. The house was large enough for three generations. After James died in 1920, Cam took over the house and the firm.[2]

Construction stagnated after the War and got even worse during the Depression. In March 1934, near the bottom of the Depression, Cam submitted a proposal to the editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press* aimed at boosting construction and improving living accommodation for the poor. He was most concerned about over-crowded and decrepit housing in Winnipeg's central district. "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," he argued. The city should "dictate" that landlords provide decent housing to those tenants using municipal relief payments to cover their rent. More creatively, the City should offer twenty-year loans up to $4,000 to home owners wanting to improve their property. Chisholm claimed that every million dollars spent on repairs would give five months of work to a thousand men "at a fair wage scale."[3] A good idea, like so many, but it came to naught.

Cam's death two years later drew public notice because, like his father, he had long been prominent in the curling community. He invented the "Chisholm draw," the procedure whereby matches were organized at bonspiels.[4] His social conscience went unnoted in the *Free Press* obituary.

A neighbour of the Chisholms on Furby also drew public attention in *Free Press* articles in 1933 and 1934. P.J. Rykers—artist, photographer, inventor and a roomer at 254 Furby—had a very public fight with the relief system during the Depression. Rykers had immigrated to Winnipeg from Holland in 1919. He worked in several photographic studios in the city, sold paintings and photographs and invented a number of adaptations to photo equipment. The Depression put him out of work. He lived in a $4 a month room at 254 Furby and was on relief.

In 1933, the *Free Press* reported that Rykers had run afoul of the City Relief

"High Class Rooming House":
After Cam's death, his siblings and widow sold 294 Furby. At first, the ad read: "choice house... suit adult family."[11] 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."[12]

Department for collecting benefits while he was spending the summer at Grand Beach.[5] Ryker explained that he had taken a summer job painting cottages in return for room and board. He had stayed on relief so the City would pay his room rent and he could keep storing his possessions, paintings, photographic equipment and inventions, etc. He was cut off relief and couldn't pay his rent so he quit the summer job. He returned to the city and was once again on relief.

In 1934, his unhappiness with City Relief again put him in the public eye. He began a "death fast," rather than accept the way that "single men of the relief get treated as bohunks." [6] City Relief required medical inspections of single men: "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."

The City Relief Department relented and said he did not have to repeat the medical exam to receive relief again. But he continued his fast because he said the quality of food provided to single men in soup kitchens made him ill. He ended his fast when an anonymous single man, also on relief, sent him $1 for food. The act of generosity touched Rykers, who felt that he had made his point about the insensitive treatment of the unemployed.

"Death Fast": *P.J. Rykers was a roomer at 254 Furby in the Depression and conducted a "death fast" to protest relief conditions.*

Jimmy Gray, Historian of Everyday Life

Because he lived through the events he wrote about, former *Free Press* reporter and popular historian James Gray was able to capture nuances that bring alive Winnipeg from 1911 to the Depression.

In *The Boy From Winnipeg*, Gray gives a "boy's-eye view" of the end of the construction boom in 1913, how building projects suddenly stopped, leaving half-built shells of houses "which we turned into forts, castles and battlegrounds for our interminable games of cowboys and Indians and cops and robbers." [7] Gray lived a couple of blocks from Furby and Broadway and remembers details like the wooden boardwalks along West Broadway streets and the half-built apartment at the corner of Westminister and Young from which he dropped snowballs on unsuspecting passers-by. His descriptions bring the era alive – getting the strap at Mulvey School, delivering papers in the opulence of Armstrong's Point, taking Saturday night baths in a tub of water heated in the kitchen.

Similarly, in *The Winter Years*, because he was actually there, standing in the line to get relief at the Woodyard (the city office where relief was dispensed), he can remember the smells: "Garlic, to race-proud Anglo-Saxons, was something to touch gently to a salad bowl. To the Galicians–a derisive generic term Winnipeggers applied to all foreigners–garlic was an anti-toxin, a medicine, a gargle, a liniment, and a confection to chew while waiting for streetcars. The Woodyard waiting-room that day swam in an aroma of garlic." [8]

Garlic was the smell of the relief line because it was the smell of the North End. Gray was Anglo-Saxon, and aware of the discrimination that existed in Winnipeg. "In my search for employment I was free to range over the whole of commercial Winnipeg and nobody denied me a job from any ulterior motive. This did not hold true for the Ukrainians, Poles and Jews." [9]

In both books, he describes a life style in which "many of the things that were later to become necessities were luxuries we never needed. One was a telephone. Only two of the reporters on the *Free Press* had telephones.... Only one reporter owned a car in 1937. Cars were not something everybody had to have. They were things people hoped to be able to afford some day, after they had saved up enough to buy one."[10] Both books are filled with the joy of life in Winnipeg through the Twenties and the Thirties, despite poverty, despite moral, political and economic crises.

"This was our Winnipeg," remembered Jimmy "and most of us lived to count ourselves among fortune's favourites for having come upon the scene when we did."

DISCUSSION — BEGINNINGS

Historical Research
How an accent can change history

History is an exciting process. Finding stories like those of William "Big Bear" McLean, his daughter Amelia, the Breen family, P.J. Rykers and others who have lived on this block has been a delight of discovery. But mixed with this has been the need for researchers to recognize historical bias, including our own.

A simple example from this history is the word, Métis. Initially, we followed a practice to use Metis (without the accent). Métis (with the accent) is the word originally used by French mixed-ancestry people to describe themselves. The colonial, racial attitudes of the Hudson's Bay Company and the English elite led to Scottish mixed-ancestry people being referred to by terms like "half-breeds", often in a derogatory way. Many historians have attempted to remove the racial stratification of these terms by using one word, Metis, (without the accent) to describe all the mixed-ancestry people who made up the settlement. But removing the accent can be offensive to the descendants of the original Métis.

We decided to follow the practice of using terminology that the community today would use to describe themselves. This is not that straightforward, since there are many people and many shades of meaning. By using Métis (with an accent) are we marginalizing the many mixed-ancestry people of non-French descent who are proud of their own heritage? And what of the large numbers of mixed-ancestry people who don't see any distinction, who think of themselves as Scottish, or French, or Irish, or maybe, that vaguest of concepts, Canadian? It's obvious that you can lean over backwards with political correctness, but it's equally obvious that racism and racist terms are a standard part of Winnipeg's fabric. We've done our best to recognize this reality and avoid falling into the racist pattern ourselves.

The pattern of one culture dominating another is even shown in something that seems so straightforward as drawing a map. The map on page four on which "Furby" first appears is a plan for the city and a plan which, when you look carefully, is pure imagination. This plan, for instance, envisaged Portage Road starting at Colony Creek. But Portage actually started at the Red River and became Winnipeg's main street. These early planners ignored it perhaps because this customary roadway was not in their plan for what they visualized as the future city. Just as it is the elite that gets to define the terms, it is the elite that gets to draw the map. "Conquest is followed by mapmaking," explained Hooley McLaughlin in his book, *The Ends of Our Exploring.*[1] "And then the map is superimposed on all older maps, on the hopes and aspirations of the conquered." That is what happened in the Red River resistance when surveyors from Canada arrived in 1869 to lay out their new maps.

Historical records, terminology and maps are all imperfect attempts to capture the story of the past. Finally, another way is simply walking the street, getting to know the physical presence of these big houses. Just as the prairie and parkland created a unique environment for Aboriginal peoples to live their lives over centuries, this city block of big houses has created its own environment, its own cultural landscape. "If these walls could only talk," is an old expression. Just look at them and listen and you'll hear part of the story.

Historical Research

Researching a city block, its buildings and the people who have lived there can involve several sources and methods.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

LAND, BUILDINGS AND PEOPLE

In Winnipeg, an essential resource is the 8-page *Guide for Researching Winnipeg Buildings*, published by the City of Winnipeg Property and Development Services Department. It describes in more detail many of the resources introduced here.

One way is to start with the buildings as they exist now and work backwards. You can find the roll number and the property description of the building you are researching at the **City of Winnipeg Archives** (CWA) at 380 William Avenue. The roll number enables you to search backwards through assessment rolls to the date of construction. This provides information on owners and construction.

The Provincial Land Titles Office (lower level, 405 Broadway) contains information on land ownership from the 1870s to the present.

The best resource to find out about the people who lived in the buildings is *Henderson's Directories*. These books were published annually from 1876 to 2000. They list and cross-reference addresses, residents and occupations. Particularly helpful are the block-by-block listings which enable you to trace the movement of people on and off the block each year.

LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES

Henderson's Directories are available at the **Millennium Library** (3rd floor, 251 Donald St.) and the **Legislative Library** (200 Vaughan Street). The Millennium Library also contains back copies of the *Winnipeg Tribune*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, the Hudson's Bay Company's *Beaver* magazine, a large selection of local histories and a specialized Winnipeg history room. Neighbourhood libraries often have local histories and back copies of neighbourhood newspapers. The Legislative Library contains resources such as Vertical Biographical files, back copies of the *Manitoba Free Press* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* and census data for 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901.

Census data for 1901, 1906 and 1911 is available online from Library and Archives Canada (http://collectionscanada.ca).

The **Archives of Manitoba** (also at 200 Vaughan) is full of resources – collections of historical photographs, diaries, letters and other original documents. **The University of Manitoba Library** and the **University of Winnipeg Library** contain many resources. Staff at all of these libraries are helpful and knowledgeable.

Resources, such as indexed obituaries, are also available at the **Manitoba Genealogical Society** (Unit A - 1045 St. James St.) and the **Manitoba Historical Society** (4th floor, 167 Lombard Ave.).

An excellent online resource is found at **NewspaperArchive.com** with issues of the *Winnipeg Free Press* and its predecessor the *Manitoba Free Press*, from 1874 through 1977. In Advanced Search mode of the Archive, simply enter the address or the name, as well as the years, that interest you. This was the source for the "Death Fast" story on p. 11. Winnipeg's Millennium Public Library subscribes to this service.

SECONDARY SOURCES

The last 20 years have seen many publications by historians focussing on particular aspects of local history—new exciting viewpoints—social, economic, cultural, religious, gender, and more. In this first period alone, we have listed in our notes a dozen widely varying authors whose works have enriched our understanding of this period. They range from Ihor Mayba, writing about early orthopedic surgeons to Basil Johnston, describing early Ojibway practices. Sarah Carter shed new light on the history surrounding William "Big Bear" McLean's daughter Amelia and the historical context of her life and writing. There's much more. We've listed our secondary sources in our notes. Consulting of notes and bibliographies can lead a researcher to many more excellent and informative books and journal articles.

ROOMING "HOMES"

5. Furby by the Forties
Emergence of Rooming Houses

When Cam Chisolm passed away in 1936, the big white family home at 294 Furby was advertised as "suitable for doctor, institution or high class rooming house." This was an indication both of the large size of the house and the emergence of rooming houses as a major form of housing on the block. In the housing shortage that faced Winnipeg in the Thirties and Forties, rooming houses were a normal way of life for many people including the "high class."

On Furby many of the homes had become these kinds of rooming houses, many headed by women who took in roomers. Mrs. Emma Jansen had moved into 276 Furby with her husband Milen at the end of the First War. In 1931 she was listed in the assessment roll as a widow who attended to 11 residents. Also in 1931, Mrs. M. Partridge looked after 16 people at 305 Furby. Several other women were in similar situations. Some were offering rooms in their family home to make extra income. Some were hired as landladies to operate the homes. Doug McKenzie's mother, Georgina, at 266 Furby was one. (See Life as a Landlady's Son, p. 15) Doug remembers that "all of the houses on the street had roomers."

As more houses on the block brought in more roomers, the density and income levels of the block changed significantly. *Henderson's Directory* listed 19 residents at 264/266 Furby when Doug was growing up there in the Forties and Fifties. Furby had changed in the years since William "Big Bear" McLean and Thomas Deacon. Income levels had dropped; owner occupancy dropped; and population density increased. Families headed by professionals, managers or businessmen had dropped from 60% in 1911 and 1921 to 10% in 1941. Those who performed office or sales work increased, but a much larger increase occurred in the numbers who worked in trades or various other forms of blue collar labour. By 1941 owner occupancy had dropped to an all time low: from a high of 54% in 1911 to 18% in 1941.[1]

As their occupancy dropped, owners rented out to more people, breaking up some houses into multi-suite houses and operating other large houses as rooming houses. Focussing on the 28 houses that provided homes from 1911 through 1941 shows a 50% increase in the number of people living in the houses. They increased from about 200 people in 1911–1931 to 324 people in 1941. The Breen children, for example, after the death of their mother in the 1930s, divided their former 12–room family home at 308 Furby into six suites and operated it as an income property until about 1942. As a single-family home, the dwelling had housed as many as 10 residents in 1911 and as few as four in 1921. But when it was converted to suites, about 20 people lived there through the Thirties and into the Forties.[2]

Apartment construction increased the block's population density even more. At the Portage end of the block, single-family homes at 300, 301 and 317 Furby were demolished to make space for new apartment buildings–the Oxford, the Cambridge and the Trevere. R.F. Lear, a plumber and owner-occupant

Portage and Furby circa 1930:
During the golden age of public transportation, streetcars ran to Headingley and Stonewall and linked most parts of the city. In the early part of the century they had opened up "streetcar suburbs" for development. The last streetcar run in 1955 marked the end of an era as public transport lost ground to the private automobile. This photo shows a Furby Street that is much narrower than today intersecting with Portage, with a park-like structure and landscaping on the southwest corner. and the Shipley Block on the southeast corner.

of 277 Furby, divided his house into suites and then creatively attached it to the Castlemaine Apartments which he built next door. In addition, two houses that had been homes in 1911 became private hospitals–Dr. Galloway at 251 Furby and Lill's Nursing Home at 265 Furby, which specialized in maternity care.

City health reports in the inter-war years often highlighted deterioration of once-respectable neighbourhoods into growing slums. A 1947 report described tenement houses with "large rooms, and rooms not so large, subdivided to make smaller rooms... dark cubby holes containing an old, and more often than not, foul gas range... the combined odors of frowziness; products of combustion, cooking, soiled clothing, washing hung up to dry, and the indescribable odor of humanity packed into close quarters." [3]

The rooming houses on Furby were not these kinds of tenement houses and had not reached this point of deterioration. Quite the opposite was true. The homes were large enough to support the increasing population density. The presence of landladies and their families made them more like homes than the growing number of slum dwellings in other, once genteel, central neighbourhoods.

Furby was still genteel, although much faded. Many who lived in these Furby houses in the Forties and Fifties talk of rooming "homes" not houses–and roomers who "felt like family." Their stories in the pages that follow are somewhat tinted by nostalgia, but it seems a fair description of the rooming houses on Furby by the end of the Second World War–genteel, respectable, well–kept, middle-and working-class "homes."

The rooming house at 266 Furby: *This house was run from 1946-54 by Doug McKenzie's mother.*

Life as a Landlady's Son

Doug McKenzie was two years old when he and his mother Georgina moved into 266 Furby in 1946.[4] Mother and son lived in a three-room suite with kitchenette. Doug's aunt operated a number of rooming houses, one of which was 266 Furby. His mother was landlady of this rooming house.

Ownership of a rooming house was often separate from its operation. The owner leased the building to an operator who purchased furnishings and contents from the previous operator. The operator maintained the house and performed building repairs as required. Doug's aunt took over rooming houses that were getting a bit run down. She and her sisters would run them, fix them up, and then sell the operating lease at a higher price. Doug can remember fixing up 266 Furby, helping to hang wall and ceiling paper when he was six years old.

Living in a rooming house was a sociable experience for a young boy. He remembers Ruby, a widow, who "lived on wine." Mrs. Newell, who seemed to the five-year old boy to be in her nineties, regularly invited him in for a very formal tea. Upstairs was a German family with a son about his own age, but with whom he could not speak. Doug played with other children up and down the street–following horse-drawn delivery wagons, hoping the iceman would chip a chunk of ice for them; playing in back of Thomson's Funeral Home (Doug thought it strange that his mother never wanted the flowers that workers there gave him); racing go-carts down the rooftop ramp at Dickson Motors at Portage and Furby; occasionally getting into a car, pushing its unkeyed starter button and driving it into the bank parking lot. Doug marveled that they never got into trouble. On hot summer nights, the kids would hang around outside the Normandy Dance Hall, listening to the music. It was a safe and secure neighbourhood. "We didn't know fear," he remembered.

As a young child, no more than eight or nine years old, he often opened the door to "beggars," men of all ages from their mid-twenties upwards, who knocked and asked for food. He would make them a peanut butter sandwich and give them a glass of water and they would be on their way. People just did that.

In 1954 Doug and his mother moved to 401 Balmoral Street, another of his aunt's rooming houses.

ROOMING "HOMES"

6. The Rooming "Home" Experience

In the closing years of the Second World War, two young women from Hamiota, a rural Manitoba town arrived in Winnipeg to seek their fortunes. For the first five years in the city, they lived in a rooming "home" at 287 Furby Street. "Mabel J" came first in 1943 and soon gained employment at Great West Life (then located at Portage and Main), where she was to work for forty years.[1] At first she rented a room with board on Colony Street. The following year Mabel found a two-room suite in a house at 287 Furby that she could share with her sister "Eunice," who was about to begin teacher training in the city.

The sisters would have preferred an apartment, but the wartime housing shortage put that out of the question. Still, they put their names on a waiting list for the Cambridge Apartments at 303 Furby, just several doors north of their new place. The rent for their suite was slightly more than the $30 that Mabel had been paying from her $50 a month salary, but Eunice's contribution made it affordable. In any case, they judged it a good neighbourhood and they appreciated its location. "It was an excellent 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 explained Mabel in an interview. "We didn't have a car until 1954 so we had to be within walking distance of downtown."

The two sisters had two rooms on one side of the ground floor–a sitting room and a bedroom. The family that owned the house lived on the other side. On the second and third floors were several other roomers, including one lady and her blind husband. Each room had its own gas stove (two burners and an oven). Washrooms were shared.

Fire at the Furby Theatre, 1952:
Every neighbourhood used to have its movie theatre, like the Furby. Behind is the Galaxy roller skating rink. The coming of television to the city in 1954 was the death knell for neighbourhood theatres. It was also one of the major agents of the huge change in values taking place in the Fifties and Sixties. Other agents of change in this period included the car, the baby boom, the economic boom that followed the war and the shift from farm to city to suburb.

WORD CONNOTATIONS

The term "rooming house" had very different connotations in those days than today. Language and connotations can change. That change was evident in the sisters' answer to an interview question. The interviewer asked, "I think there was a fair amount of home ownership at a certain point in that period (when you were there) and I think it shifted. Did you notice that at all? Or were there always lots of rooming houses on that block?" (The question is phrased as though home ownership and rooming houses are mutually exclusive.)

Mabel and Eunice responded:

"I thought there were mostly rooming homes."

"I thought there were too, really,"

"There were a few private ones though."

"But I think they did move towards rooming houses more."

In the language of Mabel and Eunice, the presence of the owner's family made 287 Furby a rooming "home." A rooming "home" was a large house in which a family lived and rented out several rooms to roomers. A rooming house was more like a private business. It had the same physical set-up, but not the personal touch of the owner's family living there. That distinction helps to explain how rooming "homes" and "rooming" were more respectable housing alternatives at the time. Many roomers, especially women, earned low incomes, but still considered rooming to be respectable, something they associated with living in a family setting.

"Those days, you weren't wanting luxury," explained Mabel. "It was just whatever was cheapest." They described how, during the

Forties and Fifties, they'd often have visitors from the country who could easily make themselves at home sleeping on the floor for the night.

Their means may have been modest, but life was rich for Mabel and Eunice over the next five years. Eunice completed Normal School and began teaching at an elementary school. The two went to Young United Church, down the street on Furby. But then they became good friends with a fellow-teacher, Marilyn, who belonged to Westminster United Church so they joined there.

Everything they wanted was within walking distance. They had friends on Beverly Street and friends on Spence Street. Many other friends moving in from the country also lived downtown. They shopped at Eaton's and The Bay and all along busy Portage Avenue. Winnipeg's entertainment was all downtown. The Winnipeg Auditorium was between the Legislature and the Bay. The Velodrome and Osborne Stadium were across from the Legislature. It wasn't until the mid-Fifties that Great West Life took over the Stadium site and the arena and stadium moved to Polo Park. For Mabel and Eunice, it was a short walk to public skating at the Velodrome or dancing at the Auditorium. Their brother-in-law played for the Army baseball team at the stadium and they'd travel to smaller ball parks around the city to watch their nephews playing for country teams that came into the city. On Saturdays, they went for cream pie at Harmon's Drug Store and Confectionery. They would spend some Sunday afternoons at Vimy Ridge Park. There were movies at the nearby Furby Theatre or at numerous movie theatres downtown. Nearby was Carr's Drugstore at Portage and Furby and Sam Diamond's drug store and confectionery at Broadway and Young.

In 1949, after waiting five years, they moved into the Cambridge Apartments. The move was timely for the two sisters, because the house at 287 Furby had recently been sold. Life there was becoming noisier. The first owners had been quiet, but they said of the new owners, "The last ones 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 party and the accordion were too much for the two women who lived on the same floor. And so, when the apartment became available, they were happy to move.

287 Furby:
From 1944 to 1949
Mabel and Eunice lived at
this rooming "home."

The Shift from Farms to City

Mabel and Eunice were part of the major historical transition from a rural society to an urban society. Manitoba had always been rural. In 1941, 56% of its population lived on farms and 44% in towns and cities. By 1951, these numbers had reversed–43% rural and 57% urban.

It took several years for society to catch up with the transformation taking place. The provincial government was heavily rural; there was much emotion in the Fifties over rural-urban issues like daylight savings time, the marketing of coloured margarine, school consolidation and branch line abandonment.

But urbanization (ultimately suburbanization) was to become the new way of life, including many new values.

At the time that major changes in society are happening, we often just live the changes, unaware of their gradual effects. But one writer in the Fifties, philosopher George Grant, asked the question then:

"The farm community, as it once existed, is bound slowly to disappear–for even if people are farmers by profession they must become more and more town people with the automobile, the radio and television, the machine, and mass education.... I do not know what forms of the human spirit this new world will produce—but one thing I do know–no sensible person can believe that the same kind of people are going to come out of this environment as came out of the old Canadian towns and farms." [2]

ROOMING "HOMES"

7. New Families Bring New Life to Furby

In 1948, Omelian and Mychalina Monastyrski moved into 305 Furby, the house where they would spend the rest of their lives together. [1]

They had grown up in a small village in Western Ukraine and emigrated to Canada shortly after being married in 1928. They lived in Point Douglas through the Depression and the war. Omelian worked in a meat packing plant, as a labourer with Winnipeg School Division and finally as a skilled labourer in concrete with the school division. Mychalina too worked hard at Swift's chicken eviscerating plant and the Winnipeg Cold Storage warehouse. In 1934, their son Taras was born. As soon as they could, the Monastyrskis bought their own home on Heaton Street in south Point Douglas. As Taras explained in an interview, home ownership was an important value for the Monastyrskis and their circle of friends. "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."

The Monastyrskis moved to Furby because the house was bigger and better. Taras explained of his parents, "They wanted to better themselves." They had taken in roomers at their house on Heaton and two of their roomers moved with them. At the Furby house they had as many as six roomers. Taras describes them as "almost family." Two were carpenters and when the house needed work and a new garage, "we'd get the boys to help out." For many, rooming was a stage in their life cycle until they married. Some roomers were already married, but had moved from rural areas ahead of their families to find work and get started in city life. Taras thought Mychalina "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?!' Long after they moved out, many returned to introduce their wives and families."

The garden was Mychalina's pride and joy—a half lot to the south that provided ample room for vegetables and a long flower garden facing the street. Among the many gardens on Furby at that time, people remarked on the beauty of the garden at the Monastyrski house. Tenants in the apartment next door (300 Furby) enjoyed the garden view from their window. Their compliments usually earned them vegetables at harvest time.

The Monastyrskis were proud of their house, their garden and their Ukrainian heritage. The streetcar and bus routes made it easy to maintain 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. Public transportation also conveyed them to the activities in the Ukrainian community that were central to their personal and cultural identities. Omelian actively participated in a Ukrainian cultural and literary institute which performed plays. He loved singing and belonged to several church and concert choirs. Mychalina was involved in church activities and volunteer work. His parents made sure Taras went to Ukrainian school on evenings and weekends to learn his language and heritage. "Ukrainian dancing was my sport."

Taras attended Gordon Bell (located at the present Mulvey School). He remembers his class helping to build dikes in St. Boniface during the 1950 flood. He had a

Omelian and Mychalina Monastyrski in their garden: *Many houses on the street had gardens. Taras Monastyrski remembers at least one family that raised rabbits in their garage. Other neighbours recall chickens.*

paper route on Furby and reminisced about many families up and down the street; a Polish family in that house; "two doctors out of that house;" the Michaylow family at 287 Furby, "That was a family that knew how to party."

The Michaylow family had purchased Mabel and Eunice's rooming home in 1949. The Michaylows, the Monastyrskis and many others were part of a major influx of Ukrainian, Polish and other families purchasing homes on the block after the war. They were families who lived their lives, planted gardens, raised children and, as a matter of course, took in a variety of roomers. The houses were crowded – just as they had been in the inter-war years as housing densities had increased – but it was the crowding of families and children and rooming homes, not the gradual deterioration that housing reports were describing in other parts of the city. The arrival of these families injected new life into Furby for at least the next twenty years.

The table below shows this major change–how the number of owner-occupied homes on the block reached all-time highs from the 1960s to the Eighties after the decline of the Depression and the war.

Table: Home Ownership Occupancy on Furby (1911 - 2001) [2]

Year	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1980	1991	2001
Houses	31	31	28	28	25	23	24	24	20	18
Owner-occupied	17	15	5	5	13	20	17	15	8	3
Percent	54.9	48.4	17.9	17.9	52.0	**87.0**	**70.8**	**62.5**	40.0	16.7

New Life for a City

Just as ambitious hardworking people from different ethnic backgrounds revitalized the Furby neighbourhood, so too were new leaders from different ethnic backgrounds bringing a dynamic energy to Winnipeg's business and public life.

Winnipeg was booming again with the post-war prosperity sweeping North America and much of that boom was clearly attributable to the large ethnic population that had originally been ghettoized in the North End. Manitoba historian, W.L. Morton, suggested that, "only, on the whole among the non-Anglo-Saxon Canadians of Winnipeg and the Mennonites of Steinbach and Altona were there at once that enterprise which made two industries flourish where none was before and the capacity to live a whole and vigorous life." [3]

Be that as it may, the non-Anglo-Saxons of Winnipeg were now entering the middle class and enlivening the city's businesses and arts. In 1956, the city elected a North End Ukrainian as mayor. Steve Juba would remain unbeatable and reigned for the next 20 years. By 1961, 27% of Winnipeg's Jewish population lived not in the traditional North End, but in River Heights. [4] John Hirsch's energy at the Manitoba Theatre Centre had national impact.

There were many others. Maitland Steinkopf was one. As a businessman, he played a major role in developing the Polo Park shopping centre in 1959. He was in Duff Roblin's provincial cabinet in the Sixties. In 1970, the year he died, he spearheaded Manitoba's Centennial celebrations. That same year, he brought a Triple-A baseball team, the Winnipeg Whips, to the city. Writing a letter to a friend just before his death, Steinkopf praised Winnipeg, "Everything is possible in this city." [5]

ROOMING "HOMES"

8. Baby Boomers Come and Go

The Fifties and Sixties were the height of the baby boom in Canada and Furby Street was no exception. Almost every house on the block was occupied by a family and almost every one of those families had children, as well as a variety of other relatives and roomers.

Cathy Hoekstra (née Curwain) was born in 1949.[1] Her family lived in her grandmother's house at 265 Furby. Her grandmother, Catherine Hyslop, had moved onto the block in 1939 with her husband. They came from the country and lived in a rooming house at 270 Furby. Then they rented 297 Furby, where they took in roomers. After her husband's death, Catherine had enough saved to purchase 265 Furby and moved there with her daughter, Kathleen, and Kathleen's husband, David Curwain, a jeweler at Eaton's. As a little girl, Cathy enjoyed growing up in the rooming home, which regularly housed 10-15 roomers, plus her own family. The space was small, with the family in their suite on the ground floor, several rooms and a shared bathroom on the second floor and a third-floor self-contained suite. "We had a lot of boarders, a lot of women. To me, they seemed older then, but probably they were 25 or 30." It was like having a house full of aunts for the little girl. After school she would run up to see Mrs. Hedley, "because she had cake." All Cathy's friends lived nearby. Caroline lived across the back lane. Another friend who lived in the Castlemaine Apartments almost next door, she thought must have been rich, her building was so impressive. Two German boys, "Mumfy" and Roland Barkowski, lived next door at 261 Furby. When the parents weren't looking, the boys invited Cathy into their parents' room to jump on the comfy down comforter on the bed. In the evening, people sat out on their front steps. Nobody locked their doors. In the summer, children climbed trees and jumped onto garage roofs. In the winter, they played road hockey. A special treat around Christmas was a walk up Broadway to the florist shop which always had a huge display in the window.

Cathy started school in the mid-Fifties at Mulvey School, just a short walk down Broadway to Maryland. (Gordon Bell High School was built on the same site in 1960 and the name "Mulvey" transferred to the old Gordon Bell down by the river.) It was down that way that Cathy remembers going to movies at the Tivoli Theatre. Cathy remembers that her dad wore a shirt and tie every day, Monday to Saturday for his work at Eaton's and Sunday for church at Young United and then carving the roast for Sunday dinner. In 1959, David opened his own jewelry store in Transcona and the family moved. For 10-year-old Cathy, the move was "heartbreaking". Saying goodbye to that one tiny block was saying goodbye to all she had known in her life.

Family home for two families
The '50s and '60s saw two different families move in and start young families at 265 Furby — Cathy's family and Janice's family. They were part of Furby's own baby boom.

Grandmother Catherine stayed at 265 Furby. The following year she sold the house to Stanley and Mildred Belluk. Catherine stayed on as a roomer, but eventually joined the family in Transcona.

The Belluks had moved from a bed-sit with kitchenette on Hargrave Street where they had lived since getting married. [2] Stan was a carpenter who moved into the city from Beausejour. Mildred was a waitress at the popular Barbecue Restaurant beside the Metropolitan Theatre. They met at the Barbecue, married, and now were starting a family. In 1960, their daughter, Janice, was born and her brother two years later. The Belluks soon fell into a satisfying regular routine. The house required some repairs and Stanley applied his carpentry skills fixing it up in evenings and on weekends. He had a car and drove to work during the day. Mildred took care of the house and roomers during the day. The whole family would be together for dinner. Then Mildred would take the bus for her 7 to 11 pm shift at the Barbecue. Twice a month they

drove to the new Co-op Supermarket on Wall Street for groceries. When they ran short, there was the smaller Safeway around the corner on Broadway.

As a child growing up in the neighbourhood in the Sixties and early Seventies, Janice remembers the same things that Cathy Hoekstra had experienced ten years earlier–ball games in the back lane, people leaving their doors open, gangs of kids going up and down the street at Halloween. She even remembers some of the same kids: older now, the boys next door she remembers as Mumford and Leonard.

Major changes would come to the Belluk house and the neighbourhood in the late Seventies as Janice grew older and eventually moved away. But for her, Cathy, "Mumfy" and dozens of other baby boomers, Furby was the street where they grew up. They grew up in family homes that were homes to them and their childhood buddies, but also homes to "aunts" and many different kinds of roomers.

The boys next door at 261 Furby:
"Mumfy" and Roland left documentary evidence when their father was putting in new concrete in the back yard in 1963.

Moving to the Suburbs

From the Fifties to the Seventies, Winnipeg's growth shifted to the suburbs. (See population table below.) In 1953-54, the stadium and arena left downtown for Polo Park. In 1959, Polo Park Shopping Mall was built. In *Going Downtown,* his popular history of Portage Avenue,[3] Russ Gourluck identifies the development of Polo Park as the beginning of the end for Eaton's, The Bay and downtown. "By the time the 1970s ended, it was obvious that the glory days of downtown Portage Avenue were over....Many of the clothing stores, specialty shops and restaurants that formerly attracted throngs of shoppers downtown were replaced by vacant storefronts."

What made the downtown's deterioration inevitable was the automobile. Janice's father had a car in 1959. Mabel and Eunice (p. 16) bought their first car in 1954. In the prosperous Fifties, everyone seemed to be doing the same. The car meant street widening and realignments, including Furby. In 1955, Broadway Avenue was extended through to Portage so suburban traffic had a second route to zip downtown. In 1969, the Maryland Bridge became a twin-span bridge, totally changing Maryland and Sherbrook from quiet tree-lined streets into one-way thoroughfares for suburban traffic.

That was the year that Mabel and Eunice moved out of the Cambridge Apartments into Osborne Village.

For them, Furby was changing too much. They noticed more Aboriginal people, more poverty, more loud talking and parties outside their window at night. The neighbourhood didn't feel as safe anymore. It was no longer the genteel neighbourhood Mabel had walked through in 1943 as she looked for a suitable rooming home.

Population of Winnipeg & suburbs [4]

	Winnipeg	Suburbs
1901	42,340	5,629
1931	218,785	69,289
1951	235,710	115,552
1971	246,270	289,130

DISCUSSION — ROOMING "HOMES"

Oral History
Whose History is it anyway?

About half of our information on the rooming "homes" period came from oral history—interviews with people who were willing to share their stories of life on the block—and about half came from other historical sources.

There are strengths and weaknesses to oral history. Probably the greatest weakness is that everyone's story is being told from their point of view, and that point of view is not all-inclusive. For instance, most people interviewed in this period were representative of the families that owned or ran rooming homes. They spoke of roomers who were "like family", but they didn't tell stories of roomers coming down and joining them for dinner or sharing other intimate moments. The one story from roomers, Mabel and Eunice, mentions almost nothing about their relationship with the owners, except that they were glad to move out when an apartment became available, partly because the new owners had noisy parties.

What became apparent when we did manage to get stories from both sides (for instance, a few cases in the next five chapters when we hear from both owners and tenants of the same house) is that each side sees the same events differently and each has different perspectives on what was happening. Since oral history gives us one person's perspective, how are we, as researchers, going to use this information? Do we accept their perspectives at face value? What is nostalgia and what is history?

This brings us to the great strength of oral history: the way that people being interviewed remember all kinds of details. They may not tie their details into any particular interpretation of what was happening, but they're almost always good about the actual details of what was happening. This can give us a vivid picture of the times and allow us to draw our own interpretations. For instance, Mabel and Eunice describe friends coming from the country and sleeping on the floor of their suite. This gives a clear idea of the modest standard of living in this period. Their distinction between rooming "homes" and rooming "houses" (on p. 16) was a crucial detail which allowed us to understand much of the history of the block. It was also a good example of how we can construct our interpretation of events from our perspective, but different people from different times will understand the same events in their way, not our way.

Clearly any person's story can be interpreted and judged in different ways. Any history, whether it's based on oral interviews or standard historical materials, will choose to emphasize one set of facts and ignore others. In oral history, people have told us their stories because they trust us. They expect that we will reproduce their stories in a way that shows how they have interpreted events. As this book progresses into the Eighties and Nineties, it draws heavily on oral stories from many people who showed great trust and courage when they shared stories which include poverty, hardship, suffering, coping, drinking and illegal activities.

What we have attempted to do in this history is to simply allow people to share their stories, without judging on our part. Where we could, we researched to verify or add details, but we felt it was important to respect all and to allow them to tell their story in their way.

Oral History

There are several steps necessary in planning and carrying out this kind of oral history research.

FINDING PEOPLE.

The first challenge in oral history is actually finding people willing to share their stories. Using this period (Rooming "Homes") as an example, it is mainly based on five interviews — from Doug McKenzie (1946) to Janice Belluk (the Seventies).

Three of these five interviewees were found as the two community researchers explored their web of personal connections. We knew someone who knew someone. Having that intermediate person actually make the initial contact was critical: the prospective interviewee was being told about the project by someone they trusted.

One of the interviews came as a result of methodical work and a cold phone call. In this case, the person who lived on the block in the Fifties had a distinctive name. There were only a few in today's phone book. A few calls later and we had contacted the right person.

One interview came because we were able to arrange a story in the *Winnipeg Free Press* about halfway through our research. Local newspapers would likely give similar coverage to a local group who could tell them some of their preliminary findings.

There were several other routes which may provide useful leads, local churches, neighbourhood groups and long-established business people.

BUILDING TRUST

Just as important as finding the people, is how you approach them. Our greatest success was when someone had a personal connection, even if it was two or three degrees of separation. Personal trust is critical. We prepared a small brochure on the project so we had something to show a person when we approached them. We found it was best in the first contact to simply explain the project and ask them if they'd be willing to explore it further. If "yes," then we'd get together and decide what their participation might be.

The second contact might be an exchange of ideas about what details and questions the person is willing to share. Sometimes, the second contact might become the interview itself, or the first of two or three interviews.

At this stage people being interviewed should feel some control over the process. It is their stories and their lives they are talking about. We accomplished this sense of control by preparing a brief form called "Interview Permission Form." In this form, they agreed to be interviewed and specified whether they would be recorded, video-recorded, or be anonymous. The project and the eventual storage and use of videotapes, audiotapes, etc. should be explained so people can give their informed consent. If they're going to share their stories, they have the right to know what audiences their stories might eventually reach.

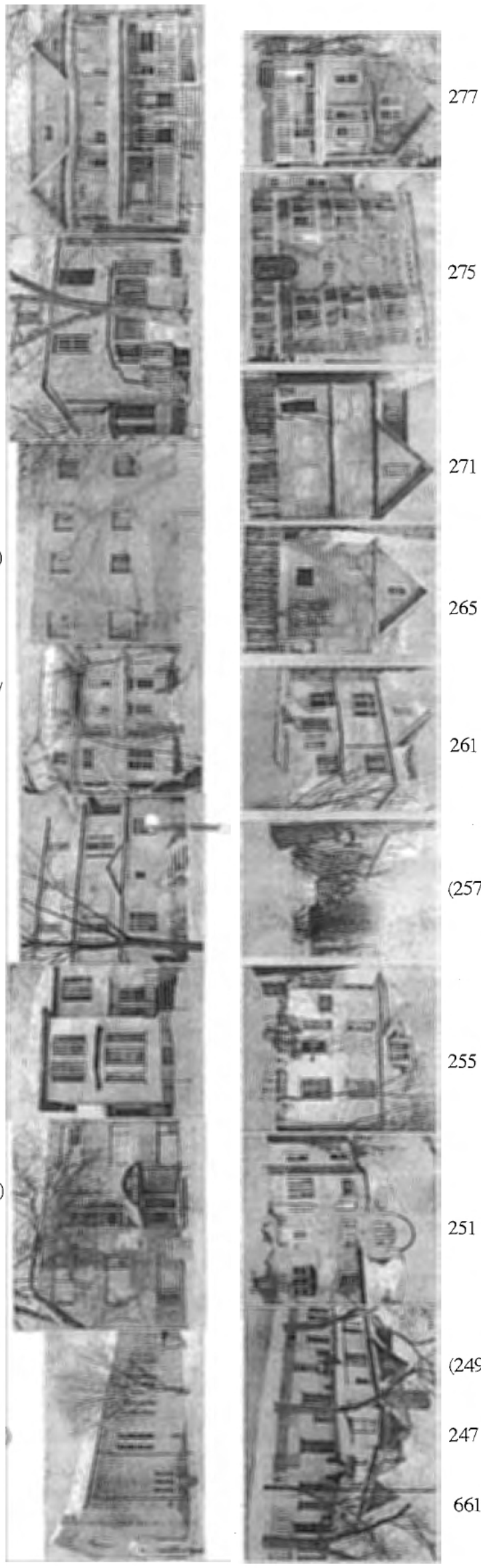
CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

The questions should be agreed to beforehand so the people being interviewed are confident. As they talk, you may end up deviating from agreed questions to follow up their line of thought, but they see that this is in response to what they've already said. The interviewer should not say much. Feed the interviewees the questions, make them feel confident and let them tell their story.

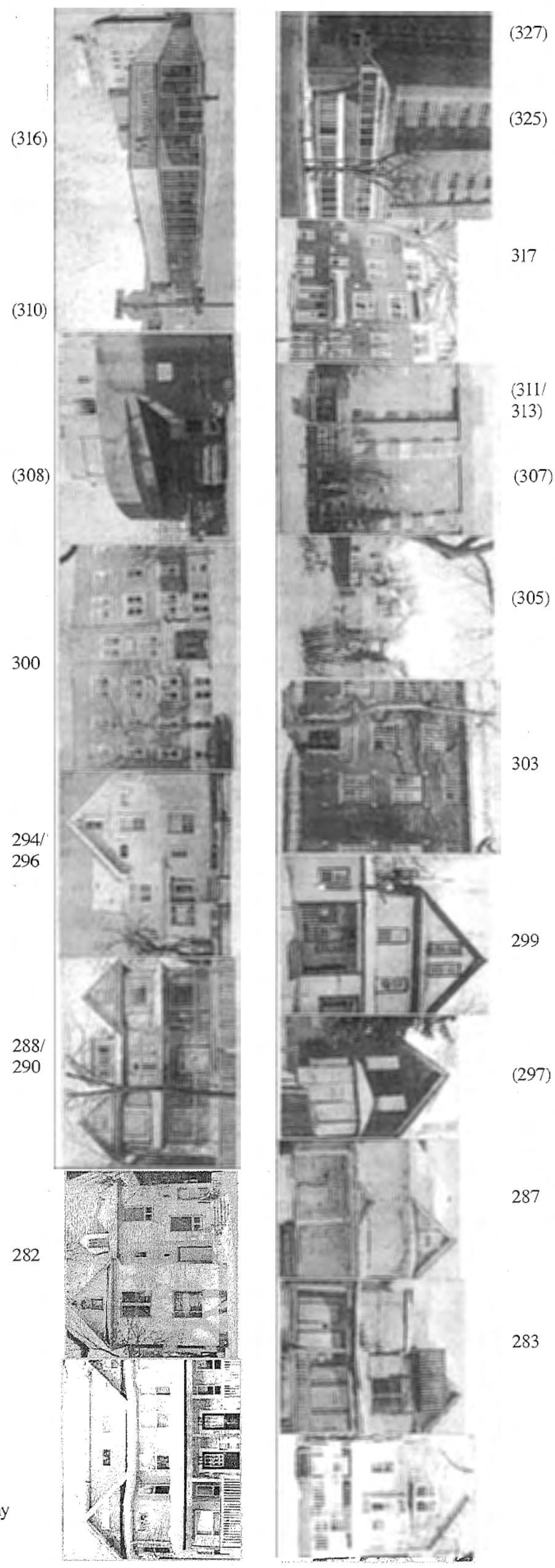
Whenever possible we videotaped our interviews — a technological learning curve for all of us. (Note: it's vital to clean the tape heads between interviews, or you can lose conversations.)

Having the interviews on videotape means different researchers than those conducting the interviews can watch them. Much detail is captured in nuances of expression. And the interviews are, quite simply, mesmerizing. Having people share their stories is really a precious gift.

NORTH END (PORTAGE)



SOUTH END (BROADWAY)



STREETSCAPE OF THE BLOCK, DECEMBER, 2004

(Houses in Brackets demolished)

9. "It became home in the cold, cold winter."

"It was just one room with a bit of a partition and a stove, a tiny little gas stove, and refrigerator in the hall which I shared with a woman down the hall," recalled Don Dixon about the room where he lived at 276 Furby from 1969 to 1971.[1]

It was the Sixties. Don was 19, travelling across the country from his childhood home in Toronto "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. "Don was searching and travelling that summer of '69. He arrived in Winnipeg and shared a room with a friend on a block just north of Portage. He remembers this northern neighbourhood as a lot rougher than south of Portage Avenue. After a month he hitch-hiked west. As September drew on, he decided to spend the winter in Winnipeg. He chose Winnipeg mainly because he'd met a girl there, 15-year-old Jamie Nelson. He got casual jobs, but he spent a lot of time in his small room. "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 with everybody back then—it was a great period of introspection."

The house was quiet; tenants kept to themselves. The woman he shared the refrigerator with often gave him home-made pasta which she used to dry on cords strung across her room. He remembers a hippie on the ground floor and one woman who would have long animated conversations with herself and become embarrassed when anyone noticed. Don described his room as modest. As well as the stove, the room had a small table and a hide-a-bed. Don got a mattress and a small school desk. He had a radio, no television or record player. For personal touches he added posters, a few plants and a tie-dyed sheet over the partition.

"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, Don had the time that he needed to think. Part of his thinking during that long cold winter convinced him he didn't want to make a life working at the kind of jobs he'd experienced over the last year. He needed to finish high school and university. He applied for financial assistance. During the summer of 1970, he learned his application was successful: $112 a month to complete high school and go on to university. After he paid his $32 rent, he would have just enough to live on.

The centre of his life was his deepening relationship with Jamie. Occasionally they went to a coffee house in one of the churches or, in summer, to Memorial Park, which was filled with young people, many on their own journeys of self-discovery. They also took in free rock concerts in Assinboine Park. They went to movies regularly and talked afterward about their meaning. They went on long walks, everywhere, lost in conversation. When Don talked with Jamie about doing his interview for the *Living on Furby* project, she made him promise that he would share that their first son was conceived in his room on Furby Street. They learned that Jamie was pregnant in the winter of 1971, while both of them were finishing high school. They decided to get married. He was 21 and she was 17. Don had little doubt about what he should do. He had left Toronto because he wanted to be in control of his life. "The decision to get married was part of the whole attitude that I had about doing something different. I would have found it completely irresponsible to sort of walk away from that situation."

276/278 Furby:
Don Dixon lived here in a small room from 1969 to 1970 — a period that saw major changes in his life. He credits the modest room with giving him time and space to shape the direction of his life. Don Dixon found his meaning in long conversations with his girlfriend, Jamie, and in their deepening relationship. Taking responsibility for that relationship was a key value in his life.

The families were skeptical about what they were 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 child. 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?"

In February, Don moved out of his Furby room and in with Jamie and her parents. In the fall, he began university classes which would eventually lead to a life-long career in the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. He and Jamie are still married. Their "poor little kid" is now a surgeon in Calgary.

Reflecting back, Don feels he was able to make something of his life because of the support he received from society. "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.... I've paid society back many times.... Those experiences that I had at that time really defined in many ways what kind of society we should have and the social programs we should support. I'm quite adamant in support of those."

Postwar Growth of Prosperity and Poverty

The Fifties and Sixties in Winnipeg and throughout North America were defined by society's "lust for security" [2] following the frugal years of the Depression and the Second World War.

The lust for security was supported by the long post-war economic boom. Everyone's prosperity seemed to rise — buying cars, buying appliances, buying a home and yard in the suburbs. In the booming prosperity, taxpayers could afford to support a new liberal consensus to build social programs guaranteeing the Depression could never come again: Old Age Security (1951), Canada Pension Plan (1965), Medicare (1966), Canada Assistance Plan (1966), doubling of family allowance for low-income famiies (1970).

But this consensus never really built a welfare state that would care for all of its citizens and transfer meaningful national income to the disadvantaged. "Rather, it provided a safety net against the worst of economic misfortunes and, in the process, obscured the fact that the gap between rich and poor was not closing," according to social historians Michael Cross and Gregory Kealey.[3]

Numerous reports in the Sixties showed that, amidst prosperity, poverty was growing in Canada.[4] In 1965 the Pearson government announced a "War on Poverty." A few months later, an increase in cabinet salaries led Opposition leader John Diefenbaker to grump as he glared at the government benchs, "They've won *their* war on poverty."

Even though Furby had always had its share of low income people, levels of poverty were far greater in other parts of the city. The North End had always been considered the poorest area of the city. By the 1930s, many central neighbourhoods were also showing serious signs of deterioration. The 1947 City of Winnipeg report (see p. 15) described horrible conditions in the growing inner city. The areas on both sides of the CPR tracks were the worst, especially from the tracks south to Logan Avenue, and the poverty was spreading southwards, past Logan to Notre Dame Avenue, past Notre Dame towards Ellice. [5]

For just as there were growing numbers of the prosperous in the city, there were growing numbers of the poor, and they too needed homes. Mary Guilbault, a social worker with the Urban Indian Association in the Fifties and Sixties described visiting homes with "great big house rats.... The old grandma would sit there with her blanket over her shoulders and a broom in her hand and shoo the rats away." [6]

Winnipeg was a city in which many citizens were buying suburban lots and summer cottages and many others were shooing away rats. Real poverty, although not as well documented as prosperity, was growing, and soon it would reach Furby.

10. Rooming Homes become Rooming Houses

Mary Herchie was the landlady and owner of the rooming house at 276/278 Furby from 1946 to 1985—40 years which saw the decline of her house from a rooming home of the old family type to the worst kind of rooming house. Mary's daughter, Jean Knight, was nine when the family moved into the house and remembers the decline. [1]

In the post-war housing crunch, the house was always full. Jean remembers that whenever they advertised a vacancy, the phone would ring incessantly. The demand was so great that for a couple of years the Herchies rented their living room to a young war widow, Mrs. Dancho, and her son. During those early years, 276/278 Furby was very much a rooming home. As well as opening their living room to a young family, Jean remembers many tenants who became friends. Charlotte Campbell was in her late teens and worked in Eaton's catalogue department. She and Jean were like older and younger sisters. They both developed a crush on one tenant, Bill Wilson, and became jealous when he became involved with a "cute girlfriend" who was another tenant. Mrs. Kopsi was a single mom with eight-year-old Cyril. She suffered from mental illness and had to be hospitalized. Mary did not hesitate to take Cyril into her own family. He shared a bed with Jean's younger brother, Russell, and the family dog for six months until his mother returned. Some stories were not so happy. On the top floor was a couple with a son. The father was a manager at Eaton's but was also a violent alcoholic who beat his wife when he drank. He sometimes came home so drunk that Jean remembers him crawling up the stairs and vomiting.

Perhaps Mary responded so generously to the young war widow and to Cyril because she remembered her own hard childhood. She was ten when her mother and siblings died in Winnipeg's 1918 influenza epidemic. Her father was a construction worker on the railroad and was away for two years. When Mary was fourteen, he was seriously injured and she had to work to supplement his inadequate pension. She married during the Depression. Jean remembered that "Mother saved desperately" throughout her life. By 1942, she had saved enough from her household allowance to put a deposit on the family's first house in the North End. They lived there until Mary purchased 276/278 Furby.

A home for many: Mary Herchie had a hands-on approach to running this rooming house, which made it a home for many over 40 years, including Don Dixon. He remembers his room as "home in the cold, cold winter."

1953 was a year of big changes. Jean turned 16 and moved to Montreal. Mary divorced and stayed at Furby, renting out rooms. To make extra income, she invested in a Dairy Queen on Pembina Highway. Later she discovered her partner had a gambling problem. One day, two men "dressed like gangsters" threatened to burn down the Dairy Queen if he didn't pay his debt. Mary let out a shriek and chased the two with a broom. Later, she bought out the partner. Jean returned to Winnipeg in 1955 to comfort her mom when her brother Russell died in a shooting accident. On her first night home, Jean slept in Russell's bed. She wakened to see him standing at the side of the room. She turned away in fear, and he vanished. After the funeral, Jean stayed with her mom. She worked for awhile at the Dairy Queen and then found work as a commercial artist. In 1960, Jean married and moved to Puerto Rico, later Toronto. All through the Sixties and Seventies, Mary continued keeping the rooming house, working at the Dairy Queen and visiting Puerto Rico. One tenant in this period was Don Dixon (p. 26). In 1971, when Don was packing to leave, he remembers Mary visiting his room. He had just taken down the tie-died sheet that decorated his wall, when she said, "You know I'm relieved because I thought you had hung that big sheet up there because you'd somehow broken that partition."

Mary's health began to decline in the late Seventies — and the house began to

decline as well. She sold the Dairy Queen after she had a series of small strokes. As she became more disabled, she had to move and the Manitoba Public Trustee intervened to take control. They turned over management of 276/278 Furby to a property management company. In 1982, Mary suffered a stroke from which she never fully recovered. When Jean came to visit her mother's old suite, she was shocked at the decline of the house. A door had been kicked in; her mother's suite had been burgled; the refrigerator contained rotten food; and the living room was occupied by tenants who left quickly when Jean appeared. Several tenants appeared to have drinking problems. The house was filthy and run down. As well as letting the house fall into disrepair, the property managers were renting to people whom Mary would probably have chased away with her broom. When Jean visited her mother three months later, the same food was still rotting in the fridge. By 1985, the house had been sold, and Mary had moved away.

Once Mary had relinquished her hands-on control of her rooming "home", it had started to deteriorate. Through the Eighties and Nineties, people observed the same kind of deterioration up and down the block.

Down the street at 265 Furby, Janice Belluk (see p. 20) had turned 15 in 1975. [2] That was around the time that her parents, Stan and Mildred, decided to stop taking in roomers. By the Eighties, Janice noticed homes on the block were no longer being taken care of. Many of the children she'd grown up with had moved away. In 1985, Janice herself moved away but her parents stayed until their deaths in 1995. In those final ten years, Janice really noticed the neighbourhood going downhill. "They had a lot of—I don't want to say 'undesirables' in the area—but you'd have drunks come to the door at times."

Taras Monastyrski (see p. 18) had moved out of the family home at 305 Furby in 1965 but his parents were still there. [3] Mychalina was still bringing in roomers, but "that style of living was dying off in the Eighties and Nineties," Taras observed. They only had two roomers. Omelian passed away in 1988. Mychalina stayed on and did well keeping the place. Her security was a concern for Taras. One night someone broke into the house while she was there. A roomer phoned police and the burglar jumped out of the second-floor window. Mychalina admitted then to Taras, "I guess I gotta move out." But she would not leave immediately because of her cat. Then in 1994 she phoned Taras, "I'm ready to go... the cat died." Mychalina herself passed away in 1996 and, in 1998, 50 years after the Monasytyrski family had moved in, the family sold the house for $10,000. It was demolished.

The Dying of a Way of Life

As Mary Herchie and the Monastyrskis and the Belluks passed away or moved on, a way of life was dying with them. The children of those families were gaining new levels of prosperity and moving away. The big houses of Furby Street were passing into the hands of absentee owners who saw the houses as income properties. This was very different from the families who had seen them as homes.

The way of life that was dying on Furby had been rich in what might be termed "social capital": the informal connections and mutual support that exist naturally in a community where families and neighbours and roomers know one another. People in Mary Herchie's time were rich in social capital: the way she brought eight-year-old Cyril into her home when his mother was sick, neighbours sitting out on their steps sharing their gardens, impoverished students like Don Dixon arguing philosophy late at night in a neighbour's room.

This loss of social capital was not simply a Furby phenomenon. In his classic American study, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam quantified the decline of social capital in the Eighties and Nineties — our increasing disconnect from neighbours and social structures, whether the PTA, church, civic groups, or, hence his title, bowling leagues. [4]

From 1980 to 2000, social capital was dying. It was happening not only on Furby, but it would have disastrous effects on that block.

POVERTY

11. "Murder's Half-acre"

In the Eighties and Nineties, as one big house after another came on the market, they were bought by absentee owners. With little investment, the houses could be operated for a variety of tenants, whose only common denominator was their need for low cost housing — minimum-wage working people, people on welfare or pensions, drunks, druggies, people with mental disabilities and many more. For whatever reason—the lean, mean economics of the Eighties, changes to welfare, the influx of Aboriginal people in poverty from reserves—there was no shortage of people needing such accommodation. In the Eighties, deinstitutionalization became a provincial policy, releasing many psychiatric patients and people with developmental disabilities from institutions to live fuller lives in the community. Unfortunately, often due to the general decline in social supports and community life as a whole, many of these former patients ended up eking out a miserable existence in the cheapest accomodation available, usually rooming houses.

Getting an accurate picture of this stage of the block's history is difficult because many who were tenants literally have never been able to speak for themselves because of mental and developmental disabilities, addictions or simply the shame and stigma of living at the bottom of society. A 2002 rooming house study of this area and two other areas of Winnipeg identified rooming houses as part of the way society had chosen to house and feed the poor—an "industry of poverty"—an interconnected network of food banks, soup lines and rooming houses.[1] During the rooming house study, one tenant gestured to the room around him: "When you look around, you know you're poor... you know you're close to rock bottom." [2] For anyone who spent any time in many of the rooming houses on the block in this period, they can picture the filth and disorder of rooms with cockroaches, broken-down furniture and broken-down lives. Similarly many owners have hesitated to speak and be recorded. The bad owners are simply not interested. One good owner explained, "In any other business, if you make a profit, you're a good businessman. In the rooming house business, if you make a profit, you're a slum landlord." [3]

In 1985, the first newspaper articles began appearing describing the "looming presence of poverty and attendant crime" in West Broadway. A May 1, 1985 article in the *Free Press* ("The poor and trendy meet on the street") [4] described the area as an eclectic mix —"Plastik's jazzy, post-punk décor... the homey, good earth atmosphere of Wheat Song Bakery... native families eating out of our garbage can." The article quoted Larry Leroux who reported that his pharmacy had three armed robberies and three break-ins in the last year. He felt the establishment of a soup kitchen at Broadway Community Club was bringing transient people into the neighbourhood. The arrival of crack cocaine in the city in the Eighties didn't help.

By 1996 the newspaper had given up on images like "trendy" and "eclectic mix". That year the *Free Press* coined the phrase "Murder's Half-acre" to describe the four streets, Spence, Young, Langside and Furby, that had the highest concentration of murders and violent crime in the city. [5] The four streets, from Sargent to Armstrong's Point had been picked as the first beats for community police officers under a new scheme of policing introduced by Police Chief David Cassels.

"Doug C" lived in two rooming houses on the block in this period and remembers the changing conditions.[6] In 1981 he moved into the rooming house at 266 Furby. (Doug McKenzie's old house, see p. 15). It was owned then by a Mennonite man who was taking good care of it. Doug recalled that if he complained about drinking or other behaviour, tenants were kicked out. But in 1986, the rooming house was sold, Doug recalls, to a numbered company. "After he sold out, 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." Doug moved in with the Yaremchuk family across the street at 271 Furby, where he roomed for the next 16 years, from 1986 to 2002. The Yaremchuks were the last of the old-style families on the block taking in roomers.[7] Joyce Yaremchuk was active in Young United Church, which provided services like Native Ministries and AGAPE Table, a soup kitchen to the growing number of low-income people. Eddie was a Winnipeg institution in boxing, a coach for many inner-city kids. By 2002, Eddie and Joyce had passed away and the last of the old-style rooming "homes" was boarded up and left vacant. Doug's old rooming house at 266 Furby continued to deteriorate.

266 Furby: *A rooming house that progressed from a good landlord to a numbered company to a "rathole."*

In 1998, Nelson Giesbrecht moved into the same house.[8] By then, 266 Furby was owned by an owner described by Nelson as a "slum landlord" and the house was a "rat hole." He lived there because that was what he could afford — $236 a month from his disability cheque. Nelson became caretaker, living in the house's best suite: a self-contained-bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. All of the other rooms shared a kitchen and bathroom. When he moved in, the house was infested with cockroaches. It took the landlord three months to get rid of them. Then there were mice. The landlord did nothing, so Nelson bought poison and laid it down in his suite. There was no security, the back door could just be pushed and it would pop open. "Lots of windows got broken when I was caretaker. I just boarded them up. The landlord only came to collect the rent. He never fixed a window in his life." Tenants caused a lot of the damages. Nelson himself 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." The most positive aspect of life in the rooming house for Nelson was his passion for woodworking. He made an arrangement with his landlord to fix up the basement into a workshop and paid an extra $20 a month for electricity. The most negative aspect was the crime in the neighbourhood. "There were crack houses everywhere," he remembered. "If you'd walk across the street, they'd mug you." A task force of health, fire and building inspectors closed the house in 2003. "A lot of guys came in with their badges and told us we had to leave the premises right now," Nelson remembered.

The Lean, Mean Economics of the Eighties and Nineties

The years of prosperity in Canada began to fade in the Seventies. The 1973 OPEC oil crisis; the new global marketplace; the twin-headed monster of "stagflation" (inflation and unemployment growing together); all discredited postwar economic thinking. The Neo-Conservative reaction came quickly (1975, Margaret Thatcher; 1980, Ronald Reagan; 1984, Brian Mulroney). As prosperity faded, poverty continued to grow. But now the safety net constructed during days of prosperity began to unravel.

As the end of the century approached, corporations and nations were being tied closer and closer together and becoming leaner and meaner. The "recession" word replaced the Depression. During the 1990-92 recession, U.S. Labour Secretary Robert Reich coined the phrase, "jobless recovery" to describe the new global workplace.[9] Outsourcing, restructuring, and downsizing were the new realities. Reducing the deficit and downloading costs (ie. eliminating social programs) became government mantras.

The lean, mean Nineties were leaner for the poor than for anyone else — death by a thousand little cuts: the GST driving costs up; shelter allowances cut by up to $49 in 1993; single person benefits cut from $457 to $415 a month in 1996; benefits for families with infants cut by $65 a month in 1997; and on and on. [10] One rooming house landlord remarked on how rooming house tenants used to have little extras like soap and knick-knacks in their rooms, but how all these vanished in the Nineties. [11]

12. Life and Death at 276/278 Furby

In the early morning hours of October 6, 2001, John Edward O'Brien, the caretaker at 276/278 Furby was brutally beaten to death. A former tenant of the rooming house was charged with the crime, but his trial in April 2003 resulted in a hung jury. [1] Possibly the jury could not come to a decision because the chief Crown witness was a tenant who acknowledged she'd covered up evidence of another murder years earlier. In that case, she and several others had beaten a man to death with a baseball bat and she had then wiped the fingerprints off the bat and placed it in the hands of a woman who had passed out drunk beside the victim's body.

The death of John O'Brien was equally brutal. He was a small man, 5 foot 7, 1.5 m and about 130 pounds 58 kg. Testimony revealed a long and violent assault in which he was punched and kicked until he died. He had 17 head injuries, many of them severe; eight broken ribs, a torn liver and at least 15 other significant wounds. He had been beaten in the front hall, where a pool of blood remained after the attack, and dragged to his room where more blows were inflicted. Some witnesses described hearing screams, but no one intervened.

One tenant who was called as a witness had passed out in his room earlier on the night in question. His girlfriend had also passed out, collapsed on the floor. Later, when he got up in the night in order to go to an all-night store he had walked right through the pool of blood in the main hallway. He answered questions about his drinking:

Q. So that the jury understands the quality of and the ability of you to make observations, we should deal with a little bit about your background. Would it be fair to say that at that time of your life you used to drink every day, all day?

A Yeah.

Q. Would it be fair to say that you would get drunk every single day of your life?

A. Yeah.

Q. At that time?

A. Yeah.

Q. Would it be fair to say that you would start drinking as soon as you woke up?

A. Yeah.

Q. And would drink until you passed out?

A. Yeah.

Q. And would it be fair to say that you drank alcohol or whatever else you could get your hands on in order to put yourself in the position of passing out?

A. Yeah.

276/278 Furby: *By 2002, a house of poverty, alcohol, crack, sniff, garbage, broken furniture, fights and murder.*

Many of the tenants in the rooming house acknowledged that the house was a well-known "party house." Many tenants were on welfare and when the welfare cheques came in, they drank in their rooms and invited others in — sometimes ten people squashed into one little room — until they passed out or fights broke out. Police described one suite: "I went into the suite, photographed it. It was just a mess. Things were broken inside and the floor was littered with broken items and garbage and furniture. "It was because there were a large number of "partyers "that the property manager had asked John O'Brien to take over from the former caretaker who had just "up and left."

The property manager testified:

Q. Would it be fair to say that you wanted somebody around when you were in that house for safety reasons?

A. For safety reasons of the good tenants that we wanted to keep in there and that we wanted to put in there and I wanted a good caretaker that would bring those kind of people into the house. And so that I was very comfortable going there.

Q. Would it be fair to say that in the—after you got John and just prior to getting John, you had evicted a number of people for drinking, breaking house rules, fighting, partying too loud and things like that?

A. No, actually the house was quite full until John took it over.

Q. Right.

A. At that point, we were going to evict five, I think maybe six tenants.

Q. Okay. And the reason for that was what?

A. To clean house.

Q. That's because these people were partying too loud?

A. They were partyers and drinking and somebody had gone down the stairs, I believe, and had—there was a hole in the wall kind of thing and it was just getting rough; it needed to be tamed down again.

One of the tenants was a man who worked in Winnipeg and had a home south of the city. He stayed in the rooming house on weeknights and returned to his regular home on weekends. His room was separated by one thin door from the main hall where the beating had taken place. He'd awakened in the night to hear a thump and a crash but had gone back to sleep. His observations:

Q. That's a pretty rough house; would that be fair?

A. I would say so.

Q. And do you want to tell the jury what you mean when you say it's a pretty rough house.

A. Well, it's like party there all the time.

Q. And what's wrong with the parties?

A. Well, if you've got to work, partying all the time is not very good.

Q. So would it be fair to say that mainly the people there didn't work?

A. I would say 95 percent.

Q. Didn't work?

A. That's correct.

Q. And would you say that most of the people there drank a lot?

A. That's a mild way of putting it.

Q. How would you put it?

A. Like swimming.

Q. Because most of the people there were drunk most of the time?

A. That's correct.

Q. And most of the people not only were drunk most of the time but most of the people were doing other stuff as well, maybe sniffing, maybe doing drugs. Whatever there was to do, they would be doing it?

A. More than likely.

Q. And one of the problems with being drunk all the time and doing sniffing and doing drugs and partying is that there would be lots of fights?

A. I never really heard a lot of fights. There was a lot of noise going on but you never heard any fights, like big fights.

Q. Were there some fights?

A. Well, you hear arguing and that but I never heard anybody flying around or, you know.

This brief glimpse into 276/278 Furby in October, 2001 shows a sharp deterioration from the quality of rooming house life that Donald Dixon remembered when he lived in the same house in 1971. Over the intervening 30 years much had changed on the block. The poverty Donald experienced was very different from the poverty of these later tenants.

13. Different Perspectives on a Strip of Houses – Landlord, Tenant, Community, Researcher

There are different perspectives to every story — especially a story as emotion-laden as what is really happening on a block as it slides into poverty. What follows are several perspectives all relating to the same strip of houses on Furby in its period of deterioration. The truth may be somewhere in the middle of all these perspectives, or it may be in perspectives we have not yet recorded.

A LANDLORD'S PERSPECTIVE

José Correia immigrated to Canada from Portugal when he was 16.[1] He and his mother joined his father who had been working in Canada for several years. In 1969, they purchased 297 Furby. They lived on the ground floor and took in roomers upstairs. Many roomers were long-term; he remembers one man living upstairs in the house for over 20 years.

José lived on Furby over the next nine years. There were many Ukrainian families. Another Portuguese family, the Barros family, moved in two doors down at 283 Furby. Everyone had gardens, but different kinds of vegetables if they were Ukrainian or Portuguese — his family grew a lot of kale.

Life in Canada was prosperous and José fulfilled the immigrant's dream. He left school and worked for a cleaning company, quickly rising through the ranks and acquiring a controlling interest in the business. He married and lived for a time in the family home. But by 1978, with a growing family and a growing business, he bought a home in a Winnipeg suburb. His mother and father temporarily moved with him, but soon decided to return to Portugal since their son was well-established.

Over the next 20 years, José built up his cleaning business into the largest industrial cleaning business in western Canada. He also became one of the main landlords on Furby, keeping ownership of the family house and purchasing the two houses to the south — 287 Furby from the Michaylow family, and 283 from the Barros family. He often rented to recent arrivals from Portugal or workers in his cleaning company. He converted the three houses into self-contained suites and resented the fact that the City classified them as rooming houses. The City's definition of a rooming house is a single-family house which has been converted to more than one housing unit. Thus, paradoxically, these homes, which for many years had been single family homes filled with roomers, when converted to self contained-suites, became classified for the first time as rooming houses.

José remembers that things in the houses went well for about ten years, but began to go downhill in the Nineties. Cars were broken into, tenants didn't want to stay, the turnover started getting higher. It became harder to make an income on the houses — more turnover, taxes, money spent on pest control, new safety rules that demanded more improvements, having to pay rooming house licence fees. "It became an area that basically was welfare people," he recalled. He believed a turning point for the neighbourhood came when the welfare office moved onto Broadway. The block was changing from the gardens and families José remembered when he had lived there up to 1978. "There was a huge change in a matter of 20 years."

The Correia houses in 2003:
Photos taken by Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation shortly after purchasing houses from the Correia family.

297 Furby *287 Furby* *283 Furby*

The breaking point came in 2002. Police contacted him about tenants whose activities they were investigating. At that time, a community group conducted a survey of the block which identified two of the houses as part of a group of seven houses that were rundown and filled with illicit activities.[2]

"We gotta get out of this," remembered José, "We can't fix it." He sold the three houses to Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, which was part of the community group seeking to revitalize the houses.

A TENANT'S PERSPECTIVE

Anna "Nanny" Morrissette lived in the West Broadway neighbourhood for 25 years, and lived on Furby through the Nineties. [3] Her story represents many Aboriginal women—grandmothers and mothers—holding families together.

She was born in Stonewall in 1925, daughter of Teresa Chief and Norman Morrissette. Norman Morrisette was a "Frenchman" whose family lived outside Stonewall in a low-lying area known as "The Bog." When Teresa died in 1930, Norman turned to her family to raise the children—Anna went with her aunt; her brothers with Granny Suzette. Granny Suzette was one of the strongest women in Nanny's life. She had been born before the Red River Resistance. A family picture shows a line of tipis with women, including Suzette, sitting in front. When Anna was 18 and leaving Stonewall, she gave her new-born daughter, Grace, to Suzette to raise —the third generation Granny raised.

Life was hard as Anna grew up. She remembers working on farms, hoeing and harvesting sugar beets and potatoes. Around 1943, "Nothing much was happening" around Stonewall and she left to work in Winnipeg. After several months, she was homesick and returned home. Then she got a job with the CNR as a waitress in BC. Again she got homesick and returned. She tried another job in Alberta, but was homesick again. By this time Norman had married his second wife, Josephine, and lived in Winnipeg on Bushnell Street. He worked in the stockyards, Josephine in the garment industry. There were many visitors to the Morrissette house on Bushnell. Uncle Andy and Mary lived across the street; upstairs were the Parisiens, also from Stonewall. Anna lived with them on Bushnell and got work as a cleaning lady. Then, in 1955, she and Bert Starr got together. They lived in several homes in central areas of the city, all now demolished in the urban renewal projects of the Fifties and Sixties.

They had four boys: Brent, David, Kelly and Ringo. Anna remembers how Ringo was given his name in 1964. It was a difficult birth so she was under anaesthetic. When she awoke, the nurses told her, "Ringo's doing fine, Mrs. Starr."

"Who's Ringo?" asked Anna, who had planned to name the baby Bert. But the nurses had named him after the popular Beatle of the time and the name stuck.

In the Seventies they moved to the home Anna remembers most fondly, 402 Boyd Avenue, in the North End. A six-room, two-storey house, it was a centre for Anna's family. Brent was married there. Anna and Bert parted in 1975, but the three boys stayed with her. They've lived together ever since. When Anna was asked why her sons, now grown up, have always lived with her, the 80-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." In the late Seventies, Anna moved to West Broadway. The move simplified Kelly's bus ride to his job at a lumberyard. They moved first to 308 Langside and then another apartment, where, for a time, Anna was caretaker.

In the early Nineties, Anna, Kelly, David, and Ringo moved into 299 Furby. They had no idea the block had a bad reputation, but after settling in, "That's when I heard

One of many gatherings on a front porch on Furby.

it was rough territory," said Anna. Their ground floor suite was cramped for four — two bedrooms, bathroom, small living room and kitchen all opening into a central room. Anna and Kelly each had their own bedroom; David and Ringo slept on couches in the living room and the central room. Their home provided a gathering place for many friends and relatives. Anna visited grandkids, especially Stephen on nearby Balmoral. It was the children who first started calling her Nanny.

Cheryl and Mort were neighbours down the street. "Nanny's was just a great place to visit," explained Cheryl.[4] Especially on weekends quite a number of people would visit, having a few beer, talking, laughing, listening to music, listening to Nanny's stories of the old days. In warm weather, the group would spill onto the front porch.

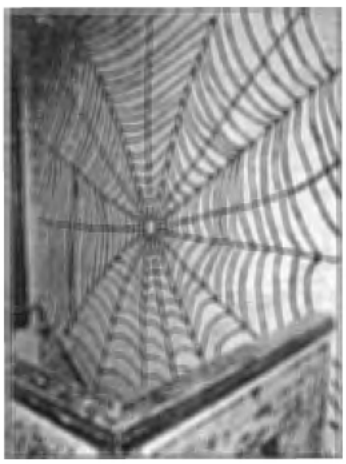
Andy Miller and his two daughters lived two doors down at 283 Furby and were "just like family." Andy suggested they move to 283 where the top two floors were vacant. Andy worked as a cleaner and the building was owned by his employer, José Correia. Nanny moved into the larger apartment and continued to enjoy many get-togethers with relatives and friends. It was around this time, in 2003, that the houses in this strip were identified by neighbours as rundown, noisy and in need of improvement (see below). The landlord, José Correia, sold his houses to Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation as part of a neighbourhood revitalization program. Tenants were given three months to move. One Saturday after receiving their notice, Anna and others on the block were sitting outside on Nanny's front porch. Andy went inside to get a beer and never came back. Someone went in and found him having a heart attack. He died shortly after. A few weeks after Andy's death, Nanny and her sons moved into an apartment run by Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

By 2002, Furby's deterioration was complete: it was now a block known for poverty, crime, derelict houses. In January of that year, a community group wrote a letter describing "unsavory and illicit activities" in a group of houses identified by West Broadway residents who had surveyed the block:

> "The houses in question on Furby Street are as followed: 275, 276, 277, 278, 287, 297 and 299. I have investigated these allegations... 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." [5]

Interior decoration at 287 Furby: Tenants at 287 Furby had repainted their suite with wall-size spider webs and psychedelic patterns.



- 275/277 was the Castlemaine Apartments and its attached house.
- 276/278 Furby was Mary Herchie's old rooming house and the scene of John O'Brien's murder in 2001 (see p.32).
- 287 and 297 Furby were two of the houses owned by the Correia family. (Notably, the home where Andy Miller and his daughters and Nanny Morrissette and her sons lived is not on the community resident's list).
- 299 Furby was the house where Nanny and her family had lived in the Nineties. In November, 2002 it was occupied by a single Aboriginal mother trying to make the house into a home for herself and her babies, but having difficulties with a former partner who was a drug dealer.[6]

A Researcher's Changing Perspective

by Mike Maunder

As a resident of West Broadway, I was part of the community group that wrote the letter describing conditions on Furby in 2002. I surveyed part of the block that included the strip of houses from 277 Furby to 299 Furby. I saw them as rundown, with huge sagging porches that ran together, filled at all hours with groups of men drinking beer. It led me to declare authoritatively that the houses were "gang houses."

However, as a result of this history project, I have been able to get to know some of the people who were living in those houses at the time, and my opinion has changed. Mainly, as a researcher, I was able to interview Nanny Morrissette, whose story as a tenant appears here, and also Mary Niemi and several of her family members who lived at 299 Furby from 2003 to 2005. These interviews changed my perspective on what was happening in the houses.

One of the factors that made the houses seem so threatening when I walked the block in 2002 was that many men hanging around the front porches were Aboriginal, and I was not. I concluded that groups of Aboriginal men hanging around must mean a gang house. This was a racist assumption and totally incorrect. Undoubtedly there was gang activity. The spider web mural at 287 Furby was a clear sign of drugs. But there were also gatherings of family and friends spilling out onto front porches.

When, in 2005, Nanny Morrissette began sharing her story with me, I began to see things more completely. Nanny and many of those living on the block would not apply words like "poverty" and "deterioration" to their lives. She was simply a woman and mother who had always done her best to be connected with her growing family in whatever accommodation would fit them. The neighbourhoods she lived in—from Bushnell to Furby—have been characterized as slums. The main quality that made all of these places into good homes for Nanny was not the physical condition of the houses, but the presence of family and friends, often in robust and vibrant gatherings.

I got the same impression when I interviewed Mary Niemi. [7] Because Mary was actually living in 299 Furby at the time of the interview, I got to experience what life was like for an Aboriginal family. It was very different from my own family experience—mainly because the house was constantly alive with an endless parade of friends and family. In two hours of interviewing, we were interrupted 12 times by children, grandchildren, cousins, near-relatives, far-relatives and neighbours—a vital, boisterous demonstration of a huge extended family. In the months after our interview, the "nuclear" part of this family changed again and again: Mary's grandson, Darren, moved in. Mary's cousin's son, Glen, and his partner, Michelle, moved in upstairs. And finally Mary, her daughter, Roxanne, and some of the grandsons moved out to return to Thunder Bay, while Mary's son, Jacques, her grandson, Darren, and her niece, Candida, stayed in the house. Amazed at the large number of people who called the Niemi house "home", I asked her: "I have about seven relatives that I am connected with. How many have you?" Mary's response spoke volumes—she just laughed—and then started an endless list that she never finished.

This is one of the key changes in perspective which I experienced as part of this history project — understanding the vibrancy of family life that was going on inside these homes, not just their physically sagging exteriors. (Like all families, these families also shared conflict and dysfunction, and the lines can become very blurred when family members and friends also share gang and drug connections. But the stories these families shared showed me their strength and resilience.)

One time when I was visiting the Niemi house, Darren explained to me the detailed history of all the family names carved into the main pillar of the porch. Understanding their stories gave me a new perspective on what I had seen up until then simply as poverty and deterioration.

The perspective is different when you're standing on the porch looking out.

DISCUSSION — POVERTY

"Poverty" vs "Deterioration"
The Power to Frame the Discourse

The choice of "Poverty" as the theme for these chapters is an example of the power possessed by we who frame the discourse. The chapters equally could have been named "Deterioration" but this would have defined the challenges facing the community in terms of run-down buildings, undesirable tenants and increasing crime. The real question in this period is how quickly poverty arrived on the block—not the temporary, though real, poverty of a student like Don Dixon in 1970, but the deep poverty of alcohol and crack; of vermin and cockroaches and of a brutal murder in the same house where Don once lived. By framing the discourse in terms of poverty, we were able to attempt a history of poverty itself: how it was growing at the same time that most of us only remember the growth of prosperity, how it was concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, and how that growth in poverty gradually reached Furby.

The power to frame the discourse is an enormous power. Those who are dominant in society claim that power to write the history and to make the assumptions that control us all. In a liberal society such as ours, there is a fundamental assumption that we are all equal, that we all have an equal chance to exercise this power. But obviously, all are not equal. As long as the poor do not control the public discourse and do not define the terms, their situation remains only partially visible. This is the ultimate loss of power.

Mike Maunder organized the chart on the following page in an attempt to make the situation of the poor more visible. It attempts to show the relationship of several low-income groups to power in our society. The difference between modest poverty and the deep poverty that was becoming evident on the block was not just financial, it was a difference of power.

This power is at two levels - the personal power of individuals over themselves and their situation, and the power of systems over individuals.

The power of the individual resides in the ability to cope, an individual's personal sense of identity and dignity and meaning. This power is greatly enhanced by the kind of social capital that used to be evident throughout our society: the support of family, church and community institutions; neighbours like Mary Herchie bringing eight-year-old Cyril into her home; friends like those who formed the Canada Permanent House Club way back in 1911, the strength of the Aboriginal extended family today.

The power of the system is mainly in our capitalist system with wealth for some and poverty for others; and in the systems we have constructed to deal with poverty—the safety net, the student grants that benefited Don Dixon, the various systems the poor often encounter: welfare, Child and Family Services and, for First Nation people, Indian Affairs, residential schools, etc.

The top level in the various groupings of poverty is the kind of modest poverty we've heard a lot about in Furby's first century—impoverished students, women on low incomes, the hardships of P.J. Rykers in the Depression. To the extent that these people have been raised with systemic and personal power, they can live modestly in poverty and often overcome it.

Deep poverty begins when people have not been raised with systemic power—similar groupings, but little power—the working poor, single mothers and children, Aboriginal people, the disabled. Their lack of systemic power, combined with low income, results in deep poverty.

People fall to the bottom rung when both systemic and personal power are lost—the poverty of alcohol and crack, of vermin and cockroaches. Particularly at this level, it's vital to remember that, in all groupings, at all levels of society, there are both good and bad people. No group has dominance over goodness, only over power.

Poverty and Power

by Mike Maunder

Those who have systemic power and personal power

DEEP POVERTY

Those who have little systemic power but still have their personal power

Those who have lost systemic power and personal power

THE MODEST POOR

People raised with power and privilege have their share of hardship and issues. For some, poverty may be temporary. But people raised with power and the knowledge of how it works are treated better by the system, partly because it has been created by people just like them. They know how to complain; how to write letters; how to organize to get what they want.

THE WORKING POOR

Many roomers over the years were working poor. Their personal power is strained by constant systemic financial concerns, "making do," second-hand clothes, not being able to afford the things they would like, living in a rooming house instead of their own apartment.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The rooming houses of Furby for many years were filled with women living on low incomes and having little power over their lives for systemic reasons. But they took responsibility for their children. From 1987 to 1993 the number of Canadians classified as poor rose from 3.5 million to 4.9 million, including 1.4 million children. Sixty percent of them lived in homes headed by single mothers.[1]

ABORIGINAL

Colonization and white privilege systemically denied power, identity and dignity to First Nation people. Residential schools and child protection services intervened to destroy First Nation families. Part of Winnipeg's growth in poverty from the Fifties on included many Aboriginal people leaving the reserves (see p47).

DISABLED

Many disabled live in abject poverty, unless supported by their families. Physical, mental or developmental disabilities weaken personal power. Their numbers increased greatly in the Eighties, when systemic deinstitutionalization moved many people from residential care facilities to live in the community without care or supervision.

THE BOTTOM RUNG - PERSONAL POWER AND ITS SUBSTITUTES

Many people in all groupings live lives of deep poverty with great nobility and integrity sustained by their personal power—the modest poor, the working poor, women and children, Aboriginal people, the disabled. But personal power is fragile and there are many substitutes—substance abuse, domestic violence, crime—all of which bring power of their own for those being denied power.

At this bottom rung, norms of behaviour change; addiction can be the main coping mechanism (life changes when you become addicted); chronic drinking and drug use becomes "partying"; joining a gang is simple survival. Beating the system is honourable and praiseworthy, because the system has done such a good job of beating you.

14. Revitalization: Blooming of Many Programs

In the depth of West Broadway's deterioration, from 1996 to 2004, there were many people and programs at work that began turning the neighbourhood around. No one person or government agency was responsible, but many partnerships and projects bloomed in this period.

One of the starting points was in June, 1996, when community worker Paul Chorney and local artist Wanda Koop, both residents, gathered a group to paint a large mural on the outside of the "Wilson" house, a grand old house at the corner of Balmoral and Broadway which had fallen into disrepair and had become an ugly symbol of the deteriorating neighbourhood.

Around the same time, community worker Linda Williams was organizing barbecues for apartment blocks, forming tenant groups, conducting a safety survey and beginning a database of good landlords. [1] She had worked for years in a City program helping tenants but when funding ran out, she continued working on her own in West Broadway. She was able to find funding to create several programs, including Odd Jobs For Kids, which provided income earning opportunities to local kids who otherwise might be drawn into gangs; Tenant Landlord Cooperation, in which tenants and landlords worked together to set standards for 20 approved apartment blocks; and street-strolling, in which groups of residents patrolled streets looking for early signs of trouble.

A huge force for change was community policing with community officers like Rick Morris—who helped organize a local pow wow—and towering Brad Richardson, whose patrols through the neighbourhood built relationships and increased safety.

Housing was always seen as one of the keys to revitalization. Under the leadership of Al Davies, Lions Seniors' Homes embarked on an ambitious project renovating 11 homes in a cluster on Langside. Most of them had been rooming houses — workers hauled ten refrigerators out of their first house. Westminister Housing Society, formed at Westminister United Church, also began a program of renovating houses.

In 1996, Paul Chorney drew together the various people working in the neighbourhood to create the West Broadway Alliance. In Alliance meetings, partnerships formed and more programs began taking effect. [2] At this time the three levels of government were joining together to create the Winnipeg Development Agreement to provide revitalization funding. In 1997 the Alliance created the West Broadway Development Corporation to be the community agency through which funds could flow. There were dozens of revitalization programs. A new funding agreement allowed the local community club to create drop-in programs that worked for inner city kids, rather than conventional leagues and sports that required scheduled times. The local BIZ, supported by Great West Life, bought a van for the community club, launched anti-graffitti programs, street festivals and other projects. Wanda Koop created Art City, a drop-in program where local kids worked with artists. The Good Food Club involved 100 local food bank users in organizing cafes, working on a farm in the country and, every Saturday, parking the "Veggie Van" at the local bingo game to sell fresh-picked vegetables. There were greening programs, adult retraining programs, creation of a new park, an Aboriginal Residents' Group, and much more. In this phase of revitalization capacity building for residents was as important as housing.

Operation Go Home launched the first housing project on Furby in 2000. Transition House was to be a home where at-risk girls could live together with staff and university mentors. Renovations began on the boarded-up rooming house at 288/290 Furby, supported by a partnership of Operation Go Home's own network and various Alliance partners, particularly Lions Housing. But Lions were overextended

***288/290 Furby** Transition House was the first renovation project on Furby in 2001. It closed a year later and went through several social housing incarnations.*

in doing the houses on Langside and Transition House. Construction halted in 2001 amid a provincial audit of Lions Housing. [3] The project was picked up by Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, Transition House opened in 2001 but closed a year later when Operation Go Home, because of a change in directors, failed to complete the annual funding application to operate the program. [4] By this time, after being absent from the social housing field since the lean, mean cuts of the early Nineties, the three levels of government were beginning to recommit money to housing. They streamlined housing grants by combining all of their various programs through the "single window" Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative (WHHI). Because of the large amounts of money involved, housing would soon become the major focus of revitalization. The Development Corporation formed a partnership with Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation to develop housing plans. One plan was for a Community Land Trust to renovate 17 houses on Langside, Young and Furby. This project succeeded in the renovation phase, but was unable to actually operate as a Land Trust. Nine of the houses were sold to the original pioneers of the concept at 2002 prices; the remainder were sold on the rapidly escalating West Broadway market (up to $99,000).

It was a project on Furby that initially held out some real promise to improve the lives of rooming house residents. West Broadway and Winnipeg Housing acquired four houses on Furby, including the Correia houses, and hoped to develop them as model rooming houses for marginalized single people. Of all the redevelopment plans, this was the only plan that specifically recognized the need for rooming house accommodation. West Broadway Community Ministry joined the partnership. They held focus groups with rooming house tenants asking for design input. They applied for WHHI funding, but in April, 2004, the application was rejected and the model rooming house proposal died. [5]

The proposal died because WHHI's Proposal Fund Allocation Committee had evolved a principle that, if transitional housing were going to service primarily Aboriginal people, then the agencies developing the proposal should themselves be at least 50% Aboriginal. The West Broadway/ Winnipeg Housing/ Community Ministry partnership could not meet this criteria.

There were several setbacks by 2004 that showed just how hard it was to maintain community partnerships -- the collapse of the Lions Housing, the closing of Transition House, the end of community policing, failure of the rooming house project, charges of embezzlement in a neighbourhood youth program, the housing partnership between the Development Corporation and Winnipeg Housing fell apart, and Paul Chorney, who had pioneered the creation of many partnerships, lost his job at the Development Corporation.

Paul was philosophical about the losses and the gains of the exciting eight-year period in which he played a major role: "Sometimes the garden is growing; sometimes the garden needs to rest," he explained. [6]

For those who were part of it, West Broadway's period of blossoming was one of the neighbourhood's highest points.

What is Revitalization?

Community revitalization takes many forms. For many years in Winnipeg, revitalization had been "urban renewal," large top-down projects in which whole neighbourhoods were bulldozed and rebuilt. The prevailing theory in the Nineties was to try to find community partners who would carry out revitalization work on a more local basis. The West Broadway story shows how rewarding—and how difficult this can be,

West Broadway also raised another question: If you consider the problem of a neighbourhood to be deterioration, then revitalization means fixing up housing. But if you consider the problem of a neighbourhood to be poverty, then you try to build capacity and improve the lives of the people. What is the balance between the property theme and the people theme?

REVITALIZATION

15. 2004 - The Turnaround Year
But what kind of turnaround?

Although 2004 was the year that the model rooming house proposal for four houses on Furby was rejected, it was also the year that several substantial projects came to fruition on the block. By the end of 2004, five houses had been totally renovated and, within the next two years, three others would be completed. Thus, in three years, half of the houses on the block were totally converted. The two biggest projects were completed in 2004: conversion of 275/277 Furby to University of Winnipeg housing by Kinkora Developments, and renovation of 276/278 Furby across the street, the house where John O'Brien had been murdered. Both of these houses had been on Brian Grant's list in January, 2002 as centres for "prostitution, addictions, drug & alcohol abuse, booze-can parties, gang activities and general aberrant behaviour by the residents."

In January 2004, Mandy Fraser moved into a totally renovated 275 Furby. They were still finishing the drywalling. She was 25 and had spent the last three years living in eight different residences, several of them party houses.[1] She wanted to get serious and didn't want to party at all. The Kinkora manager talked of developing a community of students and other low-income people in the two buildings and this appealed to Mandy. As she settled in, "community" meant activities like getting to know a group of tenants meeting Thursdays to watch *Survivor*, meeting the Asian students and the teacher who lived in one apartment with her daughter, attending pot-lucks in the manager's apartment, gardening out front where she got to know Ginny, the "guerilla gardener" who lives down the street.

"Community is the good, the bad and the ugly," explained Mandy. "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 there was a drug dealer on my street...in St. James. 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. It's called racism, first of all, and classism, 'cause they're poor and not dressed right. 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.... St. James is like a ghost town."

That activity, and diversity–the good, the bad and the ugly–is what she likes about Furby. Her one regret about her home is that she realizes that many diverse people were cleared out of it in order that she could move in. She knew students who lived there before Kinkora renovated it. They told her they were only given two months notice to move out. These students can't afford to live in the building now because the rent has gone up. The rent was a lot lower before. "There's unhappiness about people being basically kicked out of where they live, so nice students can move in."

275/277 Furby:
This apartment/ attached house was developed and is run by Kinkora Developments for the University of Winnipeg. The unique arrangement allowed Kinkora to access housing funds, while the university ensures a steady supply of tenants.

The organization that has done the most to renovate houses on this block of Furby is Westminster Housing Society. It began renovating houses in the neighbourhood in 1997 after having constructed an apartment co-op and a row of townhouses on Maryland near the church. Its vision was to contribute to the neighbourhood around Westminster Church by providing good quality affordable housing.[2] By 2004, Westminster Housing had renovated 10 houses in West Broadway. In that year, they completed their 11th project, renovation of 294/296 Furby as a triplex. Unlike

many of their previous renovations, the old Chisholm home had been in such good condition when it had been purchased that renovations were able to keep the original floor plan and original flavour of the house, which featured wooden inlaid floors and several high-quality built in mantles, bookcases and cupboards.

In 2004 they began converting 276/278 Furby from a rabbit warren of 16-18 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. It was in one of these suites that Don Dixon was interviewed for the *Living on Furby* project. He remarked on how much more spacious the new suite was, even though, back in the Sixties and Seventies, his much smaller suite had allowed him to build the foundation of his life.

As well as 276/278 Furby and 294/296 Furby, in the next three years, Westminster Housing renovated three of the homes that had been mentioned in the community group's 2002 letter, 283 Furby, 287 Furby and 299 Furby. It was a major transformation of the block's housing stock.

But if the housing stock is improved, does that mean, as Mandy Fraser questioned, that the original people who lived there—the good, the bad and the ugly—can no longer return? Or is revitalization simply gentrification? Members of Westminster Housing's board have determined that this question can best be answered by providing a mix of tenants—some on assistance, some on low income paying rent-geared-to-income and some paying market rent. On Spence Street, where they had started their renovation work, they provided significant support to a mix of tenants—some on assistance, low-income and mid-income workers—who created their own community from three Westminster houses on the street: sharing pot-lucks, a shared laundry, banding trees in the fall, gifts for the kids at Christmas, work projects together in the garden, etc.[3] In the 17 projects Westminster completed in West Broadway, they strived for a mix of rents. In the early years, former chair Charles Huband recalls they spent a lot of time interviewing prospective tenants and set rates so they could get the right mix of people. When Westminster got too large to manage their properties this way, they hired SAM Management, a not-for-profit manager of affordable housing. SAM and Westminster together have tried to find the right mix of tenants to keep their portfolio sustainable. Like all landlords, particularly in old houses, they have found heating costs an increasing problem. It's also clear they cannot sustain the houses on welfare rates.

One way Westminster has found to help face the social realities of many low-income tenants is by forming strategic partnerships with social agencies. "We're not social workers," explained former Westminster president Tom Ford, in what seems to be the universal refrain of landlords dealing day-in and day-out with the problems many low-income people face. "We know plumbing. But by working with people familiar with the problems our clients face we can be of even more help to them." [4] In several of its houses, Westminster has formed partnerships with social agencies like Winnipeg Regional Health and New Directions for Children, Youth and Adults. The agencies provide the tenants and help support them in their tenancy. Sometimes it has worked, sometimes not. But, at this point in the block's history, it does seem to be the most promising way to provide space for those tenants who used to live in Furby's rooming houses because of mental health issues or other issues that made them hard to house.

A mix of tenants: *Among tenants at the renovated 276/278 Furby in 2005 was Nelson Giesbrecht (far left), formerly in the "rat hole" at 266 Furby. He moved into a ground floor suite and was given access to the basement to build his best workshop yet. "This is home," he said.* [5] *"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."*

16. Rooming Houses Today (2005-2008)

If you strolled down Furby Street in 2008, you would find that six of the big, old houses on the block between Portage and Broadway were still rooming houses. That was the situation on Boxing Day in 2005, when we conducted the final interview for this study with a tenant named "Robert" at 282 Furby.

It was a quiet Boxing Day when we banged on the front door, but got no answer. The interviewer gave the door a push and, as Nelson Giesbrecht had explained earlier, it popped open. "One shot and I'm in." It was eerie walking through the silent halls of the rooming house knowing that only one thin bedroom door separated people in the hall from people sleeping in their rooms. The interviewer went up the stairs and knocked at Robert's door. No answer. So he knocked harder. Too hard — again the door popped open. Inside, Robert was fast asleep on a mattress on the floor. It was frightening to realize how vulnerable people are, just two shoves and an intruder could walk in on them as they slept.

282 Furby

Robert's bedroom door had been reinforced with pieces of plywood on both sides because, two months earlier, a neighbouring tenant, high on some substance, had tried to kick it in to get at Robert. Inside the room, Robert propped a chair against the doorknob to keep his fellow tenant out. After police took the tenant away, the landlord put on the plywood and a metal plate around the door lock.

Robert made it clear in his interview that he had lived in this building for a year and a half, not because he wanted to, but because it was the only place he could afford. [1] His rent was $271 a month, paid by welfare, and that left him $140 a month for all other living expenses — food, transportation, clothing—basically $5 a day. It was an income that made it essential to use food banks and missions, part of the informal "industry of poverty" that's been identified as our society's way of dealing with anyone who, for whatever reason, cannot make it on their own.

Robert explained that he's been on welfare, or in care, or in jail, most of his life. He was 36 years old at the time of the interview. He had a hard childhood -- really only his Mom showed him any affection and she had just died in the last year. He had spent Christmas alone in his rooming house. He phoned his brother, who lived with his step-father in the home where he grew up, but his brother told him not to visit: "We don't have respect for you." They've accused him of being "spoiled" but he gestured to his ramshackle room, "I don't call this being spoiled."

At the age of 14, he had entered the "system", apprehended by Child and Family Services with bruises on his body from home. At that point, he gave up on his family providing him with a home. He was placed in Seven Oaks Youth Centre where he learned how to live on the street—that is, to get money by break-ins, dealing drugs. The first time he got any sense of home in his life was staying at a group home run by a priest, Father Albert Boufat. "He was a good person, he showed a lot of care." But the group home was closed when one of the residents beat Father Albert with a baseball bat as he slept. Robert remembers seeing the blood on the pillow.

Robert's bedroom: *This was Robert's bedroom when we toured the building on Boxing Day, 2005*

Robert's own misdemeanors began to take a violent turn. He would get into arguments and they'd end up as fights. He particularly found relationships with women often ending up in a fight. Most of his jail time over the next fifteen years was for these types of incidents, including one 2 1/2 year term for violent assault. His life has also been complicated by epilepsy since he was a child. Although he's tried to get on disability (a form of social support that provides a few more benefits) he's been unable because he

needs help navigating the system. A friend he met at West Broadway Community Ministry has been helping him, but it's a complicated process. For the last four or five years, Robert has kept himself out of criminal activity. "I decided either I smarten up now or it's not going to happen," he said.

He gave a tour of the rooming house. Two roomers lived on the ground floor, including one man who's been there for 12 years. The second and third floors had three or four roomers when Robert moved in, but he was the only one left, shuffling around in an old wreck of a building. His own room (about 12 ft x 12 ft) (3.66 m. x 3.66 m) was crowded with a mattress in the corner, sleeping bags for bedding, a refrigerator, a cupboard, a couple of chairs with his clothes and possessions. The other second floor rooms had broken flooring, peeling walls, piles of old furniture, clothes left from the former tenant. The bathroom on the second floor was neat and tidy, just a toilet and a sink. For a bath, Robert had to use the downstairs bathroom, filled with someone's laundry when we visited. The third floor was a jumble of unused rooms, a poorly-erected wall that cut a window in half in order to divide one room into two, broken flooring, frozen toilet and pipes jutting out of floors at bizarre angles. Robert told how, when they had cleaned the third floor after the last tenant, they had filled up a garbage bag with syringes used for drugs.

The most hopeful sign for the old building was a notice posted on one of the doors that the building had just been purchased by a new landlord, Richard Fulham of Thunderbird Holdings. Richard had plans to renovate, but for Robert, all this meant was uncertainty about whether he could stay. In the end, tenants did stay, but shortly after our interview, Robert reportedly got into a fight with one of the ground floor tenants, packed up his garbage bags of possessions and left.

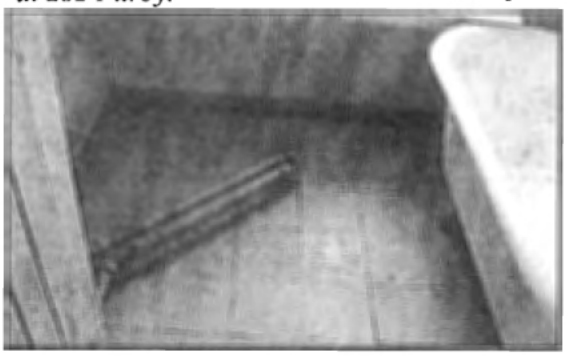
It's too bad he left when he did, for Richard, the new owner, who also owns two of the other rooming houses on the block, embarked on a major program of renovations and improvements for 282 Furby, turning it into a clean and respectable rooming house (see pictures, right). However, in conversation two years later, Richard acknowledged that the cost of improvements, combined with the meagre rents paid by welfare, made it impossible to operate the rooming houses. "You can't make these work on welfare rates," he explained. [2] Another long-time landlord in the area has succeeded in running rooming houses, but only by excluding those on welfare and by quickly kicking out problem tenants, eventually building up a house of good tenants. [3]

The revitalization process itself has significantly decreased rooming house stock—three of the houses on the block that have been upgraded used to be rooming houses. This trend is confirmed by overall West Broadway housing figures, which show a 30% decline in rooming house stock over the last 15 years. [4]

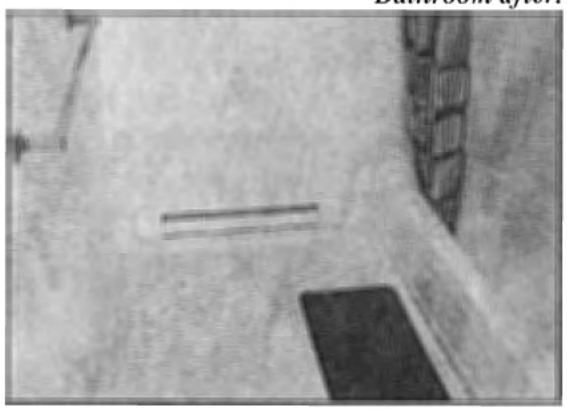
Without some major intervention, it's a trend that's likely to continue, perhaps soon bringing to an end the history of rooming houses on this block.

Improvements at 282 Furby:

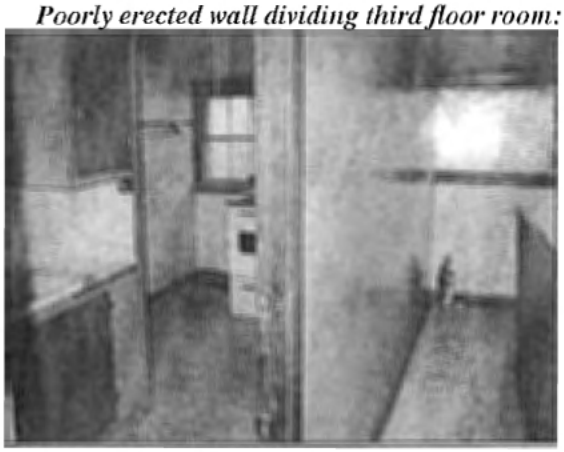
Bathroom before:



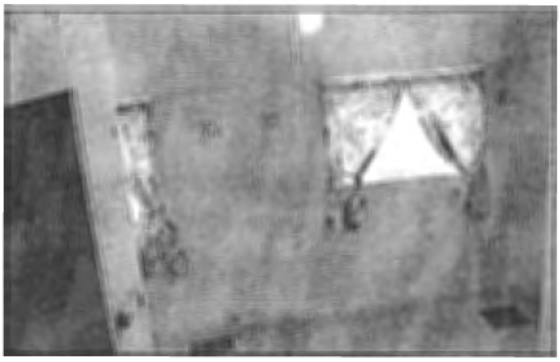
Bathroom after:



Poorly erected wall dividing third floor room:



Same view with wall removed:



DISCUSSION — PURPOSES OF THIS HISTORY

A Block's History

The purpose of this research project was to tell the history of an inner-city block and the people who had lived there in the hope that knowing this history could help planners and community groups who were attempting the revitalization of similar blocks. This block of Furby was chosen in August, 2004 at a time when the deterioration and poverty on the block were clear, but the shape that revitalization might take was not so clear.

Thus was launched the larger history project—*Living on Furby, Narratives of Home, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1880-2005*. This magazine focussing on rooming houses is a small part of that study.

The purpose of any history should be to reproduce the facts and stories of the people and their periods as honestly as possible. Inevitably we who have written this history have shaped it by our own perspectives. But hopefully, in our telling, the stories of the people who actually lived on the block can shine through. It is through these stories that readers can draw their own conclusions.

Probably the most powerful insight for the study as a whole came when we read a passage written by William Allison, an English professor who lived at 254 Furby in the early Twenties. He described how he felt in "my cosy library, alone with 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." [1]

Prof. Allison may or may not have been living on Furby at the time he wrote these words, but they captured something universal. Furby has provided a sense of home and comfort for many diverse people from Mayor Thomas Deacon to rooming house tenant Nelson Giesbrecht. Don Dixon described how his small room "became home" in the cold, cold winter of 1969. Nanny Morrissette's front porch at 299 Furby became a symbol of home, which was not so much a place of material possessions as a place where extended family and friends could gather.

Nanny grew up on "the Bog" near Stonewall. Another child growing up there at the same time was artist William Kurelek. Historian Ramsay Cook described how Kurelek was haunted by images of his childhood home all his life, how a mystical bond with that prairie land created his art and created his understanding of home—"what the Spanish call *querencia*, contentment of familiar surroundings... a sense of identity." [2]

No wonder Aboriginal people felt such a sense of loss when they left their prairie homeland for the reserves. No wonder 10-year-old Cathy Hoekstra cried when she moved to Transcona and left her familiar surroundings at 265 Furby--the "aunts" upstairs who had her in for tea, her friends like "Mumfy" and Roland next door.

Furby, in all of its incarnations, has provided a deep sense of home for many. Many brought with them their own sense of what home should be and shaped the big houses on the block to meet their dreams. Many of them tell their stories here. Perhaps urban planners can use these stories to help people of all income levels find the homes they long for. Perhaps each of us can learn more about our fellow human beings by hearing and understanding these stories.

Aboriginal Roots of Poverty and Resilience

This magazine focussing on rooming houses has paid particular attention to poverty. It is unfortunately true that many of those in poverty are Aboriginal. Not all Aboriginal people on Furby have been poor, but the reality of life for too many Aboriginal people on the block has been abject poverty and dysfunction. For instance, almost all involved in the murder trial at 276/278 Furby were Aboriginal people. When the Social Planning Council first included Furby on the edge of Winnipeg's highest-needs neighbourhoods in 1980, they wrote: "Finally, and with some caution, we include the native household as indicative of a high need/ high risk group," [3]

Through these pages we have provided a historical background for mainstream poverty. To understand Furby's reality we need a similar understanding of the roots of Aboriginal poverty and the resilience with which the Aboriginal community has responded. Those roots go back to the loss of their prairie homeland which the First Nations suffered in the 1870s. For the First Nations, their share of the new way of life was a paternalistic reserve system that marginalized them and separated them from mainstream life. On the prairies, they were promised training in the new way of farming, but were never provided with the tools and techniques they needed to make such a fundamental shift in their culture and economy. [4] The new settlers, who did not have to make such a huge shift, were becoming successful, so why not Aboriginal people? Thus racism grew. And poverty. This was the reality of the new order for Aboriginal people—marginalization, racism, poverty and a system which denied power.

The traditional way of hunters, fishers and trappers had never been rich in terms of material commodities but it did bring its own rewards, particularly a social order in which all members of the family played a vital role in the joint enterprise. As these positive aspects of traditional life vanished in the new order, physical poverty and the poverty of spirit deepened. In the Fifties and Sixties, as marginalized First Nation people arrived in the cities they often ended up in skid rows and decaying inner cores.

One effective response to these social realities was developed by Aboriginal people themselves—the Indian Métis Friendship Centre movement, which began in Winnipeg in 1959. Stanley McKay, Sr. was one of many grassroots Aboriginal people who was part of that movement. He explained the ways the two cultures looked at poverty:

> "In the dominant society the important thing is independence. When you get your paycheque you're supposed to put away some of that money for what we like to call a 'rainy day'.... We look up to the guy with a lot of money.
>
> "In the old Indian custom we also prepared for that rainy day, not by accumulating wealth, but by sharing. The best hunter was the big man in the community. When he's sick, everybody tries to help him. This is the way he tries to prepare for the rainy day or when he's sick or old. And everybody looks up to him; not to the guy who hoards for himself; he's an outcast." [5]

It was building on this kind of sharing and natural networks that made the Indian Métis Friendship Centre so successful an answer to dislocation and poverty. From the Sixties onwards, Aboriginal people themselves have continued building their own networks to confront the long-standing problems they face. As with any people finding their voice, there have been successes and failures and many different approaches. Many found strength in the rebirth of ceremonies and the teachings and healings of the Elders. In the Seventies a proliferation of provincial and national organizations developed political power. The far-reaching land settlement negotiated by the James Bay Cree, and the Supreme Court of Canada "Calder" decision opened the door to just land settlements. Assumption of education and child welfare services gave power back to reserve bands and Aboriginal-run organizations. In the Eighties, Aboriginal rights were enshrined in the constitution. The "Indian Summer" of 1990 began with Elijah Harper voting in the Manitoba legislature to stop the Meech Lake Accord and ended with the stand-off between Aboriginal people and troops at Oka.

But despite progress and a resilient culture strongly rooted in family ties and community connections, the wounds of colonization are deep. As it was in the 1980 Social Planning Council report, it is still true in Winnipeg in 2008 that being Aboriginal too often means being poor.

For many years these poor—Aboriginal and the other poor of our society—were able to find their homes on Furby. As revitalization proceeds on the block, it is a question whether Furby will continue to provide these kinds of homes.

Notes

1. FROM PRAIRIE HOMELAND TO A CITY BLOCK

1 Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage*, McClelland and Stewart, 1976,

2 W.O. Mitchell, quoted in Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists*, 1973, Toronto, Macmillan of Canada

3 See Page 12 for discussion on the use of Métis terminology

4 H.Y. Hind, quoted in *The Prairie Shore, Self-guiding Interpretive Trail*, Government of Manitoba pamphlet

5 242 Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba, North-West Territories and Kee-wa-tin*, Belfords, Clarke and Co., Toronto, 1880, 28.

6 Frits Pannekoek, *A Snug Little Flock*, Watson and Dwyer Publishing, Winnipeg, Man.,1990, 18,

7 D.N. Sprague and R.P. Frye, *The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation*, Tables 1 & 4, Pemmican Publications, 1983.

8 "A Pioneer's Prosperity", *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 May 1881.

9 Library and Archives Canada, Dominion of Canada, Department of Interior Records (RG15), Manitoba Act Files, vol. 169, fi le MA 10493, James Mulligan Application for Patent to Lot 79, Parish of St. James, 23 April 1873.

10 Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg in Maps*, National Map Collection, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, 1975

11 CWA, Building Permits, Application for Permit for Alterations etc., no. 94, 7 May 1900.

12 "Old Timer Dead", *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 August 1912.

13 Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg, An Illustrated History*, Toronto, 1977, 30.

14 CWA, Building Permits, Application for Permit to Build, No. 839, 13 Aug 1917.

2. A FUR TRADE FAMILY-- WILLIAM "BIG BEAR" McLEAN

1 Building Permit

2 "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*

3 Sarah Carter, "Introduction," *The People of the Plains*, University of Regina, 2004, page xvi.

4 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," [unidentified newspaper clipping], 21 October 1924.

5 "'Big Bear' McLean, Pioneer Factor, Dies," [undated newspaper clipping].

6 "W.J. McLean," *The Beaver*, 2 (December, 1921); W.E.I. "'Big Bear' McLean."

7 Alan F.J. Artibise, Winnipeg: *A Social History of Urban Growth*, 1874-1914, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1975

8 Sarah Carter, "Introduction", *The People of the Plains*, 2004, University of Regina

9 Sarah Carter, "Introduction", *The People of the Plains*, 2004, University of Regina, page viii.

3. NEIGHBOURS IN 1911

1 1911 Census, Library and Archives Canada, http: // collections canada.ca

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

3 "N.J. Breen dies at age 82 in Winnipeg," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 27 Dec. 1954; "Thomas G. Breen, Pioneer Auto Man," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 April 1957.

4 Alan Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal-Kingston, 1975, 308-319.

5 "The Work Of Women and Girls in Department Stores in Winnipeg", University Women's' Club, Winnipeg, 1914, quoted in Jim Blanchard, *Winnipeg, 1912*, 47.

4. FURBY DURING THE DEPRESSION THE WELL-OFF AND THE HARD-UP

1 "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.

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

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

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

5 "City Refuses Relief to Man Summering at Lake, despite Threat" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 July 1933, 4

6 "Furby Street Resident Starts Self-imposed Death-Seeking Fast," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 7 June 1934, 1; "Faster Receives $1, So Quits Hunger Strike," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 8 June 1934, 1.

7 James H. Gray, *The Boy From Winnipeg*, Fifth House Publishers, 1970, Saskatoon and Calgary, 15.

8 James H. Gray, *The Winter Years*, Fifth House Publishers, Saskatoon and Calgary, 1966, 20.

9 Ibid, 161

10 Ibid, 271

11 [Ad], *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 August 1937, 20.

12 [Ad], *Winnipeg Free Press*, 24 August 1937, 18.

DISCUSSION: HISTORICAL RESEARCH

1 Hooley McLaughlin, *The Ends of Our Exploring, Ethical and Scientific Journeys to Remote Places*, Toronto, Malcolm Lester Books, 1999, 77.

5. FURBY BY THE FORTIES EMERGENCE OF ROOMING HOUSES

1 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls; Henderson's City Directories

2 Information on the Breen household numbers, and other household numbers for the inter-war years, has been drawn from Henderson's City Directories and City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls.

3 City of Winnipeg Health Department, *Report of the Thirtieth Annual Survey of Vacant Houses*, Winnipeg, 1947.

4 Telephone interview, D.. Burley with Doug McKenzie, 10

August 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

6. THE ROOMING "HOME" EXPERIENCE

1 Mabel Jones and Eunice Jones [pseudonyms], interviewed by Paul Chorney, May, 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

2 George Grant, *Texts of Addresses Delivered at the Twenty-fourth Annual Couchiching Conference*, Canadian Institute on Public Affairs and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1955; reprinted 1985, 39.

7. NEW FAMILIES BRING NEW LIFE TO FURBY

1 Taras Monastyrski, interviewed by Paul Chorney and Ian Keenan, May 18, 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

2 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls; Winnipeg Street Directories.

3 W.L. Morton, *Manitoba, A History*, University of Toronto Press, 1957, 466.

4 Alan Artbise, *Winnipeg, An Illustrated History*, James Lorimar & Company and National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, Toronto, 1977, 174.

5 "Everything is Possible", *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 November 1970, 63

8. BABY BOOMERS COME AND GO

1 Cathy Hoekstra, interviewed by Paul Chorney, Feb. 28, 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

2 Janice Belluk, interviewed by Paul Chorney, April 11, 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

3 Russ Gourluck, *Going Downtown, A History of Winnipeg's Portage Avenue*, Great Plains Publications, Winnipeg, 2006, 265.

4 The Metropolitan Development Plan (Winnipeg, 1968); Census of Canada, 1971; in Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg, An Illustrated History*, James Lorimar and Company and National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, 1977.

DISCUSSION: ORAL HISTORY

9. "IT BECAME HOME IN THE COLD, COLD WINTER"

1 Don Dixon, interviewed by Mike Maunder, 30 October 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

2 Michael Cross and Gregory Kealey, *Modern Canada, 1930-1980s, Readings in Canadian Social History, Vol. 5*, McClelland and Stewart, 1984, 12-13.

3 Ibid

4 Economic Council of Canada, 1968; Canadian Welfare Council, 1969; *Poverty in Canada*, The Croll Commission, 1971.

5 David G. Burley, *City and Suburb - Housing in Twentieth Century Winnipeg*, Winnipeg Real Estate Board, March 2003. 29.

6 Mary Guilbault, quoted in Leslie Hall, *A place of Awakening: The Formation of the Winnipeg Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, 1954-64*, thesis, Department of History, University of Manitoba, 2004, 34.

10. ROOMING HOMES BECOME ROOMING HOUSES

1 Jean Knight, interview by David Burley, 6 May 2006, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

2 Janice Belluk, interviewed by Paul Chorney, April 11, 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

3 Taras Monastyrski, interviewed by Paul Chorney and Ian Keenan, May 18, 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

4 For a discussion of social capital see Putnam, Robert, *Bowling Alone - The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2000.

11." MURDER'S HALF- ACRE"

1 Distasio, Jino; Dudley, Michael; Maunder, Mike; November, 2002, *Out of the Long Dark Hallway: Voices from Winnipeg's Rooming Houses*; University of Winnipeg, Institute of Urban Studies, 63.

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 "The poor and trendy meet on the street", *Winnipeg Free Press*, 1 May 1985.

5 Doug Nairn, "Murder's Half-acre", *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 December 1996.

6 Doug Crawford [pseudonym], interviewed by Paul Chorney, March, 2005, Living on Furby project, Department of History University of Winnipeg

7 "Obituary: Ed Yaremchuk," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 16 April 2001; "Ed Yaremchuk," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 17 April 2001: "Obituary: Sadie Yaremchuk," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 22 August 2002.

8 Nelson Giesbrecht, interviewed by Mike Maunder, 6 April 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg.

9 "The Jobless Economy," *Globe and Mail*, 26 August 1993.

10 *Inner City Voice*, May, 1994; Distasio, Dudley and Maunder, 2002, *Out of the Long Dark Hallway: Voices From Winnipeg's Rooming Houses*, University of Winnipeg, 39; *Winnipeg Sun*, April 2, 1996, 1; *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 3, 1996.

11 Distasio, Dudley and Maunder, 2002, *Out of the Long Dark Hallway: Voices From Winnipeg's Rooming Houses*, University of Winnipeg,

12. LIFE AND DEATH AT 276/278 FURBY

1 Court of Queen's Bench, Winnipeg Centre, *Her Majesty the Queen and Daniel Norman Buck, Accused*, CR03-01-24083, Testimony of Proceedings, 29 March to 2 April, 2004.

13. DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON A STRIP OF HOUSES

1 José Correia, interviewed by David Burley, 13 July 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History

University of Winnipeg.

2 Community group letter to Ray Klassen, City of Winnipeg Property and Development Services, 22 January 2002, copy in possession of Mike Maunder.

3 Anna Morrissette, interviewed by Mike Maunder, 11 July 2005, Living on Furby project, Department of History University of Winnipeg

4 Conversation with Mike Maunder

5 Community group letter to Ray Klassen, City of Winnipeg Property and Development Services, 22 January 2002, copy in possession of Mike Maunder.

6 Ruth P [pseudonym], interviewed by Mike Maunder, 7 May 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History, University of Winnipeg

7 Mary Niemi, interviewed by Mike Maunder, 15 June 2005 and 16 April 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History, University of Winnipeg

DISCUSSION "POVERTY" VS "DETERIORATION"

1 Alvin Finkel, Margaret Conrad, *History of the Canadian Peoples, 1867 to the Present*, 2002, Toronto, Addison, Wesley, Longman, 439.

14. BLOOMING OF MANY PROGRAMS

1 Linda Williams, "A Neighbourhood in Bloom: The revitalization process of West Broadway, a central inner city neighbourhood in Winnipeg", Heritage Canada, May/ June 1997, 6.

2 Government of Manitoba, Neighbourhoods Alive!, "Community Organizing: People's energies spread to other people", *Report on June 14, 2001 Neighbourhoods Alive! Forum*, 5.

3 Government of Manitoba, Office of the Auditor General, *Report on Compliance and Special Audits, March 2001*, 68-9

4 Ian Marcil, E-mail correspondence with Mike Maunder, 5 August 2006

5 Harry Lehotsky, "Urban Future Hijacked", *Winnipeg Sun*, 16 November 2003

6 Paul Chorney, interview by David Burley, 24 May 2006, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg

15. 2004 - THE TURNAROUND YEAR BUT WHAT KIND OF TURNAROUND?

1 Mandy Fraser, interview by Mike Maunder and Carey Sinclair, June, 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg

2 Charles Huband, personal letter, September, 2005

3 Sam Thompson, "Creating community--Westminster Housing Society promotes unique group living model", *The Metro*, 2 March 2006

4 Tom Ford, "Westminster Housing Society opens two houses on Furby Street", undated news release, approx. February 2006.

5. Nelson Giesbrecht, interview by Mike Maunder, April, 2005, Living on Furby Project, Department of History University of Winnipeg

16. ROOMING HOUSES TODAY (2005 - 2008)

1 Robert [pseudonym] interviewed by Mike Maunder, December 2005, Living on Furby project, Department of History, University of Winnipeg

2 Conversation with Mike Maunder, 20 May 2008

3 Conversation with Mike Maunder. The landlord asked not to be identified.

4 Conversation with Mike Maunder, 4 March 2008

DISCUSSION: PURPOSES OF THIS HISTORY

1 W. T. Allison, *This for Remembrance*, The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1949, 1

2 Ramsay Cook, "William Kurelek: A Prairie Boy's Visions", *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 1980.

3 Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, *An Analysis of Social Problems, Needs and Trends for Winnipeg*, May, 1980.

4 For a discussion of the failure of the prairie reserve system, see:
Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare, Why Indian policy failed in the Prairies Provinces*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston, 1992.
and
Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests, Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*, , McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston, 1990.

5 Stanley McKay, Sr., quoted in Larry Krotz, *Urban Indians, The Strangers in Canada's Cities*, Hurtig Publishers, Edmonton, 1980, 98.

Photos and Maps

All exterior house photos, Mike Maunder, December 2004

p3 Tall grass prairie, Mike Maunder 2007

p4 Deaf and Dumb Institute at the edge of the prairie, Archives of Manitoba: Stovel Advocate Collection, Item 194 [N10193]

p4 1874 Plan in Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg in Maps*, National Map Collection, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, 1975

p6 William McLean, courtesy of Provincial Archives of Manitoba

p7 McLean children courtesy of Provincial Archives of Manitoba

p14 Streetcar tracks photo, courtesy of Provincial Archives of Manitoba

p16 Furby Theatre fire, Courtesy of Winnipeg Free Press

p18 The Monasyrskis in their garden, Courtesy of Taras Monastyrski

p21 Mumfy's concrete carving, Mike Maunder, 2007

p34 Deteriorating houses, Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation, Stephano Grande, 2003

p36 Front porch gathering, anonymous photo

p36 Spider web interior design, photo by David Burley, 2006

p37 Inside the porch, photo by Mike Maunder, 2006

p43 Mix of tenants, photo by Mike Maunder, 2005

p44 Robert's bedroom, photo by Mike Maunder, December, 2005

p45 All interior photos at 282 Furby by Mike Maunder, 2005-07