

A Critical Growth Cycle for Vancouver, 1900-1914

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Few North American cities have enjoyed sustained growth and prosperity throughout their entire history. Rather, growth tends to be a sporadic process with bursts of activity interspersed with long periods when apparently nothing significant happens. Each surge of growth is greeted as the beginning of endless prosperity, while every slowdown or set back is considered the prelude to stagnation and decline. In the case of Vancouver, four fairly distinct periods of growth can be identified. The first and best known coincides with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Prior to the arrival of the first train in 1887, the townsite of Granville was little more than an extended clearing in the woods, geared to the needs of local lumber mills and logging camps. As late as 1885 the entire white population in the vicinity of Burrard Inlet amounted to about 900. But with the construction of the C.P.R. conditions changed dramatically, and by 1891 Vancouver had mushroomed to a community of 13,709 persons.

This early boom petered out in the depression of the 1890's and although Vancouver continued to grow it was at a much more modest rate. The Klondike gold rush of 1897-98 provided an intense flurry of excitement and prosperity, but it was not until the turn of the century that a second major growth phase began. From then until the eve of World War I migrants poured into the city in unprecedented numbers, construction boomed, and streetcar lines multiplied. These developments transformed Vancouver from a medium-sized community of about 27,000 to a substantial city of 115,000 that covered much of the area between Burrard Inlet and the Fraser River.

By 1913 the surge of the previous decade was over. Wartime enlistments led to a slump in the city's population, and it was not until the early 1920's that another expansionary phase began. These years lacked the kind of drastic change that characterized the late 1880's and the early 1900's, but construction activity increased sharply throughout the decade, and aided by amalgamation in 1929 with the municipalities of South

Vancouver and Point Grey the city had 246,000 residents by 1931, while the total metropolitan population reached 304,000.

Like other cities throughout Canada, Vancouver's growth virtually stopped during the depression, and its fourth growth cycle was largely a post-World War II phenomenon, especially of the 1950's and 1960's. Not only was the strongly British, or at least Anglo-Canadian image of the city modified by the arrival of some 100,000 European immigrants, but the physical nature of the city changed as well. The construction of high rise apartments and office blocks modified the city skyline, while the growing scarcity of land in the city, the increase in automobile ownership, and the improvement in highways sharply increased suburban development. By 1971 when the population of metropolitan Vancouver exceeded the million mark only 40% of these persons lived in the city proper, while some 60% lived in suburban areas. In 1941 about 80% of the metropolitan population lived in the city, and only 20% in the suburbs.¹

All of these cycles of growth are worthy of intensive examination but this article will examine only the period from 1900-1914. These critical years have received very little attention. When thought of at all they tend to qualify as the golden age of the real estate operator, when fortunes were made and lost as prices soared one day and plunged the next. There is no doubt that much frenzied speculation took place, but developments during this period went far beyond the quaint and superficial. These were some of Vancouver's most dynamic and prosperous years, and many of the city's present characteristics reflect developments that occurred at that time.

Unlike the boom initiated by the construction of the C.P.R. and the arrival of the first train in Vancouver, no single event announced the beginning of another expansionary phase in the early 1900's. Nor did any single organization influence development to the extent the C.P.R. had done previously. Rather, growth during these years was a diverse, pervasive process that affected all components of Vancouver's life and significantly reshaped the city and its institutions.

If one factor can be said to be basic to all the changes that took place at this time it was undoubtedly rapid population growth. Vancouver's growth was not unique, for while it was surging ahead much the same thing was happening to other western cities. All felt the consequences whether direct or indirect of an immense stream of immigrants from

¹ *Census of Canada 1941*, II, 143; *Vancouver Sun*, November 25, 1971, 17, quotes preliminary Census data that give the Vancouver metropolitan population as 1,071,081, and Vancouver city population as 422,278.

Europe to America, as well as a heavy westward migration of Canadians and Americans. It is true that some cities in the far west grew only moderately, but whether one concentrates on Vancouver or looks at Los Angeles, Seattle, Spokane or Calgary, the pattern of rapid urban growth was essentially similar.

POPULATION GROWTH IN SELECTED WESTERN CITIES
1900/01-1910/11²

<u>City</u>	<u>Population 1900/01</u>	<u>Population 1910/11</u>	<u>Increase Number</u>	<u>1900/01 - 1910/11 Percentage</u>
Los Angeles	102,497	319,198	216,701	211
San Francisco	342,782	416,912	74,130	22
Portland	90,426	207,214	116,788	129
Seattle	80,671	237,194	156,523	194
Tacoma	37,714	83,743	46,029	122
Vancouver	27,010	100,401	73,391	271
Victoria	20,919	31,660	10,741	51
Spokane	36,848	104,402	67,554	183
Calgary	4,498	43,704	39,306	894
Edmonton	2,626	24,900	22,274	848

The immigrant stream that poured into Vancouver was diverse, but primarily of English speaking background.³ The largest single bloc came from Britain. Some 16,000 Englishmen and Welshmen, 9,000 Scots, 2,000 Irish and 1,000 Australians, New Zealanders, and South Africans arrived in the city between 1901 and 1911 and gave it a decided British cast. Canadian born migrants also made up a large group, with 13,000 from Ontario, 4,000 from the Maritimes, 3,000 from the Prairies, 3,000 from British Columbia itself, and about 1,500 from Quebec. Next in order of importance was an American contingent of about 8,000, while 7,000 arrived from Europe, primarily from Italy, Scandinavia, Germany and Russia. Finally about 2,500 Chinese and Japanese arrived during the decade.

The most distinctive and significant feature of this influx was the large bloc from the British Isles. British immigrants had played an important role in Vancouver from its earliest years, but before 1900 had accounted

² *U.S. Census 1910*, I, 80-83; *Census of Canada 1911*, I, 535-537. The data for American cities apply to 1900 and 1910, while those for Canadian cities are for 1901 and 1911.

³ For a more detailed analysis of Vancouver's population growth see Norbert Macdonald, "Population Growth and Change in Seattle and Vancouver 1880-1960," *Pacific Historical Review* XXXIX, No. 3 (1970), 297-321.

for only 18% of the city's population. After the great influx of 1900-1912 their importance increased. In 1911, for example, they accounted for one Vancouverite in three (34%), by 1931 — 30%, and not until 1961 did they drop to about 15% of the population. Whether the profound influence of these people is measured by the kinds of labour organizations and political parties they helped establish, by the types of homes and gardens they created, by the kinds of educational facilities they shaped, or by the general tone that thousands of British clerks, lawyers, merchants, and craftsmen gave Vancouver, it became well-established in the opening decade of the century.

An additional symbol and yardstick of Vancouver's growth was the expansion of its urban transportation network. Vancouver had begun its electric street railway in 1889, just one year after the system had been perfected in Richmond, Virginia, and by 1891 had a 13 mile system in operation which followed the basic route of Granville, Hastings, Main, and Broadway.⁴ Expansion in the 1890's was limited to some three additional miles, and it was not until the 1900-1914 period that the major growth occurred.⁵ During these hectic years numerous additional lines were laid in the downtown area, and tracks were pushed east, south and west bringing service to Hastings, Collingwood, South Vancouver, Marpole, Kerrisdale, Kitsilano and West Point Grey. By 1914 the 103 mile system of the B.C. Electric Railway Company served virtually the entire city.

A major extension of inter-urban railway lines also increased the range of urban settlement and activity.⁶ The 15 mile long Central Park line to New Westminster had been laid out in 1891; between 1900 and 1912 much of it was double tracked. Between 1902 and 1914 some 98 miles of additional inter-urban line were constructed. The C.P.R. constructed the Lulu Island line in 1902, connecting the city with the fishing centre of Steveston. From this line in turn the Eburne-New Westminster was built in 1909. In 1911 an additional Vancouver-New Westminster link was provided when the line via Burnaby Lake was completed. Finally between 1909 and 1911 lines were extended from New Westminster to the farming centres at Abbotsford and Chilliwack. The net result of all this con-

⁴ Between 1891 and 1897 Ottawa, Hamilton, Montreal, Winnipeg, St. John's, Halifax and Quebec City all established electric railway concerns. W. G. Ross, "Street Railways in Canada," *Canadian Magazine*, January 1902, 276-278.

⁵ H. Bartholomew and Associates, *A Plan for the City of Vancouver*, (Vancouver, 1929) 87-90.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 131-134.

struction was that Vancouver became the focal point of a diverse, regional transportation network. For all practical purposes anyone living within an eight mile radius of downtown could get there in thirty-five minutes, while a rush order from Chilliwack, forty miles away, could be delivered within a few hours.

At the time the first tramway lines were built in 1889-90 the great bulk of Vancouver's population was concentrated in a small area north of False Creek, between Granville and Main Streets. Since this was precisely the area served by the original trams, one can say that in the earliest years the tramway tended to follow the population build up. But as early as 1891 as the tramways were pushed across False Creek along Broadway to complete the Fairview belt line, there is no doubt that the trackage was well in advance of settlement, and tended to determine the settlement patterns. The entire district of Fairview and Mount Pleasant, for example, had only 186 households at the time it received its first rails.⁷ The Vancouver Electric Railway and Light Company had been promised 68 free lots in the area by the C.P.R. if it would build a line and guarantee a regular thirty minute service. Although population growth later made this a profitable venture the immediate consequences for the V.E.R. & L. were little short of disastrous. Construction costs of the six mile extension vastly exceeded estimates, the C.P.R. refused to surrender the lots claiming non-fulfillment of contract, and the economic slump of the 1890's merely intensified the company's problems.⁸ By 1895 it was in receivership.

The districts that received tramway service in the great surge of construction carried out between 1900 and 1914 were not as thinly settled as Fairview and Mount Pleasant had been in the early 1890's. Yet these rail facilities preceded any significant population growth, and it was the expectation of a rapid rise in real estate values that influenced both the municipal council and B.C. Electric Railway Company in their decision to go ahead.⁹ The municipality of Point Grey, for example, had only 854 dwellings and a population of 4,320 in 1911, yet in 1912 it had approxi-

⁷ Patricia E. Roy, "The British Columbia Electric Railway Company 1897-1928," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia 1970, 22-34.

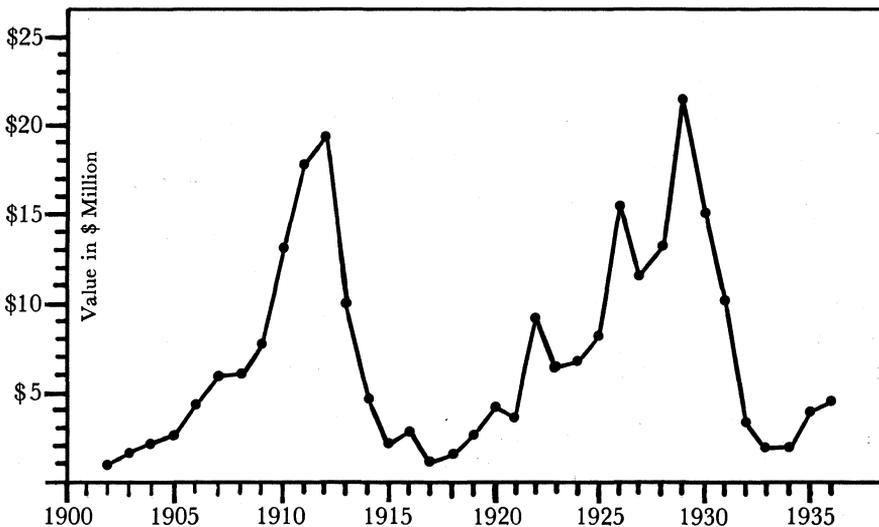
⁸ In 1893 service was discontinued on the Fairview line, and the Powell Street line east of Main Street. Mount Pleasant service was reduced. British Columbia Electric Railway Company Ltd. "Twenty Nine Years of Public Service." (Vancouver, 1926) 9.

⁹ S. D. Reid of Kerrisdale claimed that C. M. Woodward had purchased a parcel of land in Point Grey for about \$2,000, but had promptly disposed of it for \$25-30,000 shortly after the completion of the B.C. Railway line in that region. *Vancouver Daily News Advertiser*, January 10, 1912, 18.

mately 16 miles of tramways.¹⁰ Much the same pattern was evident in the development of inter-urban lines. The region served by the Vancouver-Lulu Island line was virtually unsettled when the C.P.R. laid its track in 1902, and the subsequent growth of Kerrisdale and the sale of portions of their land grant undoubtedly did much more for the C.P.R.'s balance sheet than did the fares collected from workers going to and from the salmon canneries at Steveston. Yet although these lines exceeded Vancouver's immediate needs, they encouraged many citizens to settle on the outskirts of the community, and reduced the population concentration in the central city.

Along with the development of these urban and inter-urban railway lines went an incredible amount of construction. Building activities had been reasonably vigorous in the early 1900's but as the decade unfolded construction raced ahead at an unprecedented rate. Each year of the decade seemed to set some kind of record only to be exceeded by an even greater volume of activity the following year. Some idea of the size, growth, and cyclical nature of this activity can be gathered from the following graph.

VALUE OF BUILDING PERMITS IN VANCOUVER
1902-1936¹¹



¹⁰ *Census of Canada 1911*, 1, 249; J. A. Paton, "The Inside Story of Point Grey," *B.C. Magazine* July 1911, 735-737.

¹¹ *Vancouver Annual Report 1936*, "Report of Building Inspector," 91, lists the yearly value of building permits issued in the city from 1902 to 1936.

It is evident from the graph that construction activity rose steadily throughout the decade, peaked in 1912 and then dropped sharply. Some idea of its magnitude can be gained from the fact that in the entire period from 1900 to the end of World War II, it was only in the banner year 1929 that the value of construction exceeded that achieved in 1912. There can be little doubt that the diverse demand created by this activity played a major role in sustaining Vancouver's growth.

Construction spread over the entire city and ranged from small bungalows on 33 foot lots to massive department stores in the central business district. The great bulk of it consisted of single family frame houses in the West End, Kitsilano, Fairview, Mt. Pleasant and Hastings. In 1906 alone, 23 houses were constructed on Sixth Avenue in Kitsilano, 35 on Seventh, 47 on Eighth, 31 on Ninth and 30 on Tenth, while Comox, Robson, Nelson, and Barclay in the West End each had about 20. In the peak year 1912, 2224 houses, 217 factories and warehouses, 293 offices and stores, and 218 apartments were built.¹² Whether the land was bought from provincial authorities, the C.P.R., real estate concerns, or private owners, it was usually subdivided on a gridiron pattern and sold in an unimproved state to individuals. Only infrequently was a block developed by one owner. In 1905 typical housing lots sold for \$100-\$200. A modest bungalow on a 33 foot lot sold for under \$1,000 but the majority of houses fell in the \$1,500-\$2,500 range. A very few on large lots in prime residential areas sold for over \$3,500.¹³

The central business district underwent dramatic changes. Whereas three-and four-storied frame and stone buildings dominated at the turn of the century, by 1914 Vancouver's downtown had been transformed with scores of eight- to fourteen-storied stone, brick, and concrete structures.¹⁴ Much of this construction consisted of office blocks built by investors for rental to a variety of small concerns, while banks, hotels, railroads, insurance companies, and shipping concerns usually built for their own use. The Hudson's Bay Company, Woodward's, Spencer's, and Birks either built anew or enlarged their department stores while the Court House,

¹² *Vancouver Daily Province*, January 19, 1907, 25-27 provides a detailed street by street breakdown of all building permits issued in the city in 1906. *News Advertiser*, January 5, 1913, 29 gives data on 1912. For a detailed analysis of the changing patterns in Kitsilano housing design over the years see Deryck W. Holdsworth "Vernacular Form in an Urban Context," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1971.

¹³ *News Advertiser*, January 3, 1905, 6.

¹⁴ *News Advertiser*, January 26, 1913, 21, has an excellent composite photograph of the major buildings that had recently been completed.

Post Office, Hotel Vancouver, Carnegie Library, and the World Building provided prominent new landmarks.

With immigrants arriving in unprecedented number, tramways opening new districts, and construction booming, real estate promotion and speculation became an integral part of the Vancouver business world. Hundreds of persons became real estate agents — the Vancouver Directory of 1910 listed some 650 — thousands of Vancouverites participated. Whether they dabbled or plunged depended on personal whim and available resources, but few were indifferent. As one exuberant promoter exclaimed, "Do you know how I would write a dissertation on 'How to be rich in Vancouver?' Take a map of the lower peninsula, shut your eyes, stick your finger anywhere and sit tight."¹⁵

Such activity was not a new phenomenon for the city. At the time of the original boom of the late 1880's many who had speculated in real estate reaped handsome returns. But in the period from about 1890 to the early 1900's prices rose only modestly, about 6% per year.¹⁶ The real surge began about 1904 and continued unabated to 1912. In an annual business survey the *News Advertiser* pointed out,

With the real estate dealers 1909 has been a banner year in Vancouver. Three years ago it was prophesied that the real estate business had reached its apex and must decline; today prices have doubled and trebled and real estate brokers have probably made more money in 1909 than even in the early days of the great real estate movement about 3 years ago. Five years ago lots might have been purchased within the city limits for \$50 each; now it would be difficult to secure a single lot anywhere in Vancouver for less than \$600.¹⁷

With appropriate changes in prices the comment made about 1909 could be repeated for 1904, 1907, or 1912.

Among the numerous examples of profitable real estate transactions was the small 26 foot lot on Pender Street that was purchased from the C.P.R. in 1887 for \$480. The original owner held it for 3 months and sold for \$600. By March 1888 it sold again, for \$1,500. It did not change hands again until 1904 when it sold for \$4,000, and just two years later it sold once more, this time for \$6,000.¹⁸ Similarly a 52 foot lot on Hastings Street owned by ex-Mayor C. S. Douglas, was sold in 1904 to the real

¹⁵ R. J. McDougall, "Vancouver Real Estate," *B.C. Magazine*, June 1911, 607.

¹⁶ This was estimated from a sampling of representative house prices listed in Vancouver newspapers.

¹⁷ *News Advertiser*, January 2, 1910, 1.

¹⁸ *News Advertiser*, January 22, 1905, 6.

estate firm of Martin and Robinson for \$26,000. They held it for four years and sold in 1908 to N. Morin for \$90,000 and he in turn sold it just one year later for \$175,000.¹⁹

Even the U.S. Consul in Vancouver felt the impact of surging real estate prices. Anxious to get a raise in pay he pointed out to his superiors in Washington, D.C. that the new landlord had increased the rent from \$30 to \$45 per month. He also sadly announced that the house he could have bought for \$3,800 in 1897 had sold for \$6,000 in 1905 and that the present owner had declined an offer of \$10,000 for it in 1906.²⁰

The boom in real estate peaked in 1912, and for those who held out for still higher prices it was a painful experience to see their paper profits suddenly evaporate. While evidence abounds of the dramatic profits between 1887 and 1889 and from 1904 to 1912, it is not surprising that few people were willing to divulge the extent of their losses after 1912. Then as now no one liked to admit that he had failed to exploit a "sure thing" — or even worse that he had lost heavily. Yet we do have some examples of the downslide. One owner of an expensive corner lot on Robson and Granville who had refused an offer of \$250,000 in 1910, sold for \$122,500 in 1916, while another disillusioned investor sold his Granville-Helmcken lot for \$40,000 in 1917 having rejected an offer of \$125,000 in 1912.²¹

Although not as abrupt as the changes in real estate prices, a significant process that occurred during these years was the way a number of districts became firmly identified as "residential," "commercial" or "industrial." To appreciate this development one might consider the city at the height of the Klondike gold rush in 1897-98. At that time Vancouver occupied the small peninsula of land between Burrard Inlet and False Creek. It was strongly oriented to the waterfront with about 80% of its population of some 22,000 living within a mile of the C.P.R.'s depot, yards and wharf near the foot of Granville Street.²² The tramway along Granville, Hastings and Main clearly identified the city's core and most of the city's retail

¹⁹ McDougall, "Vancouver Real Estate," 603.

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, Dispatches of U.S. Consuls in Vancouver, B.C., 1890-1906. See L. E. Dudley to F. R. Loomis, August 22, 1905, and Dudley to R. Baron, January 13, 1906.

²¹ J. P. Nichols "Real Estate Values in Vancouver," *Vancouver City Archives*, (April 1954) 26.

²² *News Advertiser*, January 1, 1911, 17, provides a detailed description of the changes during the previous decade. An excellent print entitled "Panoramic View of the City of Vancouver, British Columbia 1898," is available in Dennis M. Churchill, "False Creek Development," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1953, 47.

businesses were concentrated in that area, especially on Water, Cordova and Hastings Streets. Two industrial districts could also be distinguished, one on the waterfront with the C.P.R. facilities, the B.C. Sugar Refinery, and the Hastings Sawmill, another on the north side of False Creek with lumber and shingle mills, wood working plants, as well as the freight shed and roundhouse of the C.P.R. Homes were scattered throughout the community and some settlement had spread into East Hastings, Mount Pleasant and the West End. Legally Vancouver covered some ten square miles, but essentially the city was concentrated in a two square mile area, and virtually everyone could walk to work or to downtown stores in fifteen to twenty minutes.

By 1912 the patterns that had been hinted at in 1898 were clearly delineated, and there was no doubt about the future lay-out of the entire city. Population had jumped to 115,000 and was spread over much of the peninsula from Burrard Inlet to the Fraser River, or some thirty square miles in all, though the legal city amounted to sixteen square miles. Business was still concentrated in the same core, but the cramped and limited quarters of Water and Cordova had evolved into a wholesale and warehouse district. Hastings, Pender, Granville and Main were now the main business thoroughfares, and had been sharply extended and built up. The West End, early recognized a desirable residential area, was now heavily settled. Settlement had also followed the B.C. Electric lines into Fairview, Kitsilano and Point Grey, while Fourth Avenue and Broadway had acquired a variety of small retail outlets. Although no construction had taken place, extensive lands had been set aside for the future University of British Columbia. To the south Kerrisdale was developing while Shaughnessy Heights, in the centre of the C.P.R.'s land grant was being hailed as the city's most elegant area. Throughout these years it became apparent that the prosperous, influential and socially prominent Vancouverite tended to settle in the western sections of the city, while skilled workers and labourers gravitated eastwards. In the East End where lots were smaller and cheaper, with parks, playgrounds and schools more limited, dramatic expansion occurred as well. Grandview and Collingwood had grown sharply and the annexation of Hastings townsite in 1911 extended the eastern boundary of the city to some four miles from downtown. All of these districts were overwhelmingly residential, with single family frame houses virtually universal.

Industrial districts too were clearly delineated. Shipping facilities on the waterfront had been expanded, but most industrial activity concentrated in the False Creek Basin. In the 1890's it seemed likely that industry

would remain localized on the north shore of the creek, and that the higher land of the south shore would evolve into a prime residential area. A number of substantial houses were built in Fairview and Mt. Pleasant, but as the decade unfolded significant changes occurred. The C.P.R. constructed a branch line along the south shore of the creek in 1902, and this hastened the industrial development of the entire area.²³ By 1903 the British Columbia Mill, Timber and Trading Company had shifted its major plant from the north to the south shore and this was followed by a whole series of lumber and shingle mills, machinery depots, ship yards, gravel and cement plants. The construction of additional lines and marshalling yards by the Great Northern, and the Canadian National, the filling in of the tide flats east of Main Street, and the creation of Granville Island in 1914 marked the culmination of the industrialization of the False Creek area. Marpole, on the north arm of the Fraser River, also evolved as an industrial area during these years. Its growth was aided by inter-urban rail facilities while the low land costs and the availability of river transport hastened the development of lumber and shingle mills, an abattoir, and a flour mill.²⁴

[The problems that this growth entailed proved a severe burden for a host of administrative officials in city hall.²⁵ Whether one was responsible for the construction of roads, bridges or sewer lines, handled the intricacies of land zoning changes, designed new schools or hospitals, carried out inspections of hotels, restaurants, and laundries, or issued permits to carpenters, plumbers and electricians, the work seemed endless. Rather than being able to stay ahead of the demands placed on them, most officials worked from crisis to crisis, and it is not surprising that many found the strain intolerable. In 1906 for example city clerk, A. McEkvoy, resigned while urging city council to appoint additional staff to his office. By 1907 he was followed by the chief of police, then the city engineer, then the city solicitor.²⁶ Substantial salary increases were later voted for virtually all city employees but it did little to reduce the strain or improve the situation.

Mayor and city council too felt the strain of the city's mushrooming

²³ Churchill, "False Creek Development," 48-77.

²⁴ Jeremy Barford, "Vancouver's Inter-urban Settlements," unpublished B.A. essay, University of British Columbia, 1966, 18.

²⁵ The following paragraphs on the activities and beliefs of various municipal officials are based primarily on an examination of *Vancouver City Council Minutes* 1899-1915.

²⁶ *Vancouver City Council Minutes*, September 17, 1906. April 8, April 15, May 13, 1907.

growth. Meetings and committee assignments took more and more time, especially since council felt obliged to discuss and decide a host of minor issues — whether to award a \$25 subsidy for a shipping service, condemn a ramshackle building, or prohibit the construction of a picket fence. Yet although aldermen complained of overwork there was at the same time a sense of excitement and satisfaction with the city's growth. The inevitability of such growth had been endlessly asserted, and at long last it was actually happening. Like their counterparts in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Seattle and Los Angeles, the aldermen of Vancouver delighted in this growth, for it meant more people, more jobs, bigger payrolls, and greater opportunities for all. Since many of them were directly involved in the city's business life — of the 1912 council of sixteen for example at least ten were in real estate or general business — it is not surprising that they looked kindly on this growth and wanted to see it continue.

Ten different mayors and some eighty different aldermen served Vancouver between 1900 and 1914 but with the exception of the administration of Louis D. Taylor, the general set of ideas which guided their actions were consistent. Beyond the conviction that growth was desirable, was the equally strong conviction that property owners should be free to develop their property as they saw fit, and that private enterprise should be relied on to provide the basic municipal services and utilities. Vancouver owned and operated its own water works system, but this was the exception rather than the rule. The British Columbia Electric Railway Co. provided both street car service and electric lighting. After 1904 when it took over companies controlled by the Mackenzie Mann syndicate, it provided gas service as well.²⁷ Although complaints about inadequate service and high prices were perennial, and although rates charged were apparently much higher than in comparable Canadian and American cities, city council's opposition to municipal ownership was shared by the public. When plebiscites were held seeking authorization to borrow funds for the purchase of these facilities they were decisively defeated.²⁸

In line with the idea that private enterprise should be given free rein was the council's belief that city government should function primarily as a profitable, efficient, businesslike concern. Their task was not to direct or plan city growth, but to see that municipal services were available, that city regulations were met, and that funds were spent in an honest, impartial manner. Many considered the mayor-council system both un-

²⁷ B.C. Electric, *29 Years of Public Service*, 39.

²⁸ See *News Advertiser*, January 19, 1906, and letter to editor by C. M. Woodward in *News Advertiser*, January 9, 1914, 4.

wieldy and inefficient, especially as new wards were added to the city and the number of aldermen increased from ten in 1902 to sixteen by 1912. Various charter amendments and new forms of city government were proposed all of which aimed at withdrawing power from elected ward representatives and concentrating it in a small, highly centralized board.²⁹ In 1907-08 for example, Mayor A. Bethune suggested that the city be managed by a board of control consisting of the mayor and three councillors. In 1911 council considered at length the possibility of establishing a commission form of government. And in 1914 the idea of a board of control was again brought forward.³⁰ None of these proposals were implemented, yet their recurrence suggests that municipal government was hard pressed to keep up with the demands of rapid growth and change.

While there is no doubt that city council favoured private ownership and private enterprise, there is some evidence at least that during these years a sense of public needs and public rights was also beginning to assert itself.³¹ Throughout the decade council insisted on the need to protect the public interest, especially in its right to easy access to waterfront facilities. One significant step in this direction was the acquisition by the city of a number of private lots on English Bay for public bathing and picnic areas. The steady acquisition of a variety of parkland, the resistance to Mr. Ludgate's attempts to obtain Deadman's Island and establish a lumber mill there, and the vigour with which both council and public responded to any indication that Stanley Park might be developed or "improved" all indicate that the dominant philosophy did not go unchallenged.³²

During these hectic years Vancouver gradually lost its intimate, folksy, small town quality. The chatty, local columns that had been a staple item in the eight-paged local papers of the 1890's faded more into the background as the 1900's unfolded. By 1912 weekend editions ran from forty to sixty pages. National and international events dominated the news,

²⁹ In this respect Vancouver closely followed the patterns revealed in a number of U.S. cities between 1900 and 1917. See Samuel P. Hays, "Policies of Reform in Municipal Government During the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* (October 1964) 157-169.

³⁰ *Vancouver City Council Minutes*, December 28, 1907, January 6, 1908, January 13, 1908, January 19, 1911, May 30, 1911, January 24, 1912, 1914 *passim*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, November 4, 1902, December 8, 1902, May 4, 1903, February 29, 1904, April 24, 1904, February 27, 1905.

³² Both Stanley Park of 1,000 acres, and Hastings Park of 160 acres had been granted to the city without cost in the 1880's. Between 1902 and 1912 Vancouver spent approximately a million dollars for sixteen parcels of parkland, that together amounted to about 60 acres. Bartholomew, *A Plan for the City of Vancouver*, 177-178. For an example of public concern on Stanley Park see Letters to the Editor in *News Advertiser*, January 21, 1903, and January 22, 1903.

special sections treated business, sports, society, entertainment, and advertisements abounded. One might still recognize a prominent lumberman, or real estate broker as he strolled along Hastings or Granville, but this became more and more the exception as the years went by. There were just too many new companies, new offices, new faces and new millionaires. Unless one belonged to the Vancouver Club, the Terminal City Club, or was active in the Board of Trade one had little chance to know who these men were, let alone recognize them. The visiting salesman from Montreal, Chicago or London would still consider the city a comfortable, prosperous, low-keyed community; but for the local resident who had arrived at the time of the Klondike gold rush, or possibly even before the C.P.R., Vancouver had been transformed.

Now that the city was three times as large as Victoria the heated competition of the 1880's and 90's could be dismissed as that "era of parochial rivalry."³³ Vancouver remained a trading, transportation and service centre, with most of its work force still geared to the local community as clerks, carpenters, school teachers, and real estate agents.³⁴ But the general scope of the city's activities had broadened. Whether its business leaders promoted mines in the Kootenays, publicized investment opportunities in the Okanagan, sold timber and shingles on the Prairies, or lobbied in Ottawa for elevators to handle Saskatchewan wheat there is no doubt that they operated far beyond the city's boundaries.

The increasingly metropolitan character could also be seen in the ethnic make-up. Some 80% of Vancouver's residents were still of English-speaking background whether from Canada, Britain or the United States. But in addition there was a significant sprinkling of Swedes, Norwegians and Germans all of whom blended in quite imperceptibly. It was a vastly different proposition for Italians and Russians, and especially for the Chinese and Japanese who at best were looked upon not as second class citizens, but as ones who had reached the third or fourth order of undesirability. Ethnic hostility was clear and undisguised and the fierce anti-Oriental riots of 1907, and the rejection of East Indians in 1914 merely marked the highlights of this antipathy.³⁵

There is little doubt that economic and political power remained highly concentrated. Vancouver's business elite were overwhelmingly from an

³³ *Weekly News Advertiser*, March 11, 1909, 4.

³⁴ *Census of Canada 1911*, VI, Occupations, 286-296.

³⁵ These riots did not go unnoticed. In a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt in 1907, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge observed, "I cannot help feeling a certain gentle interest in the performances now going on in Vancouver in regard to the Japanese and other Asiatics. It is a demonstration of the fact that the white people will not

English speaking, Protestant background. One study of thirty-eight of these leaders showed that twenty-one were Canadian born, ten were born in England or Scotland, six were U.S. born and only one was European born.³⁶ Of those whose religious affiliation was known some thirty-one were Protestant, especially Presbyterian and Anglican, three were Roman Catholic and one a Jew.

Business leaders of non-English speaking background were few and far between. The one conspicuous exception during this decade was Alvo von Alvensleben, a German born financier, promoter, and real estate broker.³⁷ He had the good fortune to come to Vancouver in 1904 just when the city was on the verge of very dramatic expansion. As a man with some personal wealth and as an agent for European capital Von Alvensleben prospered. By 1912 he was one of the most prominent businessmen in the entire city with a host of mining and lumbering organizations under his control. He was particularly active in promoting Kitsilano real estate, and with his Canadian-born wife and a handsome Kerrisdale residence enjoyed major prominence. With World War I, however, his small empire disintegrated and as an enemy alien he quickly lost virtually everything. By 1915 he had disappeared into relative obscurity in the United States.

A much more representative member of Vancouver's business elite was Robert McLennan, founder of the wholesale firm of McLennan and McFeely.³⁸ Born in Pictou, Nova Scotia of Scottish-Presbyterian background, McLennan left the Maritimes in his early 20's and worked briefly in Winnipeg before moving to Victoria in 1884 where he opened a small building supply store. He did very well there and invited Jim McFeely, an old Winnipeg friend then working in Minneapolis to join him. The young partners prospered. They were aware of the great potential for growth on the B.C. mainland, and by the mid 1890's had transferred their main centre of operations to Vancouver. Their company profited from the

suffer Asiatic competition in their own country and I think it will perhaps make England a little less inclined to preach in a patronizing way at us about San Francisco." Quoted in Thomas A. Bailey, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese-American Crisis*, (Stanford and London, 1934), 253.

³⁶ Norbert MacDonald, "Seattle, Vancouver, and the Klondike," *Canadian Historical Review*, XLIX, No. 3, (September 1968), 235.

³⁷ Mr. Ronald D'Altroy of the Vancouver Public Library kindly provided me with a tape recording of a speech given by Von Alvensleben to the German-Canadian Association on January 30, 1961. It is a vivid, moving statement of his meteoric rise and fall. See also *Vancouver Province*, June 19, 1909, 17, and *B.C. Saturday Sunset*, September 25, 1909, 7.

³⁸ F. W. Howay and E. O. S. Scholefield, *British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1914) V. 4, 1186-1187.

Klondike gold rush of 1897-98 and was in a favourable position for the dramatic expansion of the following decade. As a member of the local elite McLennan was prominent in many phases of Vancouver's life. Not only did he head one of the biggest wholesale firms in the region, but he also served on the Board of Governors of U.B.C. and McGill, ran as a Liberal candidate for a seat in the provincial legislature, was a member of the prestigious Vancouver Club and Terminal City Club, and served a term as president of the Vancouver Board of Trade.

An additional pattern that remained constant during these years was the sense of pride in the city and its growth. Business leaders and editors never tired of pointing out that unlike Victoria or Seattle all of the development in Vancouver was the result of local initiative, unaided by any government subsidy or help.³⁹ Though this distorted the truth there is no doubt that the concept was fervently held. Similarly, although the more candid Vancouverite might admit that the city had its fair share of drunks, prostitutes, thieves, and derelicts, no one doubted that Vancouver was a decent, respectable, law abiding city and as such differed sharply from raucous, disreputable American cities. Few challenged the view that most of the city's trouble makers came from Bellingham or Seattle.⁴⁰ Conversely since the city police force and the park system were modelled on British institutions they were indisputably superior to their American counterparts.⁴¹

Although various examples of continuity and stability can be uncovered, the dominant motif in Vancouver's development from the turn of the century to World War I was one of growth and change. The quadrupling of population, the massive influx of migrants from the British Isles with their distinctive styles and beliefs, the disappearance of the intimate small town quality and the development of a more impersonal city with an increased national and international orientation, the construction of an elaborate street railway system and the subsequent expansion of the physical city from about two square miles to some thirty square miles, the establishment of well-defined commercial, industrial, and residential districts with distinctive shadings in price and prestige, the construction of miles of streets and sidewalks, and thousands of homes, offices, stores, and business blocks all combined to make this one of the most significant

³⁹ *Weekly News Advertiser*, May 28, 1909, 6.

⁴⁰ *Daily News Advertiser*, January 2, 1902, 12, January 15, 1905, 8, January 28, 1908, 5.

⁴¹ *Vancouver City Council Minutes*, February 29, 1904, *B.C. Magazine* VII, (1911), 558-561.

periods in Vancouver's history. Indeed the basic character and appearance achieved by 1914 would still be clearly recognizable not only in 1924, but in 1934, as well as 1944. Not until the 1950's and 1960's would Vancouver again experience a transformation of comparable magnitude.

In 1905 an organization of businessmen calling themselves the Hundred Thousand Club coined the slogan "In 1910, Vancouver then, will have 100,000 men." As population surged in the latter part of the decade they awaited the results of the Canadian census with lively anticipation. According to city hall Vancouver already had a population of 111,245, but since these were local figures and open to the charge of distortion, the Hundred Thousand Club was delighted when the census of 1911 officially revealed that Vancouver had 100,401 residents. Flushed with success and aware that this meant that Vancouver had almost quadrupled in ten years the organization was renamed the Half Million Club. There was little doubt in the minds of these businessmen that the growth of the previous years would continue and that by 1917 greater Vancouver would reach that mark. The year when greater Vancouver actually reached 500,000 was never precisely identified, but rather than taking five or six years actually took about thirty-five years. The Half Million Club's boosterism is understandable given the nature of the previous decade. But 1912, rather than marking the beginning of vigorous new growth, actually marked the end of one of the most significant growth cycles in Vancouver's history.