

Jean Côté

December 13, 2022 Camera: Don Bouzek Interviewers: Colette Lebeuf and Don Bouzek

Q: Tell me a bit about yourself.

JC: Well, I'm a third generation Edmontonian. My grandfather was a surveyor and civil engineer – that's my father's father. He came to Edmonton in 1903, and in 1910 he was elected to the Legislature – not for Edmonton – for Athabasca. That was a part-time job and he continued as a surveyor. I forget the exact year, but during the First World War he became a provincial Cabinet Minister. Then when the Liberal government was defeated in 1921, he went back to surveying. In 1923 he was appointed to the Senate and in 1924 he suddenly and unexpectedly died. My father and his brother immediately had to leave the Jesuit College where they were just in their early teens, and go out to work to support the family. That's because any money that my grandfather made in the Klondike was gone by then. I grew up in the West End of Edmonton and I went to the Edmonton public schools through grade 12. I got my BA from McGill in Montreal, and I got my LLB from the University of Alberta. I got a graduate degree in Law from Oxford University, then I articulated here. I clerked for one year to Mr. Justice Martland in the Supreme Court of Canada. That was the first year Canada had law clerks. Then I worked in the same law firm in Edmonton, which was Hurlburt Reynolds Stevenson and Agrios, until 1987 when I was appointed to the Court of Appeal of Alberta and the Northwest Territories and then later on to the Court of Appeal of Nunavut (when it was created). At age 75 I retired, in 2015. Since then I've been doing some mediation and a wee bit of training, but mostly I've just been an author.

Q: You mentioned that you'd walked with your father in this area as a child. Can you describe what you saw?

JC: Yes. I'll start with one thing that overlaps Edmonton and the Town of Jasper Place, and that is that one day in maybe the late 1940s when I went for a walk with my father, he had with him

a mimeograph stencil which he had cut. We went to a hardware store on Stony Plain Road, and from what I've seen since, I think it was probably the one on the north side of Stony Plain Road in the 148 block. I think its name was Anderson's. The proprietor of the hardware store, my father said, was trying to organize a newspaper for the neighbourhood, and that would've been both sides of 149<sup>th</sup> Street. So my father handed the mimeograph stencil to him. That's the only time I can remember that topic having come up.

Q: Do you remember the name of the newspaper?

JC: No, nothing like that at all. I don't know whether it actually got started or got one issue and died, or what. I have no idea.

Q: Around 1949 the *Jasper Place Citizen* started to be published.

JC: Was it printed, or was it mimeographed?

Q: It was printed, I believe. Actually, I'm not sure. Anything else that you recall?

JC: About walking around? Well, we walked around both sides of 149<sup>th</sup> Street and farther west on many occasions. One little incident... it was a day in maybe March of one year, probably late '40s or early '50s. In the area west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street a lot of the storm sewers were ditches alongside the road. Wherever a sidewalk, back alley, or driveway crossed, there had to be a culvert so that the water could drain and not be blocked by the driveway or whatever it was. Of course, that time of year things freeze and thaw all the time, and a number of them had frozen. A culvert is the last thing to thaw naturally from the sunshine so that meant that, during the day, water was being created by melting and then was backing up. The Municipal District of Stony Plain had a truck there with a boiler on the back, and it was injecting steam into the culverts to thaw them.

The bigger, more general thing I remember was looking at houses under construction west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street. Just in general all over Edmonton or west of there, people didn't have a lot of money, and they would tend to get their house in stages.

When a person with money who could afford to have a house built took possession of the house, it would always have an unfinished basement. If there was any sort of attic, that would be unfinished. There probably would be no hardwood flooring, there certainly would be no inlaid carpets, and probably no appliances. He'd have to go out to Eaton's or somewhere to buy his own appliances. Well, all that served doubly west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street because there was a lot of do-it-yourself carpentry involved.

What was very common west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street was that, the first summer, people would have a basement of some sort dug – I don't know exactly how, maybe a horse scraper, I just don't know – and they would have concrete foundation; in other words, four walls for the basement done. It would presumably be a full basement. It would be roofed over by what was going to be the main floor, and maybe a window put in. There'd obviously be some sort of a door, and that was it. That was all that was built the first summer and, for the first winter, people lived in the basement. Obviously, they had proper plumbing and maybe some sort of appliances; they must've had a way to cook. Then in the spring, coming up for the second summer, the main floor would be framed and roofed in. Probably it would be a one-storey house, probably a two- or three-bedroom bungalow. Framing usually requires a framing carpenter, but that might be done by the owner or his friends. Certainly, [later] putting the siding on the house would be done by them, and certainly putting in the insulation inside the walls would be done by them. If you got an electrician to put in the wiring, that would be half a day or so, and the plumbing wouldn't take much longer to install. I don't know, you could go to a sash place and get the windows I suppose, and then have a door fitted. But a lot of that would be labour of yourself or your family or your friends. Then the outside of it would probably be covered in tarpaper – not very beautiful, but done. That would be what you'd achieve during the second summer. Your house would be pretty snug and comfortable and full-size then, and of course the roof had been put on. So that would be your second winter.

Then the next year – or the one after, depending on how much money you had – you’d spend some money to get stucco put on the outside. In those days, stucco always had imbedded in it little pieces of broken beer and pop bottles. Then maybe that year or the next year you would get some soil if you didn’t have it. Developers and whoever didn’t take away the topsoil then the way they do now, so maybe you had enough topsoil. The topsoil was always infested with quack grass. For about two years you’d grow potatoes, especially in the front yard – it’s easy to weed them. It’s work, but it can be done, and you gradually get rid of all the quack grass and the quack grass roots. Then after that, maybe if you have time, you put in a front lawn. But meanwhile, of course, the back yard you dig all up and have a vegetable garden. Back in those days almost every house had a vegetable garden in the back, whether the people had lots of money or no money. If you walked down back alleys in Edmonton, both sides of the alley were vegetable gardens. Not so anymore, but back then, yes.

Q: It’s said that the soil in Jasper Place was full of clay. Do you have any recollection of people talking to you about gardening?

JC: No – the gardening aspect – no. But in this part of Alberta back in those days, mud was your biggest single enemy. Certainly, *MacGregor’s History* says that west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street that was certainly a very serious problem. My research for the history of east of 149<sup>th</sup> indicated from some source – maybe *MacGregor’s History* – that, at one fairly early stage, the Municipal District got somebody to gravel 149<sup>th</sup> Street south of Stony Plain Road. I’ve forgotten the details.

Q: Prior to 1953 when they began to install the sewer and water systems, people had outhouses rather than indoor plumbing. Do you remember that?

JC: No, I don’t remember that. I think when my father and I walked around, we probably walked around on streets and avenues, not back alleys. But the back alleys would – except for a few months in the summer – have been difficult walking.

Q: Can you talk about any unique buildings or structures that you saw on your walks?

JC: Back in those days, I've told you pretty well what I remember. Certainly, west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street there were always businesses along Stony Plain Road. The limited area that my father and I walked never got close to the end of those. They went pretty far out, I think.

Q: Did you see any farms and farmhouses?

JC: No, not that I can recall. I think you'd probably... now, you have to understand our family didn't get an automobile until 1953 or something like that, so we didn't go far out. The City buses never went further than 149<sup>th</sup> Street, so we never took a bus into Jasper Place. I can also say that, from my own experience and research, people are very quick to identify some houses as having been an old farmhouse and so on. I'd be careful about that; that's just a supposition and there's nothing to back that up.

One thing is that, in recent years, I have seen what I think is an old stable; in fact, I've seen two. On 95<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the south side a couple of blocks west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, very visible to 95<sup>th</sup> Avenue, is something that might be an old stable. But it's not quite right; it might just be a garage that had a bit of an attic. However, somewhere in that area, probably but not certainly a bit south of there – and probably but not certainly west of there – I've several times walked past something that I think is an old stable. This is as of a year or two ago. It is on the west side of the street, and I don't think it's too far north of the avenue. I don't remember the colour of it; it's not a dark colour. The reason that I know it's a stable is that it has a pretty marked attic, and the attic has a big door at the front of it. That's where you unload the hay from the wagon and store it up above. The other thing is that old garages are remarkably low. Pre-WWII automobiles are not that low; but even so, the garages just had barely enough room to drive an ordinary-sized car in, and they were narrow, too. Well, I suppose that a horse and buggy of some sort are bigger, and certainly if you're sitting up in the buggy, you're not down at the level

of a 1948 car. So the doors for the stable are wide and, needless to say, they're not overhead doors; they're ones that are hinged on the side.

Q: Did you ever live in the area known as the town of Jasper Place?

JC: No, I've never lived west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street.

Q: Did you at some point live in Rio Terrace?

JC: Yes, that's true; you're right about that. The first house my wife and I lived in from about approximately 1972 was at the corner of 150<sup>th</sup> Street and 77<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Rio Terrace. At that time, it was part of the City of Edmonton, but it was one block away from the [former] City limits of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, which is Quesnel. When we had lived in an apartment in Edmonton, we of course had Edmonton Telephones. When we moved to Rio Terrace in the early '70s, we had to give up our subscription to Edmonton Telephones and make arrangements with Alberta Government Telephones, who of course not only were the providers of telephones in rural areas but had been the provider of telephones in the town of Jasper Place. For other purposes, when the City of Edmonton annexed things, other utilities would become City utilities; of course, Northwestern Utilities was not municipal. But the annexations didn't invade AGT's space.

Q: Could you describe Rio Terrace? Was it a subdivision that had been created out of previous land?

JC: I don't know much about the history of Rio Terrace, and I haven't researched it. I do remember when there was the – this is a little north of Rio Terrace now – I do remember when the drive-in theatre was at 156<sup>th</sup> Street and 87<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the Starlite. Just south of there is the upper limit of the Quesnel Ravine. At the time we moved into Rio Terrace, the Quesnel Freeway had been built to 159<sup>th</sup> Street, but it didn't go any further. At 159<sup>th</sup> Street, if you were

westbound, you just went up and connected to 159<sup>th</sup> Street. The theatre was gone, I think the apartment buildings at 156<sup>th</sup> and 87<sup>th</sup> were there then, and there was a Catholic school west of the end of the Quesnel Ravine. The shopping centre at 156<sup>th</sup> Street and 76<sup>th</sup> Avenue was there. I think that what later became the Jewish Community Centre was there, but it was a private club that just suddenly failed. Quesnel neighbourhood, which of course was east of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, had some houses, and the Japanese Consulate was still there at 149<sup>th</sup> Street and 76<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and there was a bus route there. I don't drive, so I used to take that bus route. The bus turned around on 149<sup>th</sup> just south of 76<sup>th</sup>. The Community League (in a previous building) was [on 76<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Rio Terrace], the school was there, the Moravian Church was there. Rio Terrace was fully developed then. An extraordinary percentage of the population worked for Alberta Government Telephones. It was not an expensive neighbourhood, but it was a nice neighbourhood.

I think it had been done by Engineered Homes. Where we lived, there were only about three designs of homes that alternated. We were at the corner of that [150<sup>th</sup> Street] crescent that's a bit like an onion; there's a crescent around a crescent. We had a nice pie-shaped lot that was small at the front and got bigger inside. As I said, the freeway was there. The remarkable thing is that we were only two half blocks – in other words, a block south – of the freeway, but we never heard the noise of the freeway. But if you walked south to 76<sup>th</sup> Avenue, you would hear the freeway quite distinctly. I can't explain why the sound hopped that way.

The one dramatic incident there... just after supper one Sunday evening, I heard a siren getting closer – there weren't a lot of emergency vehicles there because Quesnel was a dead end; it was a nice place to bring up small children – anyway, the sound of a fire engine getting closer. I went out our back door and I could smell smoke. I know the smoke of a burning building; it's not the same as a bonfire's smoke at all. I looked and, yes, the garage across the street was on fire. People were starting to come out. The siren got closer, the fire engine stopped at the end down on 76<sup>th</sup> Avenue; I didn't know why. Then he came north trailing two hoses he'd been hooking up to the hydrant. The garage and the car inside it were gone. It was a separated garage, but it was close to the house it belonged to and close to the neighbour's house. They had vinyl siding, which all just melted and drooped off, but the firemen contained it. Then, later

on, it turned out it was arson. The owner of the house had been transferred; his house had been for sale for some time. He'd had dinner at home with his wife and son and then he'd driven off to Calgary to be available for work the next day – he was just coming home on weekends. Then after he left, the real estate agent came by with somebody who had wanted to buy the house but couldn't quite afford it; and, when they got there smoke was pouring out of the garage. The owners didn't know that, and nobody suspected the owner of having caused it, but it was very peculiar anyway.

Nice neighbours in Rio Terrace, very nice place to bring up children. The school was handy, traffic wasn't a problem then. The Moravian church, otherwise known as the Rio Terrace Community Church, also gave courses on this that and the other thing that were not religious. The community league was quite active. For a long time, they raised money for their new building by holding bingos, a regular thing there. If you went south on 156<sup>th</sup> Street past what was then on your right – that club that later became the Jewish Community Centre – if you went a little further beyond what was apparently the last cross avenue beyond Rio Terrace Drive, you came to another little obscure road and you turned left and went down. That was leading you into the upper reaches of – or I guess you'd call it the western end – of Laurier Park, or an extension of it along the river.

Further east, west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, a few blocks west, the cliffs were quite steep, but children would climb up and down them and there was a good view of Fort Edmonton across the way and so on. It's a pleasant area.

Q: Was there a Patricia Ravine in the area?

JC: Yes. If you go further west, a little west of 159<sup>th</sup> Street, in those days you would walk west and pretty soon there was something all covered in bush; and, when you got to the end of that, there was an airplane sitting there. The fellow who owned that had – some people buy old cars they're always going to fix up – I think he bought an old airplane he was always going to fix up. After a long time, it disappeared. Right south of there are some very expensive homes. I think they were sort of in between Patricia Drive and the club or Jewish Community Centre.



If you went a bit west of the airplane, all of a sudden, there was a road going down into the ravine. That's the old road to the Country Club. Now today it is obviously a paved path for pedestrians, but then it was a road. It went down through the ravine heading west, crossed the creek – all these ravines had a creek at the bottom – went up the far side, and then turned left. You were then in what later became Westridge. (When we were living in Rio Terrace, all of a sudden, all of the people who had money were moving to Westridge, and that was the tony thing and so on; they didn't have numbered streets, they had named streets and so on – a completely insane naming system, but that's another matter). But this road through the ravine was fascinating because that took me right back to my childhood because I realized that was a typical old secondary Alberta highway. This is your typical 1920s highway. This one was paved; they often weren't. But in a ravine, paving would be a good thing. Because there's a drop-off on one side and you don't want cars going off the edge, especially at nighttime – there wouldn't have been street lighting – you had posts about hip height at intervals. There was a hole drilled through each post and there was cable strung between them, and that was your standard Alberta highway from before the war.

Q: Would that highway have been built on a prior trail?

JC: The Edmonton Country Club was recommissioned or rearranged in 1915, and I think my grandfather, the surveyor, was on the original Board of that. From the beginning, they had a road from Edmonton. That was an old, old road, so when I call it a 1920s highway, that's not a [mere] analogy. Incidentally, at one point in more recent years when I was a judge, I came across one of those envelopes of photos which you'd get back from the drugstore when you picked up your pictures; it had the prints and it also had the negatives. When I looked at them, they were about WWI vintage or very early 1920s. I think my grandmother was in one that was the old clubhouse at the Country Club, and so on. I showed it to Mr. Justice McClung, who was one of my colleagues, and he was unofficially the historian of the Edmonton Golf and Country Club. He just took it to a developing place and said, can I have some more prints from my

negative? The negatives were fine, they were not crackly or anything. He had them printed, no problem at all.

Q: You walked in the neighbourhoods of Canora and West Jasper Place and Sherwood and High Park?

JC: My walks sometimes took me as far west as 156<sup>th</sup> Street. But since Covid, there's been a problem – the area has become unsafe, seriously unsafe.

Q: So you don't walk anymore?

JC: Well, not that far. I used to feel perfectly comfortable walking to 156<sup>th</sup> Street. In fact, I often walked one way from 170<sup>th</sup> Street or beyond back along 100<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Q: You mentioned that when you were articling, sometimes your duties brought you to the area.

JC: Well, this isn't articling, this is earlier. Between grade 12 and going to McGill to start university in 1958, I stayed in Edmonton, and I worked that summer for what was Edmonton's largest law firm, Milner Steer. They were downtown above the old Royal Bank building on the south side of Jasper just west of 100<sup>th</sup> Street, long since torn down. I had the lowest job in the place – I was assistant to the courthouse and land titles runner, which gave me a little experience as a teenager looking at land titles documents and certificates of title, doing a search at the Land Titles office, and so on. But one day one of the partners of the firm – I think Mr. Massie – asked me to take the bus out to west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street and report to him on the progress of construction of a supermarket being built just west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, just a bit south of Stony Plain Road. I think it was Loblaws, but I'm not sure of the name. It was one of those Ontario chains that didn't survive long in Edmonton. I think he was probably acting for the mortgage company, and I think probably the periodic advances of the funds being borrowed

depended on the state of construction. So I took the bus out there, had a look, and came back and reported to him, and that was satisfactory. What I told him about the state of construction was what he'd expected.

The location was interesting because, of course, going upstream or west along the MacKinnon Ravine – it didn't have that name then but it's the MacKinnon Ravine now – you got to 149<sup>th</sup> Street, and 149<sup>th</sup> Street and Stony Plain Road went through in all four directions. But then southwest of that corner, the ravine was very much there, and the ravine didn't extend all the way [south] to 100<sup>th</sup> Avenue, but most of the way. Loblaws was being built right on the north side of 100<sup>th</sup> Avenue and I think it was to have a [parking lot] in front [north] of it – in other words, on the north side of it. But between there and Stony Plain Road was just ravine. Later on it was filled in, and that's how we got the Safeway and London Drugs and that sort of thing. You will have noticed that about two years ago part of that filled-in portion – the parking lot – suddenly collapsed. I don't know whether that was improper fill in the first place or whether some water main burst; I don't know.

Q: What would they have filled it in with?

JC: I don't know, but when there's construction there's often a lot of waste. As I say, a developer will often take the topsoil off and store it somewhere; then every time you dig a basement, what used to be the contents of a basement is no good to anybody – it's clay or something – so I think contractors are probably quite happy to supply fill for a ravine or whatever.

Q: You mentioned that the MacKinnon Ravine extended beyond 149<sup>th</sup>.

JC: Yes. Back when I was a child, I obviously knew that it was a ravine just west of 149<sup>th</sup>. Beyond that, I don't think I knew. But in my walks west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street I have noticed that you can pick up the upper limits of the ravine again. It's not continuous. But I remember a few years ago – not that long ago – walking somewhere west of 149<sup>th</sup> and somewhere north of Stony Plain Road

but not very far off either. And without warning, all of a sudden, I looked at somebody's front yard, and by George, it's the upper rim of the ravine there. Again, it was the west side of one of the streets, and I don't remember how close to the avenue it was; I can't tell you more. It would've been pretty easy for the person to fill it in, so it may not look that way now; but a few years ago, it was there. You showed me a photograph from 1949 of widening Stony Plain Road somewhere around 151<sup>st</sup> Street, so that all ties together.

I have another memory, which I'm not quite sure of the timing of. My wife and I were married in 1970, and a few years after that I can remember that the ravine immediately south of Stony Plain Road and west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street was not filled in yet. There was a bank sloping down just at the south side of [Stony Plain Road], presumably from fill of earlier filling in Stony Plain Road. There on stilts was a small structure. It was a sharpening shop of some sort. I'm not sure [of something else as] I haven't seen it myself. I remember some of the old locations where Barrel Taxi used to be. But I was under the impression that at one point Barrel Taxi's dispatch had been there [at 149<sup>th</sup> Street and Stony Plain Road]. Of course, for a long time Barrel Taxi was just south of the bus terminal on 158<sup>th</sup> Street and a block off of Stony Plain Road. I'm not sure where Barrel Taxi started but my mother always indicated they used to be near 124<sup>th</sup> Street and 102<sup>nd</sup> Avenue; I haven't been able to confirm that. The story also was that odd name came from the owner, Baril, which of course an English-speaking person would pronounce Barrel. I do know that around 1947 there was somebody ran a taxi, and he was called Baril. That's the most I can do for you.

You had asked me once about Meadowlark Shopping Centre. You asked me about contacting a friend of mine, and I've just forgotten to ask him about this; I am in touch with him all the time. I was very familiar with Meadowlark Shopping Centre when we lived in Rio Terrace because I'd go there to buy things. I'd certainly go to the public library all the time. The public library went through many reincarnations, but I believe it was originally built by the Town of Jasper Place. The shopping centre was built in the summer of 1963. I was away that summer, partly because I went with World University Service with a group of other Canadian students and traveled around Pakistan with a group of Pakistani students [...]. But when I came back to law school

again the end of August, this friend of mine who I'd known all through high school – he and I were successive treasurers of the Student's Union – he had a job then for a construction company. It [was] McNamara Construction [...]; he worked for them several summers. That summer, they were building Meadowlark Shopping Centre and he ran their little site office and did the paperwork and that sort of thing. He said, "Would you like to see the new shopping centre?" It wasn't open yet, and he took me on a tour all around it. In those days they did not have... well, in those days they hadn't built anything that was not part of the mall; the Bank of Commerce, for example, was in the mall, roughly where Safeway is now.

One of the first things to be built outside of the mall was the [government] liquor vendor's, which was just a little bit east of 159<sup>th</sup> Street on the north side of the avenue. Of course, there were no private liquor stores then, and at Christmastime it would get very busy. I was like a lot of people – the last thing I bought for Christmas was some wine. You'd go there on the last business day before Christmas and you'd have to queue up outside because they didn't want the liquor store jammed with people. Then two people would leave and they'd let two more in, and so on.

Q: 1963 would've been the construction of the Jasper Place Sports Centre.

JC: I don't know anything about that – up further north there by Annunciation Church and so on. No, I didn't know Annunciation Church was there until our kids got confirmed or first communion, I forget which.

Q: What did you notice in the neighbourhoods as you were walking around the area? What was the composition of the population?

JC: It cost a lot less money to live in [the Municipal District or the Town of] Jasper Place than it did in the City of Edmonton [...]. I told you about progressive building of a house. The houses tended to be more modest, the shops were more modest.

The Town of Jasper Place tried very hard to succeed through shopping because, for years and years, the City of Edmonton not only absolutely forbade evening shopping – and of course federal law forbade Sunday shopping – and the City of Edmonton carried on that British practice of mandatory closing all shops on Wednesday afternoon, which was a nuisance. Every time you remembered, “Oh, my watch is broken,” or something, “I’ve got to do it,” – oh no, you’d let Monday and Tuesday go by – “it’s Wednesday, everything’s closed.” So, Jasper Place emphasized that, and as you’ve seen, the old pictures of the billboard – I don’t remember the billboard, I’m going by the photographs you’d given me – but those old billboards at the entrance of Jasper Place, two versions of it, always stressed shopping. Certainly, if you lived nearby in the City of Edmonton, you’d take advantage of that to buy groceries or something in the evening. But even into the 1950s when a lot of people had an automobile and were mobile and so on, people still had the habit of going downtown to shop. I don’t think Jasper Place ever fully achieved the shopping potential that its lack of closing bylaws and lack of zoning bylaws would’ve offered. The lumbermill and the lumberyard there might’ve attracted some business, but otherwise no.

When you look now at the old photographs of the businesses along Stony Plain Road – of which there are many iterations over many years – the buildings themselves are always very small modest buildings, some of which are quite old too. They’d been historic for years and yet nobody [had] put much money in them at all. It was a working-class neighbourhood. I’ve been interested to notice – I haven’t researched what’s west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street but I’ve looked at *Henderson’s Directory* so often – for one thing, on 149<sup>th</sup> Street, sometimes they’d mix together both sides of the street; *Henderson’s* usually did that. Sometimes they’d split the two sides of the street, I don’t know why, to ease their canvasser no doubt. [What I noticed was that] several builders – who later on lived east of 149<sup>th</sup> Street – lived west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street in those days. Somebody who had some talents and was a tradesman or a businessman and so on might succeed and move up. The one thing in reverse I’ve noticed is that there was an important filling station very close to 149<sup>th</sup> Street and Stony Plain Road but west of 149<sup>th</sup>. I can’t exactly pin down the location.

Q: Was it the Esso station?

JC: I can't remember which brand. But the man who owned it, for a number of years, lived just east of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, so an easy walk. Well, I suppose somebody who owned a filling station would drive even a short distance – but very close. That shows that he liked living in Edmonton but he liked doing business in the Town of Jasper Place.

One other thing I should mention – I've looked at a lot of old plans, aerial photographs and that sort of thing – in general, I can say that 149<sup>th</sup> Street has always run north south across Stony Plain Road, but the details of it are a little different. I've told you how all the time I knew 149<sup>th</sup> Street, it interrupted the ravine; the ravine didn't interrupt it. However, some old plans and drawings and so on suggest that, at one point before my time, 149<sup>th</sup> Street made a little bit of a detour to the west and it didn't rejoin its proper road allowance until maybe 100<sup>th</sup> Avenue or a bit south of there. But that would be early, and details are never very clear.

Q: Would that be in the '30s?

JC: Well maybe even earlier than the '30s, yes.

Q: Did you and your father walk around with the eye of a surveyor, being that your grandfather was a surveyor?

JC: Well, yes and no. My father had the most excellent sense of direction; he was an automatic self navigator. The only time in his life he ever made a mistake in that was when we were walking out somewhere farther out in Vancouver and he didn't realize the street didn't run north-south or east-west; it was on an angle. But otherwise, he was just perfect on that. I also remember about 1950 or so when Noel Dant became the town planner of Edmonton, 99<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 142<sup>nd</sup> Street to 149<sup>th</sup> Street was a fairly important road. Noel Dant closed all parts of it that weren't built on. My father was saying, "This is a road allowance, you can't do that." It's true, the law has a lot of formalities for that. So he knew about that, and he had gone out

on some surveys with his father, but way up north or something like that. My grandfather sometimes was asked to survey an Indian reserve, for example.

Q: Did your father comment on how the neighbourhoods had been developed?

JC: No, he didn't. My grandfather or his firm was involved in some of the subdivisions. There weren't a lot of surveying firms back before the First World War, and fewer after. But he didn't mention those specific things, no. But I think I learned a lot more about surveying when I went to law school. An awful lot of the land in Alberta is not inside a town, so you have to just be able to look at a string of numbers for rural land and know exactly what that means. The [professor] who taught us land titles started with that, because you can't have a land title system without a modern integrated survey system. So I learned basically how the surveys of the prairies worked, and the areas we're talking about here are all based on those prairie surveys. Edmonton had a number of river lots, but the ones towards the west end of Edmonton northwest of the river were just called river lots. They weren't long and narrow, they were big squares. So they were really just a part of a quarter section.

Q: As an historian, can you talk about what you're working on now?

JC: Well, what I'm working on is a history of the opening up of the West End of Edmonton. I've given a talk on that, which you attended, [put on] by the Historical Society. I found remarkable things. I concentrate on the area between 142<sup>nd</sup> Street and 149<sup>th</sup> Street, so the Westgrove and the two Jasper Place subdivisions. You notice during the talk I rarely used the term Jasper Place, because it's so confusing. Jasper Place used to mean east of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, now to everybody it means west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street. With the schools, the confusion of names is appalling. But though my history is about 142<sup>nd</sup> to 149<sup>th</sup> Street, I talk a little bit about west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street but not very much. I talk about east of 142<sup>nd</sup> Street all the way to the Groat Ravine to some extent, and I think I've found the answer to quite a few historical mysteries there. I think that I have discovered why the area between 142<sup>nd</sup> and 149<sup>th</sup> Street succeeded – not dramatically, but



succeeded pretty well – and the other subdivision efforts east of 142<sup>nd</sup> Street – better funded, better planned – all fell flat on their faces. I’m trying to explain what I saw every day as a child, which nobody now seems to realize. [It is] that the West End did not start [developing] at 124<sup>th</sup> Street and move steadily west; the West End started at 143<sup>rd</sup> Street and Ravine Drive, of all the obscure places. There are real mysteries there.

In addition, in my authoring I’ve also written a book which hasn’t been published yet, which is based on research I’ve been doing since the first year of law school [1961], and that is about Conan Doyle’s writing of the Sherlock Holmes stories and where he got his inspirations, both in detail and broadly, and how he worked this out. Outside of Shakespeare, Sherlock Holmes is the best-known fictional character to English speaking people. There isn’t a man, woman or child who speaks English who hasn’t heard of Sherlock Holmes. How did he achieve that? Conan Doyle never thought Sherlock Holmes was a work of literature. He wrote serious historical novels that nobody reads now. They’re good quality novels, but nobody reads them. Yet he succeeded brilliantly with [Holmes]. I think I solved that mystery too.

Then, in addition I write a lot of legal things. There’s a legal reference work that has a new edition every year, and so on. I don’t get paid anything for those, or for blogs on technical legal topics, that sort of thing.

Q: Don, is there anything you’d like to ask?

Q: You mentioned that political office was a part-time job back then.

JC: People now are very conscious of what is a conflict of interest. MacGregor’s *History* says that Edmonton municipal politicians were often doing things that involved a conflict of interest. They would be approving things where they were speculating on lots in the area, and that sort of thing. Patronage in politics was certainly known in those days.

But in any event, the Legislature usually only had one session a year. Occasionally you’ll look at the statutes and there’s a first session and second session, but usually it’s just one session a year, and it was only a few weeks long. I suppose they paid MLAs, I’m not even sure that they did; maybe they just paid them some expenses [in any event]; you couldn’t possibly earn a

living off that. So the MLAs all had a day job, except of course the Cabinet Ministers. Cabinet Ministers were paid; that was a full-time job.

A couple of times my father, when I was young, took me to the Legislative building. In those days they would let you climb up the flight of stairs inside the dome and go to that tiny pimple on the top and stand there and look out over Edmonton. Apparently, that since has become unsafe and [now] you can't do that. He would show me there was an oil portrait of his father, [J. L. Côté], hanging in the [corridor of the] Legislature. Later on, it was moved; it was archived for a while and [I believe] it's now in the offices of the Research Council, because he and Henry Marshall Tory were the founders of the Research Council.

My grandfather left the Yukon, where he and the Cautley brothers had been in partnership as surveyors and came to Edmonton to carry on their surveying business, because the gold had run out in the Yukon. He chose Edmonton partly because – despite what everybody thinks – Edmonton has one of the best climates in Western Canada; objective data will show that. Second, because he was well familiar from the Geological Survey of Canada where the oil reserves were. In those days the Saudi Arabian oilfields had not yet been discovered. He knew that the oilsands at McMurray – they didn't call it Fort McMurray in those days – [...] were the second largest reserve of oil in the world.

When he was later a provincial Cabinet Minister, he knew that the thing was to separate the oil from the sand. He went to see Henry Marshall Tory, the president of the University – or they got together anyway – and they decided they had to find out how to do that, and they formed the Alberta Scientific and Industrial Research Council, which is [now] the Alberta Research Council. A man there worked on that for years, and in the '30s, when the government wouldn't fund it anymore, they got him a position with the university so he could continue that work. He did learn how to separate that. So my grandfather gave that to Alberta; people don't remember that now. I remember telling Ernest Manning that once and he wasn't interested.

But the old [Côté] family home was on 107<sup>th</sup> Street just a little over half a block south of Jasper Avenue, where the large buildings of Alberta Health are now. But those buildings were not originally built as government buildings; Suncor built them. At first, Suncor was based there;

later they moved themselves to Fort McMurray. So it's ironic that that was on the site of the old Côté family home.

[About] surveying: in other parts of the world if you buy a piece of land, you're likely to have a description by metes and bounds. [For example], starting at the end of county road 12 and the such-and-such stream, and going south 150 yards and then west to something. Worst of all, sometimes it's based on a tree or a rock or something which can move – just awful. At one time, to divide something up you could use metes and bounds in Alberta, but they've got rid of that. Now everything in the Alberta Land Titles system has to be based on a filed survey plan. That's partly because one of the rules of surveying is that when an official surveyor files a plan, that's where the boundaries are. Nothing's perfect, and before GPS was invented, things certainly weren't perfect. For example, they have found that the boundary between Alberta and Saskatchewan that runs through the middle of Lloydminster is in fact off by several hundred yards. I think Alberta got cheated on that one. It was an honest mistake of surveying.

The Surveyors' Association [of Alberta] is the one other group that remembers my grandfather. He was a Dominion Land Surveyor, of course, and when they set up the Alberta ones, he became 007 – he was Alberta Land Surveyor number seven. He was the president of it early on, and they remember him. [The Surveyors' Association] once lent me a book describing the problems of the boundary between South Australia and – originally New South Wales but later Victoria – and they were appalling. In those days between Australian states, there were the most heavy, horrible import duties, so where the boundary mattered. [The two states' measurements overlapped] by many miles. It was such a problem that, as a temporary measure, they put a railway station halfway between the two claimed boundaries, and that's where you'd stop and go through customs. Eventually they had to take it to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council [in London], who ruled on it. The problem was that supposedly there was no accurate way to measure east-west distances. For centuries, people have known how accurately to measure north-south ones, but east-west no. That's why the Royal Navy for a hundred years struggled to get a chronometer that would keep an accurate time on a ship for months. Which is odd, because from the 1790's, the Hudson's Bay Company, according to

recently published books, had hired a man who was properly trained and by star observations, could accurately measure east-west distances as well. But in Australia they didn't seem to be able to do that until they got telegraph lines so you could get real time by telegraph. [What were the] appalling disasters that came out of that in Australia? Quite apart from establishing [the spot] properly east-west, running [the border] north-south they made horrible mistakes too.

When I was studying in England in the Bodleian Library the summer between the two years I was there, I once found a little American book about the law of surveying. Given my grandfather, I was interested and looked at it. The things that can go wrong in surveying, you just wouldn't believe. The Dominion government realized [American errors and knew that] the first step in setting up the Prairies was to get proper surveys, and they did that very early. They used the basic system which the Americans had used for what [the Americans] called the "Northwest Territory" in the U. S., which was Ohio and thereabouts. [...] A little while after the Revolution when they were doing this, [the Americans] did not know that a compass does not point straight north, it points toward something [magnetic]. Of course, that could be 20 degrees off. In addition, the Americans did not know the survey chains they were using were longer in the summer than in the winter. You can just imagine the mistakes – metes and bounds surveys, just appalling. So this American book described all the ins and outs of that, but they illuminated most of that

My grandfather said that he first saw Edmonton in 1885 when he was a young apprentice and was out just as a helper on those surveys. He grew up in Les Éboulements, which is down the river from Quebec City, and where he unfortunately died. Shall I tell you the story about him?

Q. Yes.

JC: [...] His father was the village schoolmaster in Les Éboulements and at one time the Grand Trunk telegraph operator as well; his mother had also been a teacher. So [J. L. Côté] went to the commercial college of Montmagny and he learned English fairly well there and bookkeeping and some other things. Then he wanted to become a surveyor and civil engineer, and he did

that all by apprenticeship –then, learning even medicine and law was largely an apprenticeship thing. After he got qualified as a surveyor, [J. L. Côté] wanted work. The only good source of work was the Dominion Government, so he hung around the offices of the Department of the Interior in Ottawa and made such a nuisance of himself, they finally had to give him a job to get rid of him. Well, the Alaska Boundary Dispute had started. The whole issue was how wide the Panhandle was that cuts off British Columbia from the ocean. The Americans of course said that the Panhandle went up to the top of the [inland] mountains [...], and the British and Canadians said it just went a few miles inland. So they agreed to have a tripartite arbitration, [in] which [later] – of course, as usual – the British sided with the Americans. But before that, they realized they needed a proper survey, because the old Russian maps were just impossible. When the treaty had been done for the boundary between the two, it was just [based on the old Russian maps]. So [the U.S. and Canada] got a body of 24 or so young surveyors, half American half Canadian, and my grandfather was one of the Canadians. The work was [thought to be] very easy. All [my grandfather] had to do was take a big tripod and a heavy camera and several hundred glass plates and climb up a mountain and take a whole panoramic set of views, then climb down the other side of the mountain, cross the river there, take [the equipment] up the next mountain and do the same thing [and so on]; [it must have been] just awful. My grandfather was in what's now Yukon; it was then part of the Northwest Territories. My grandfather was there when gold was discovered. The Dominion Government immediately sent him to Dawson because [rookie miners] got a claim by staking it with the [would-be] mining office and having paced it out and put in stakes literally. Well, these miners were honest [...], but they had no idea of surveying. These [claims] were overlapping and there were fights and everything else, so they had [my grandfather] resurvey all of that. You've heard of Twelve-Foot Davis? A mining claim could be so many feet wide. Twelve-Foot Davis realized that there were two adjoining claims, and each of them was too wide, so he staked the 12 feet that were [impermissible] overlap, and he showed that the others were staked too wide. These were already big working mining claims, so what he staked was a proven source of gold; that's how he got wealthy. Well, that was the sort of thing my grandfather was fixing up. He went into business with these two Englishmen, the Cautley brothers. When my father went up to do a

history of his father, he found the buildings at Dawson. Well, half the buildings were gone, and that one was gone, but there's a picture of J.L. Côté and the Cautley brothers standing in front of their offices there.

Of course, my grandfather soon realized the money wasn't in Dominion Government contracts, and it certainly wasn't in looking for gold; it was in supplying people – [miners with their needs]. My great-grandfather on my mother's side made money being a hardware supplier in Northern Ontario, [whereas Côté and the Cautleys] made their money being surveyors there. Then they came to Edmonton, as I say, and set up business. [Their arrival in] 1903 was just the right time because the [Edmonton] land boom started in 1905. People knew the railway was coming to Northern Alberta, which it did in 1905.

I should just mention that railway line. The Canadian Northern Railway wanted to build a line to Vancouver, [whereas] the Grand Trunk was going to build to Prince Rupert. The Canadian Pacific was already in Vancouver, but there was no route from Central and Northern Alberta to Vancouver, and nobody [else] proposed one. So the Canadian Northern was going to. On their first [attempt], they built [from Edmonton to the] Town of Stony Plain. Then, for competitive reasons [caused by] the Grand Trunk, they didn't take [that line] any further. But that line ran roughly east-west, and it ran from the old EY&P line just a bit west of 124<sup>th</sup> Street to [the Town or Village of] Stony Plain through the western part of Edmonton. It was almost east west but was sloping a bit toward the south as it went further, so [it lay] about 106<sup>th</sup> Avenue. That ran right through, and that's why that part of the Town of Jasper Place was called Canora. It wasn't much of a [rail] line because it only went to the Town of Stony Plain. [...] [Later, after the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk amalgamated], the Canadian National naturally said, "Why do we have this stub line running to Stony Plain when we've got a better Grand Trunk line through Stony Plain?" So they tore up the [old Stony Plain] line west of 143<sup>rd</sup> or 144<sup>th</sup> Street. But I'm sure you've noticed that the survey of so-called North Jasper Place, which is really the [later] Town of Jasper Place, shows that rail line running right through it.

Q: That's interesting because we wondered about that.

JC: And [that rail line to Stony Plain was] earlier than the subdivision plan, so that's why the subdivision plans show it. You ask yourself whether the person who drew up the subdivision plan for west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street allowed for the railway, because the railway is properly shown on his plan, it's no part of the land he's got to subdivide. I think in the case of west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, I think some attention was paid to the railway line; not a lot, but some.

Q: A number of those maps show big blocks of land belonging to the CPR.

JC: Same thing about the Hudson's Bay Company. Let me tell you this story about Rio Terrace. When I was living in Rio Terrace, one of my partners in the law firm – obviously a lawyer – moved from a smaller place in Rio Terrace to a bigger place on Rio Terrace Drive, which slopes down to the river valley. He wasn't going to do the legal work for his own deal, so of course one of us did, and I said I'd do it for him. "Of course," I said, "I won't charge you a fee but I will charge you for any disbursements." Usually, the disbursements on a house deal weren't very much. Back then we were full of practical jokes so, just for him, I did the theoretical perfect job and did a historical search, which means taking the title of the present owner of the land – and it shows on it about what was the old title it comes from – then you call up that [older] title and see what one that comes from and go back [step-by-step] until you get [back to] the patent. The patent is the grant from the King to whoever got the land. It might be a farmer of homesteaded land that's now entitled [to it]. He'd take that [patent] to the Land Titles Office, and they would file it and issue the first title for that piece of land to him. Now you see why it all has to be based on a survey. Well, for my friend in Rio Terrace, I think the original patent was to the Hudson's Bay Company, if I'm not mistaken – some large entity like that, in any event. It recited certain exceptions which were earlier than the patent which I guess must have been in the 1869 transfer of Rupert's Land to the Crown, to Canada. In any event, it gives people the right to portage across his land.

Now you ask, "What's the CPR doing [near Edmonton in old titles]?" Well, people forming railways would borrow some money and hope eventually to get revenues from passengers and freight of course, but the immediate source of funding was always land grants. You read about

that in history books about the CPR, but it's true of all these railways; they would be given a certain percentage, like a quarter maybe, of all the land within x miles on either side of the railway, sometimes not just close to the railway, sometimes hundreds of miles away. Then later on, they could choose which [precise sections] they were. For example, just northwest of downtown in Edmonton was a very large Hudson's Bay Reserve, which they sold in 1912 or '13. That's why you find these scattered blocks or quarter sections or whatever. The railways' idea was that you would intersperse privately-owned land by Hudson's Bay Company or a railway with land which the Crown had and was open for homesteading. And of course, two sections in every township were for school lands as well. That way, a homesteader, if he was successful, he owned a quarter section. But even in those days, a quarter section wasn't really enough to farm, and as machinery got more important, even less, so he would want to buy nearby land. So the first one was free; that was sweat equity. But then [the farmer would] go to the railway, or some other early person, and would buy a [second] quarter from him, and then [a third] quarter. So that's the history of the whole thing. That's why you find them interspersed all over there.

The railways and the Hudson's Bay and so on had land offices [to sell their land holdings and encourage settlement]. I don't know about the Town of Jasper Place, but the City of Edmonton had a land office for a long, long time because most of the land in Edmonton had been taken back for unpaid taxes.

Q: We also noticed on the map the names of the people who were granted title to certain parts, not full sections often.

JC: Quarters usually.

Q: One of them was Charles B. Rouleau. It indicates that he was a judge in Calgary. How would he have obtained that title?



Q: Just bought it from somebody. [It was] right by near where West Edmonton Mall is, sure. When I was in the Court of Appeal, one of my colleagues, Madame Justice Hetherington, got very interested in Rouleau and she did a lot of research on him. The old Court of Appeal building in Calgary we had to abandon suddenly because it turned out a very dangerous lethal mould. Everything's there, the library and everything just left; one of the courtrooms was the Rouleau Room. [It has framed documents about Rouleau]. But Charles Rouleau was from Quebec originally. He was a judge of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories. Even though Alberta and Saskatchewan were created in 1905, it wasn't until 1907 they abolished that court and put up separate courts for Alberta and Saskatchewan. He was heavily involved in the second Riel Rebellion, the one in the 1880s. I think he lived in Battleford then which, at that time I think, was the capital of the Territories. His house was burnt down by the rebels. He sent a telegram to the Minister of Justice saying, "I'm safe but everything I own has been burned; I'm as poor as a church mouse." Then I think he said, "God save the Queen." But yes, he had land [in the Edmonton area], which he bought for speculative purposes. Those judges traveled all over the Northwest Territories holding court, so he would've been used to coming to Edmonton to hold court.

Q: Are you okay to continue?

JC: Oh yes, I'm just fine. I don't think I've yet described township plats, have I? We'll do that when the camera is back.

Q: We're recording again.

JC: Okay. Well, as I understand it, when the surveyors came out working from east to west doing the basic Dominion surveys in the 1880s, the first thing that you would do was run the limits of the townships. Townships are six miles by six miles, in other words 36 sections, because a section is a square mile. At that stage you weren't dividing up the 36 square miles, you were just showing and marking on the land the outer limits of it. The corner of a township

was marked very carefully with a mound and four pits. Even if stakes, [which were originally wood stakes], decayed or were pulled out or something, that was a very distinct sign of man having done something there. A vertical group of townships was called a range, so the end of a legal description is west of the 4<sup>th</sup> or west of the 5<sup>th</sup> meridian. Of course, if you're in Manitoba it's a lower number. Then in one of these [vertical] ranges running up from the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, you would have all these townships. The [14<sup>th</sup>] one here north of the American border is Jasper Avenue here, 101<sup>st</sup> Avenue. Now 101<sup>st</sup> Avenue is nothing very important west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street, because old Stony Plain Road is everything. But 101<sup>st</sup> Avenue, Jasper Avenue, is the [14<sup>th</sup> base line between Townships 52 and 53. Base lines are about every 24 miles and correction lines are parallel to them about 12 miles away]. And 142<sup>nd</sup> Street is the boundary between two sections – Carleton Street, they called it – or 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. It is a statutory road allowance. Now 149<sup>th</sup> Street I think is a half section [to the west] if I'm not mistaken – seven blocks. I don't think it's a mile, I think that's a half mile. So 142<sup>nd</sup> Street and 101<sup>st</sup> Avenue is very important, and 101<sup>st</sup> is. You'll notice that these subdivision plans never cross the boundary of a section, let alone a township. These first township surveys are plats, that you'd think would be just a square with four sides and nothing in the middle. But [surveyors] would fill in in the middle what they thought worth mentioning. There would be not only some drawings but a line or two of notes about the general quality of the land like, "It's marshy or it's hillside or it's rocky or it's grassland or it's covered in tamarack," that sort of thing. In addition, any significant streams or rivers or whatever, they'd show. If there was a well-established trail they would show it, just roughly – not by surveying – just a little rough sketch. If there were signs of people's occupation, like a house, a building, a fenced area, a cultivated field or that sort of thing, they would show it. You showed me the Luxton survey at the bottom of one of those pages, the one that covers the area west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street and a bit east too, [...] it certainly shows that what later became the Town of Jasper Place was in considerable part a marsh. That's what MacGregor's *History of Edmonton* says too.

Q: Hence the constant flooding.

JC: Well, you know in Edmonton one other streetcar line that reached a dead end and didn't make money was the McKernan Lake one. They never took it further north. Oldtimers like my father would call it McKernan Lake because, until WWII, it often flooded in the spring. It wasn't much of a lake, pretty shallow, but nevertheless it flooded. So things like that were a problem. I once saw some of my grandfather's old incidental papers from the time he'd been a Cabinet Minister – nothing worth keeping – but he was always talking about developing land in Northern Alberta by draining it. Drought was not the problem in Northern Alberta, it was drainage. Everything was swamp or muskeg.

There is a news story today saying that people are complaining of smoke around the Henday between 111<sup>th</sup> and 115<sup>th</sup> Avenues, and there is muskeg burning there. The fire department can't figure out how to put it out; they've been there a number of times. They're asking for outside help and [advice]. I have known this side of 149<sup>th</sup> Street a tiny muskeg fire. It seemed very small and totally harmless, but it burnt 365 days a year with smoke coming out. In the winter there'd be snow and then a hole in it and a whisp of smoke coming out.

Q: Approximately where would that have been?

JC: Very close to here. So muskeg fires used to be very well known problems at one time.

Building railways, [good grief]. I'll tell you one more story about my grandfather. The last constituency that he sat for for quite a number of years was Grouard. At one point, Grouard was going to be the centre of Northern Alberta and would have six banks and I don't know what else – I've seen the [community letterhead] – one of these blighted dreams. But [...] the Liberal government was defeated in 1921 [...] [but he] was re-elected as an MLA, so maybe it was when he was appointed to the Senate two years later, I don't know. In any event, he wanted to tour his constituency and say goodbye to everybody. I don't think it was the Northern Alberta Railway yet; I think it was still the Edmonton Dunvegan and British Columbia Railroad, which one of my uncles told me people always said that ED&BC stood for Ever Dangerous and Badly Constructed. People used to like to take abbreviations for railways or airlines and come up with

things like that. [...] So [...] train service was pretty intermittent, so [the railway rented] a large railway automobile that had wheels to go on the rails. The [axle width] of an actual automobile is pretty close to 4'8.5", which is standard gauge. This just had train wheels fitted on it. They had a railway driver. The Senator, or the ex-MLA, and his wife – my grandmother – and my father – the oldest boy – [were all along]. It was summertime and they were coming along the rails heading north toward one of the towns in the Peace River country, I don't remember which one. There was a railyard there down below, but they were coming down the hill. [...] People didn't keep proper fences, and that was a constant problem in the prairies, so some cows were around the bend lying on the rail line. They ran over a cow, and it spent a long time groaning and mooing and dying under this automobile. It was a nice summer night, not that serious. But here's the thing. Down below [the hill] in the yard is an engine moving back and forth switching cars and making up a train, and he was going to come up the hill towards them. There were no block signals or anything in those days. So the dangerous way was behind them: a train might come behind them, and that [would be] going downgrade, so you [had] to send somebody back two miles with a red lantern. The driver of this went there and maybe he took my grandfather with him, I don't know. But my grandmother and my father were left to guard the front, because it's uphill and would be easier for a train to stop and you only have to go one mile ahead [with a lantern]. My grandmother was always nervous and worried about things. For example, she never liked the bridge over Jasper Avenue at 109<sup>th</sup> Street where you went to the CP station from the High Level Bridge. She didn't like to be going under it in the streetcar when a train went over; she didn't think it was strong enough to carry a train, even though it'd been carrying trains for years. So, [this evening], every time the switch engine down in the valley moved back or forth, she said, "Oh, now the train's coming, the train's coming," and got all wound up. Of course, it never was, it was just switching. Eventually the train chuffed up and stopped, and they told them what [the situation] was and they had no problem. The ED&BC used to derail regularly, and their engines carried a hook on the side, re-railers, which were sort of a curving channel, and you could put that in the right place and run the engine forward and it would go on this and back on the track again. Why did they derail so often? Well, if it was muskeg-y and not a very good road bed and things were jumping up and down, that was part of

it. But in addition, if the ties and the spikes weren't well laid, then after a while they'd get loose, and the two rails would come apart.

Q: What kind of jobs did your dad do after he left the Jesuit College?

JC: When that happened, the two eldest boys were yanked out. The Jesuits said, "We'll keep the boys here and there'll be no tuition." So the younger one stayed in college, or I think the youngest wasn't old enough. So that's fine, and they did well. The second one, my uncle Paul, got into the coal business and married into a French-Canadian family in Alberta who were very successful and were in the Coal Branch and [Edmonton businesses]. So that ended up okay. The next one, Ernest, went through university and law school, and he worked in the summers as a radio announcer on CBC. He was the purser on the first ship that brought the lumber in 1938 that built the old town of Yellowknife, for example. He was a lawyer briefly and then he went into the Canadian army and became a colonel during the war. He's the one who was widely written up a few years ago when, at the age of 102 or so, he was attacked and almost murdered in his apartment in Ottawa. But he outsmarted the fellow and through that, they solved the fact that the guy had committed three other murders. Then he died shortly after that. After the war, [Ernest] was a diplomat, and then he was federal deputy minister in three different departments, and then he became the Canadian ambassador to Finland. Quite remarkable. The next [brother], Pierre, got a doctorate in geology from McGill and he had been in the Air Force during the war, in Coastal Command. Then he was with Imperial Oil and then Esso and then volunteering later all his life. He lived in Calgary and in several places in Europe. The youngest boy, Jacques, was with the civil service all along.

For my father, they wanted a secure job for him, so they got a job for him with the brand new Canadian National Railway. First, he went to MacTavish Business College and did a few months learning shorthand and typing. The stenographers in those days were almost always women, but the railways had times and places where you couldn't get a woman to work, so they needed male stenographers. His first job was in the old Shatner Block just north of the tracks on 97<sup>th</sup> Street or 96<sup>th</sup> Street. He was the secretary to the chief dispatcher. These were very serious

telegrams because they were changing train orders, and you have head-on collisions if you don't get those right, as Diefenbaker learned. [My father] said one day he typed up 80 of these train orders to be telegraphed.

Then after a while they had him working in Camrose. He worked there for the CN for quite a long time. The train [schedules] were such that on the CN you couldn't get back to Edmonton on the weekends. My mother had done a number of things, teaching and so on, in Saskatchewan. She'd been to the University of Toronto twice. She was then the librarian at the normal school in Camrose, and they were both boarding in the same place. Hotels didn't get enough commercial travelers then to make a go of it, so Mrs. Majake in Camrose turned the top floor of her hotel into boarding. It was mostly Normal School people, so they'd all get together on the weekends as well. One of my teachers in high school described the same thing – very collegial. When my mother had taught high school in Weyburn, one of her students that she taught English to was W.O. Mitchell. Later on in those days he was living in Camrose then too, so he knew them quite well. Then a professor at U of A knew both families and he introduced my mother and father, so [then] they got married. My father's family obviously were Catholic, my mother had been brought up United Church, but that was fine. Then after a while my father was transferred to Edmonton. He worked for the CNR for 60 years. That includes the time he was on leave in the Air Force – sixty years.

After my parents were married in 1938, they were living in apartments in the old family home on 107<sup>th</sup> Street [...]. My mother wasn't that keen on living with her mother-in-law, so my father came out and found the last vacant lot for sale in this neighbourhood, and bought it. That was going to cost \$300. He had no \$300 but my mother did; she'd been saving her earnings during the Depression, so that bought the lot. My father went to ask – I think H.M.E. Evans or Milton Martin – about getting a mortgage to build a house, "Mortgage? With a Social Credit government here, they're trying to stop mortgages; nobody will give a mortgage, forget that." One of my father's favourite sayings was, "There's more than one way to skin a cat." The other was, "Rome was not not built in a day." So those two were put together [this time]. He went to see Hayward, one of the big lumber companies, and told them his problem. The guy said, "You say you work for the railway?" "Yes." "How long have you worked for them?" "Oh, well, 14

years" [...]. So the guy says, "Oh, well, that's okay. Now that lot you're going to build on, you own it?" "Yes." "Any mortgage on it?" "No." Well, in those days, if there was a mortgage you didn't get [...] the duplicate certificate of title. The guy says, "You bring me your duplicate certificate of title and show me, and I'll sell you some lumber on credit, and we'll immediately file a mechanic's lien against your title." The mechanic's lien was a poor-man's mortgage. Very ingenious.

They hired a horse scraper to put in a basement. I don't know how the foundation got laid; it was only a half basement. They hired a framing crew for half a day to frame it, and then [almost all] the rest of the work my mother and father did, pounding a lot of nails. Then they weren't quite complete and came to the point where they needed to spend some more money. My father goes to a bank and says, "Can't you lend me some money?" The [banker] says, "To build a house, absolutely not, and we can't lend on mortgage anyway." But, he said, "The Dominion Government have a scheme under which they will guarantee a small home improvement loan." So he said, "An inspector will come and he has to see not only that the house is capable of being improved but he has to see you're living and eating there." So my father made sure there was a frying pan and the stove was connected and there was a bed and so on. But he was sleeping in the bedroom upstairs and the floor was only half there, so if he'd gotten out on the wrong side of the bed, he'd have fallen through to the living room. But the inspector [came and] said it was fine, and they got the loan. The house was finished, although just tar-papered. They moved in Labour Day weekend 1939, the same weekend that Hitler moved into Poland. On Monday or Tuesday morning, no lumber or carpenters or anything were available. The Dominion Government had all that, but [my parents] were just in [their new home]. But they felt so embarrassed. One of my aunts said it was a tarpaper shack, which just shamed my mother to no end; but it was good and livable. The neighbours to the west had nice houses; the one [the other side was unimpressive].

The one two doors down, my father found the woman living there, a married couple with children. He'd grown up across the street from her; they'd known each other all their lives, so they lived almost next door to each other most of their whole lives. She died recently, just short of her 109<sup>th</sup> birthday. When my uncle, the war hero, was having his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, I went to his

party, and I brought a card from, I said, "An old girlfriend of yours." I was referring to this woman. And I said, "And I mean old." I said, "My uncle will try to tell you that his living to 100 has something to do with clean living, but it has nothing to do with that. This is proof that it was something in the water on 107<sup>th</sup> Street."

Okay, so back to my father. In the spring of 1940, [my parents] were out putting shingles on the house like crazy, covering up the tarpaper, starting on the respectable side of the house. Then they got it all painted and laid some concrete steps and so on. Then when that was [quite complete] my father decided he wanted to go into the Air Force; he'd always been interested in aviation. Here's where the Liberal party patronage came in. He hadn't finished his what we call Grade 8 with the Jesuit College. Political strings were pulled and he got a commission in the Air Force, which on the face of it, was a disgrace. But in fact, my father was an intelligent man and always interested in history, and he really should've been a history professor. He was a natural-born teacher. Simply because he was almost 30 (I suppose by then he was a little over 30; he always wanted combat and they wouldn't put him in, he was too old) they made him an instructor, a Link instructor, flight simulator. When I was a kid I thought the Link, one of those machines, was just the most marvellous thing I'd ever seen, better even than a railway locomotive. So [my father] was very successful in that. He got two promotions. He ended the war as a flight lieutenant, which is the equivalent of captain in the Army. Then at the end of the war he was offered a job with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to go around Europe with a driver and find the local graves of Canadian airmen. My uncle, who was still over there then said, "Don't come." He said, "The closest you can bring your wife and child would be to London or somewhere in England." Conditions in England were awful. Soap was scarce, hot water was scarce. And he said it was unthinkable to go to the Continent. So my father went back to the railway, and he was the staff records clerk in the general office outside the Superintendent's [office upstairs in the old C.N.R. station].

Then later he was put in the employment office, and that was a lovely time. He had a good boss and he was just excellent for interviewing people and all that sort of thing. They administered objective tests and everything else. Then when I was halfway through high school, he was transferred to Montreal. Montreal wasn't so good because it cost a lot. Living here [in



Edmonton] in a simple little house you owned yourself – no mortgage and all that – was pretty inexpensive. The money didn't go well in Montreal even though my mother was also working as a librarian. Both of them had perfected the art of being underpaid. But [my father] kept on, and ultimately, he ended up in the Headquarters Library in Montreal doing historical research and summarizing [old documents]. Col. Stevens' two-volume history of the CNR thanks him in the introduction. The autographed copy from Col. Stevens to my father says, "I should have named you as a co-author." But my father used to [revel in railway history]. You could mention some obscure set of initials and he would say, "Oh, that's the such- and-such Valley, Railroad. That's in Nova Scotia, that went into the CN," and so on. He knew it all.

He wrote some things for the CN Magazine, one of them the history of the silk trains. That was fascinating. The CN was the railway in North America that got silk each year to the New York market before anybody else. It's an amazing story. The CN was the first railway in North America, I think, to get into diesel locomotives, and they couldn't get the proper grade of diesel oil; it would jam things, so eventually that failed. But they once did a [test] run of a diesel locomotive from Vancouver to Montreal in just a few hours. It was incredible. He said that they spiked all the switches hours beforehand, and this thing would stop just long enough to throw out the empty fuel containers, get other tins of fuel on, and they'd take off. He said he was out at the Calder yards watching, he saw that thing stop and it was there just a couple of minutes and it was going again, exhaust trailing flames out of the back of it. He said by the time it got to the yard limit, it was doing over 40 and [the speed was] climbing all the time.

So [my father] never earned much money but he was a happy man. Ironically, those old, fixed-benefit pensions the railway had – a pension plan. He'd started out that it was going to be just a fraction of his salary, and his salary was always too low, but then the CN pension fund had an enormous surplus. The calculation of these things was very unscientific. They never allowed for a shortage or a surplus in all these agreements; it's just insane. But Canada had strong railway unions, and they negotiated to split the difference, split the surplus in this pension fund between the railway and the pensioners. So my father was getting more as a pension than he had as a salary. We're not talking about large sums at all, but he could get by on that.

Q: What are your memories of the time when there were lumberyards out here? Do you have recollections of that?

JC: No, I don't. It's only by reading that I have realized that the one in the Town of Jasper Place was where later there was a lumberyard; and then very briefly I think, W.W. Arcade took it over. You know what happened to W.W. Arcade? There's a reported judgment about that. Very successful business, very successful. The family had a falling out. They were just split, they couldn't agree on anything; I read this in [the] judgment. So the company was paralyzed, they couldn't make a decision. The courts [...] just ordered it liquidated, put in a liquidator and split it all up. It's the only company I've ever heard of being liquidated that ended up with a surplus for the common shareholders. So that's what happened to that.

But the [lumberyard] that my father negotiated the lumber with, I think it was one of the two big yards in Edmonton, I'm not sure which.

Q: I did look up Hayward Lumber, and it was over on 75<sup>th</sup> Street and 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

JC: I'm vague on that. There's a house in Glenora – a red and white house at Ravine Drive and 135<sup>th</sup> Street maybe – that was the last house built there before the war, and that guy was one of the big lumber companies.

Q: Did you attend high school in Jasper Place?

JC: Well, I'll tell you my schools. There was a big fuss about where to put kids from this area and whether they should go to the Edmonton Public School Board's Jasper Place School on 148<sup>th</sup> Street or whether they should go to New Glenora. There was some discussion at some point and argument with the school superintendent. I went to New Glenora on 102<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, [...] then I went to brand-new Grovenor for three years, then I went to brand-new Westminster for three years. Then I had two years at Westglen and then I was, for grade 12, at the brand-new Ross Shepherd. So I'm part of the first graduating class of Ross Shepherd.

Q: So many new schools – that’s a reflection of how the community was growing.

JC: And you know, Glenora School looked old; when I started, it was six years old. But it looked old. It had the old-fashioned oiled floors and the cast iron desks hooked together and so on. But we couldn’t believe how modern Grovenor looked in 1949. Everything nice and new, and it was 1 to 9, it was a junior high as well. Old Jasper Place School on 148<sup>th</sup> Street – remember this is Edmonton Public School Board – looked old. I’d walked around and knew where it was, but the only time I was in it was for the federal general election when my mother went to vote there and I walked along with her.

Q: So did the children from the Town of Jasper Place go to the Jasper Place School?

JC: [...] This is more complicated. I’ll tell you this much. The first [little] rural School District was partly east of 149<sup>th</sup> and partly west, but this is when the City of Edmonton went [only] to 142<sup>nd</sup> Street. The rural municipality was, I think, the Municipal District of Spruce Grove. Then in 1913, the City limits moved to 149<sup>th</sup> Street and they split that School District; the part west of 149<sup>th</sup> that didn’t have any school in it stayed in the M.D., and the Edmonton Public School Board took over the school and the debt and the awful building. Quite soon a contract was made so that the students living west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street could attend without charge Edmonton Public School Board’s Jasper Place School. That lasted for a long time. Then there was a gap in that for a while – I think 1935 to 1940 – because they had by then built a school [on 156<sup>th</sup> Street] (where you are now in the Orange building). But then, within a few years, they reverted to that arrangement again – [accepting rural students] – because the number of kids west of 149<sup>th</sup> Street was mushrooming.

Q: In some neighbourhoods, after the Second World War CMHC was expediting the building of housing for returning soldiers with a classic two or three designs. Was that happening in this neighbourhood as well?

JC: A bit, not very much. Go over to 138<sup>th</sup> Street and some of those look like those CMHC houses.

You can learn a lot about a neighbourhood just by walking around looking at the houses. But the problem is, infilling has now changed it. For example, 138<sup>th</sup> Street, the block just south of Westminster School where I used to walk by four times a day, there are only about two houses that haven't been at least improved, renovated or put a new front on or something like that, so it's getting harder to check that.

But there's another significance to CMHC, and that is that, as I told you, Social Credit had put in various restrictions in the legislation to make it very difficult to foreclose on a mortgage. Well one thing that Alberta and Saskatchewan did [was to] put in an intermediate category where you could foreclose and take back the house or sell the house and so on [so the owner] lost his house, but you couldn't collect any deficiency from [him]. In most places in the world, when you borrow say \$200,000 to help you build your house, not only do they have a mortgage that allows them to take back [that] house but, if the house won't sell for enough – it sells for say \$150,000 and there's a \$50,000 shortfall – you still have to pay, and they can come and seize your other assets. When mortgage lending started again, it started pretty slowly because the lenders didn't like that. But CMHC, as you say, built houses. They also guaranteed mortgages. For a long time, mortgage insurance, which is insurance to the creditor, wasn't done privately; CMHC was the first one to do that. They then amended the Alberta legislation [after the war] to say that you could have personal liability on the deficiency if it was a CMHC mortgage. Then the banks were allowed to lend on mortgages for the first time – aside from what I told you about home improvement loans [...]. They were allowed to lend on mortgage if it was a CMHC guaranteed mortgage. So that way, the shareholders of the bank wouldn't be at risk.

Canadian history had shown that in good times, banks make huge amounts of money because they can lend their money at a high rate of interest – maybe eight percent – but they'll pay one or two or three percent on savings accounts. But when the hard times come, not only is cash short but you can't collect on those big mortgages. A bank would lend and say, "This house and

lot are worth \$5,000 and we're only lending \$2,000, so we're safe." Well, then a Depression comes and you can't sell that [house] for \$2,000. In theory you can, but nobody will buy, nobody's got the cash. So loans on land were what were making Canadian banks fail. The Canadians learned that lesson before the Americans did. [...] In the 1930s, there were two Canadian banks that got into trouble. One of them was the Weyburn Security Bank, a little bank but federally incorporated. The feds just told [one big bank], "You take it over," and they did. There's another one I just ran across recently and I can't remember which one it was, but I was just astonished that the same thing happened – the feds just said to one of the big banks, "You take that over." [For years], the last Canadian bank to fail was the Home Bank in 1923, until the CCB and the [Northland Bank] failed, which I was involved in too. So Canadian banks were safe in the '30s, which American banks sure as heck weren't. But the Americans, from before 1800, developed the strongest dislike of branch banking. Somebody gave me a cheque blank from the Bank of England – not the one in London – the town of England, Arkansas, a little one-branch bank. One-branch banks. That's why when Roosevelt took office [in 1933] there were thousands of insolvent banks.

Q: What have been the changes in the neighbourhood that make you feel less safe?

JC: I don't have firsthand information – like Will Rogers said, "All I know is what I read in the newspapers" – but I have just read about too many horrible, either fatal or near-fatal attacks, of total strangers on or near Stony Plain Road in broad daylight in the middle of a weekday. Back about [the 2010s], a very senior officer of the Edmonton police said there is nowhere in Edmonton that is truly safe after 10:30 p.m. That's what we all thought, that's what we were brought up to think, "Oh, you don't go out after dark or late at night. What were you doing out at 10 o'clock at night?", that sort of thing, "Honest folk are abed at this hour." But when it's a weekday in broad daylight? The Flag Shop that we know about that's now further south – I'd often meant to go in there and buy a flag – but in more recent years before they moved, or I didn't know they'd moved, I thought, "I'm not going there; it's a dangerous area." 100<sup>th</sup> Avenue felt a bit better, but Stony Plain Road, no. [And], as soon as you gum up traffic, you were really

in danger. A friend of mine from the law firm was mugged once downtown a little north of Jasper Avenue and a little east of 100<sup>th</sup> Street. The police told him that the trouble was the street was temporarily closed because they were repaving the street or something. The sidewalks were all open and he'd been walking back to his car after meeting with friends. [The police] said muggers don't like a street with traffic on it, because somebody behind them that they can't see in a vehicle can see what's going on. Of course, once we all got cellphones, then anybody can call 911. In the days before cellphones, somebody might stop and go to a payphone or something, or it could be a police car behind [the mugger]. In fact, policemen walking the beat know which side of the street to walk on, and that all ties in with this. So [the police told my friend], "You got mugged because they knew there was no automobile traffic, and therefore the chance of a policeman coming along was very slight". So there's not much foot traffic on Stony Plain Road east of 142<sup>nd</sup> Street, but maybe it's not too bad, I don't know. But when you cut off vehicle traffic or make it so awful as it is on Stony Plain Road [west of 142<sup>nd</sup> Street], you're just asking for trouble. Some of these [offenders] may not be well mentally. You wonder. Sometimes one or two of them, you wonder if maybe there's some grudge or fight going on that somebody doesn't want to tell the police about. But in some of these cases, it patently isn't. The saddest case was when there was that all-you-can-eat restaurant just north of the Safeway at about 151<sup>st</sup> Street and Stony Plain Road. An older couple who didn't have much money – and it was their anniversary and they decided to treat themselves to a luncheon out; it was a nice sunny day and so on; it was a weekday – they went there and had a nice lunch. They're walking out going to their car, and some guy comes and stabs the [old] man to death. Total stranger.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

JC: I [can think of only one thing, really]: I like the idea of helping people own their own home by building it gradually in stages and building things as they have the money to do so. I traveled in Greece a bit and I travelled in Turkey a bit, and there's a lot of that sort of thing. There'll be the skeleton of a house and only two stories are built, and you can tell they're planning to build

two more stories partly because, as the grandchildren get older, they'll have a big united family home there. A lot of people in Canada are home improvement fans, they like building things. [...] That uncle who was a diplomat and the Deputy Minister, when he was living in Ottawa, [...] finished the attic of his house himself to create more bedrooms. I fear that some of our zoning and building laws and building codes and so on don't help that. I once talked to a City inspector and I said, "I suppose you have problems with people wanting to do their own wiring and so on." He said, "No," he said, "the people who do that are very cautious, they read up on it, they're extremely concerned," he said, "usually they're meticulous." He said, "It's cheap, sloppy or dishonest contractors who are the danger."

[ END ]