

**NO STRAIGHT LINES:
Local Leadership and the Path from
Government to Governance in Small Cities**
Edited by Terry Kading

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The Tranquille Oral History Project: Reflections on a Community-Engaged Research Initiative in Kamloops, British Columbia

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Introduction

In recent years, the field of public history has grown significantly in Canada. Although there are ongoing debates about the scope and purpose of public history, most historians agree that the term refers to “historical practice carried out of, by, and for the public” (Dick 2009, 7). Public history encompasses a wide range of practices, including the work of preserving heritage sites, using technology to bring the past to life, and commemorating local historical figures and events. In this chapter, I reflect on the development of one public history initiative in Kamloops, British Columbia: the Tranquille Oral History Project (TOHP). Established for a two-year period beginning in June 2012, the TOHP involved representatives from private industry, the non-profit sector, and the university. Although the project benefited from the support of the university, it was—like many



FIGURE 6.1. “Tranquille Sanatorium,” photograph by Willian George Lothian, 1920. Wikimedia Commons, Canadian Copyright Collection, British Library, image HS85-10-38188.

other collaborations discussed in this collection—primarily led and sustained by members of the wider community. The TOHP reflected a broader interest in heritage preservation and restoration across British Columbia and Canada, but was grounded in the distinct history and culture of the small city of Kamloops. Despite varied backgrounds, participants in the project shared a mutual interest in Tranquille, a site of historic significance located west of Kamloops. This public history initiative offers a useful lens on certain challenges common to collaborative research, particularly that which involves multiple stakeholders with different motivations, priorities, and expectations. Such challenges were, however, outweighed by the rewards of a project that helped not only to create and share new knowledge about Tranquille’s complex past but also to enhance student engagement and establish connections between the university and wider community.

Located on the north shore of Kamloops Lake, Tranquille has a rich and varied history. Not only was the area an important meeting place for early Aboriginal communities, it also became significant to gold seekers during the 1850s. Tranquille has a long agricultural history, and was the site of the Cooney and Fortune homesteads during the 19th century. In 1907, it became home to the King Edward VII Sanatorium, established to treat tuberculosis patients; the location was chosen, in part, due to the favourable climate of the region, an important consideration in early tuberculosis treatment and care (Harris 2010; Norton 1999). The facility closed its doors in 1957 and was reopened in 1958 as the Tranquille Medical Institution, a training school for intellectually and developmentally disabled people (Spark 2012). In 1983, the training school employed

Formal Network Linkages

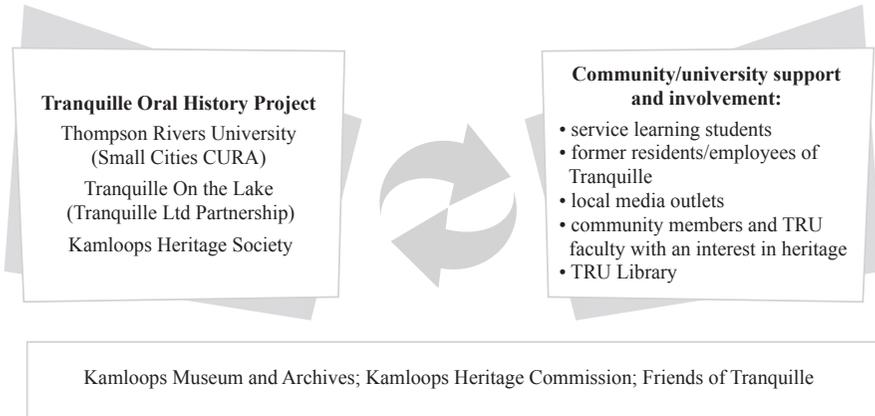


FIGURE 6.2. Tranquille Oral History Project Network by Tina Block. Design by Moneca Jantzen, Daily Designz.

approximately 600 people, many of whom lived on the site (Purvey). The school was important not only to the students and their families but to the wider Kamloops economy. Given its importance, it is not surprising that many Kamloopsians raised their voices in protest when the institution closed down in 1984. The closure of the Tranquille Medical Institution was not an isolated event, but rather part of a nationwide movement to deinstitutionalize mental health facilities and reintegrate patients into the broader community. The closure of Tranquille was carried out in an unexpectedly abrupt and rushed manner, which caused dismay and concern among residents, workers, and the wider community (Purvey). In a recent interview, a former employee of the Medical Institution reflected on the closure: “I didn’t want to leave. I thought I was going to be there till sixty-five, you know? I never ever dreamed that they would ever close it” (C. Anderson,¹ personal communication with Francesca Lucia, July 5, 2012). During the 1990s, Tranquille was purchased by private interests who planned to turn the area into a high-end, Italian-themed resort named Padova City. Such plans were soon derailed, and the site remained vacant for several years. Following the closure of the training school in

the mid-1980s, the site gradually deteriorated as the gardens became overgrown and the buildings dilapidated. Over time, Tranquille (or Padova, as it was and is known to many) came to be associated with trespassing, partying, and vandalism. A cursory internet search reveals that the site also became popular among ghost seekers, and gained a reputation as one of the most haunted places in Canada.

In 2005, the new owners of the site, British Columbia Wilderness Tours, put plans in motion for the establishment of a “sustainable agri-community that combines an urban farm and working waterfront with a mixed use village community” (Tranquille on the Lake 2012, 1). In the years that followed, the developers of the proposed community of “Tranquille on the Lake” (TOL) engaged in ongoing conversations with municipal officials, sought environmental assessments, and consulted with the wider community.² Kamloops residents took advantage of such consultations and made their voices heard. As many of the contributions to this volume make clear, the small city of Kamloops does not lack for community engagement. According to Lon Dubinsky (2006), Kamloops is distinguished by a “culture of participation” (86) that extends into several realms, including that of heritage. “Kamloops is little more than 100 years old,” Dubinsky notes, “but for a relatively young place it is very conscious of its heritage” (90). Such consciousness is evident in the existence of a thriving museum, two local heritage societies, an active Heritage Commission, and ongoing community support for activities such as heritage fairs.

Given this broad-based interest in heritage, as well as the more specific attachment of many Kamloopsians to the Tranquille site, it is not surprising that residents of the city urged Tranquille on the Lake to protect and preserve the site’s heritage. Through consultations with the community, it became clear to the developers that it would be neither possible nor desirable to disassociate present-day Tranquille from its unique past. Many of the original sanatorium buildings are still standing, and the developers were open about their commitment to honouring this built heritage. In an interview, TOL development manager Tim McLeod detailed efforts to incorporate “the history directly into the development plan. Interpretive signs throughout the development will give passers-by bites of relevant information, and buildings are being renovated to preserve glimpses of the site’s history” (Spark 2012, 20). Tranquille’s rich past lives on, not only

in the run-down buildings, historic gardens, and well-worn pathways of the site but in the memories of the people who lived, worked, and visited there. The significance of these memories very quickly became apparent to McLeod, who “has long been getting calls and emails from people around the world who had a connection with Tranquille’s past” (Spark 2012, 18). Though less tangible than buildings, memories of Tranquille are central to understanding its history, and were the focus of the Tranquille Oral History Project.

As activity at Tranquille has increased over the past several years, so too has storytelling about the area. Many people have expressed great interest in sharing their memories as well as their Tranquille-related photographs, artifacts, and memorabilia. Recognizing the importance of this oral and material heritage, McLeod approached the Kamloops Heritage Society (KHS) for expertise and assistance. Representatives from the KHS were keen to get involved and, together with McLeod, invited other organizations such as Thompson Rivers University (TRU) to come on board. As a faculty member in history at TRU, I was drawn to a project that not only fit nicely with my research and teaching interests in British Columbia history but seemed ideal for engaging students in the practice of public history.³

At early meetings, it was clear that we all shared a sense of the significance of Tranquille’s history, wide-ranging as it is, but there were various thoughts on how best to capture, preserve, and disseminate that history. These initial, exploratory meetings resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed in June 2012, establishing a two-year research collaboration between the Small Cities Community-University Research Alliance (CURA, a research unit based in Thompson Rivers University), Tranquille Limited Partnership (on behalf of Tranquille on the Lake), and the Kamloops Heritage Society. The MOU states that collaborators agreed to the following:

- To work together on projects that document, study, and archive local history research—especially oral histories related to Tranquille
- To work toward the creation and maintenance of a ‘Tranquille Interpretive Centre’ (a physical space

located on the Tranquille site as a community educational resource)

- To create opportunities for student research experience
- To seek further partnership opportunities through external grants. (MOU 2012, 3)

As indicated in the MOU, one of the larger objectives of this initiative was the establishment of an interpretive centre—an archival and educational space—on the grounds. At early meetings, it was agreed that while this should be a long-term goal, our most immediate objective should be to record and archive the memories and stories of “Tranquillians”⁴ themselves (Youds 2013, June 10). Although not formally part of the MOU, other organizations, such as the Kamloops Heritage Commission and the Kamloops Museum and Archives, participated in efforts to define the project and set it in motion. The collaborators agreed that as the project moved forward, they would encourage other “stakeholders with common interests” to join (MOU 2012, 2). Keeping in mind the longer-term objective of establishing an interpretive centre, our goal during this initial, two-year collaboration was to conduct, transcribe, and archive oral histories of Tranquille.

Tranquille on the Lake is not unique in incorporating heritage preservation and restoration directly into its development plan. Across British Columbia, several former provincial institutions have been remade into housing developments, and have retained aspects of that institutional heritage.⁵ For instance, in 1995, a townhouse development was established on the site of the former Provincial Industrial School in Vancouver. In that case, many of the original buildings were rehabilitated and restored, and new construction was made compatible with the “Spanish Mission Revival” architectural style of the original 1914 structure (Dewhirst Lessard Architects 2009). Similarly, the Prince of Wales Fairbridge Farm School at Cowichan Station, originally established in 1935 as a school for underprivileged British children, was purchased by developers in the 1970s. Now a residential area, Fairbridge includes many of the original Farm School buildings, and the Fairbridge Chapel Heritage Society plays

a key role in administering and maintaining this built heritage (Fairbridge Canada 2017; Vancouver Island Beyond Victoria 2017).

In addition, over the past few years, the large housing development of Victoria Hill has been gradually taking shape on the site of the former Provincial Lunatic Asylum in New Westminster. Established in 1878, the asylum was renamed the Provincial Hospital for the Insane in 1897, and Woodlands School for the Developmentally Disabled in 1950. The institution closed in 1996 and was purchased by Onni Group of Companies in 2003. While many of the original buildings were destroyed by a fire in 2008, a few of the smaller buildings that survived the fire were restored. When it came time to determine the fate of the last remaining major building on the site—the Tower portion of Centre Block—conflict erupted. While the city initially approved plans to restore the Tower, this decision was reversed in 2011 in response to the demand of former patients that the building be demolished “in order to assist in their healing process” (Spitale to Wright and Members of Council 2009, 2). Over the past several years, countless stories of physical, mental, and sexual abuse at Woodlands have surfaced; for the survivors of such abuse, the Woodlands Tower represented not an opportunity for heritage preservation but a site of deep, irrevocable hurts (Hall 2011). The decision to demolish Woodlands Tower suggests the extent to which heritage developments depend on community support and are grounded in specific historical contexts. The “development of heritage and the promotion of heritage sites,” Paul Shackel (2011) aptly notes, “are essentially political acts” (2). To date, there have not been any public claims of abuse at Tranquille (Purvey). Most Tranquillians have not only supported but actively encouraged efforts to preserve the institution’s heritage. Although the Tranquille development is not unique in its incorporation of heritage, such incorporation was and is made possible, in part, by wider community support and the distinctive history of the institution.

Like other initiatives discussed in this collection, the TOHP involved various stakeholders with distinct motivations for participating. The project was propelled by the countless individuals who, from the outset, expressed their eagerness to share memories of Tranquille. Early on, the developers learned of the strong emotional attachment that many people, both within and outside of Kamloops, have to the Tranquille area. Recognizing the importance of these personal histories, the TOL

development manager approached the Kamloops Heritage Society (KHS) with a request that the society become the “gatekeeper” of Tranquille’s oral and material heritage (Spark 2012, 20). The KHS is a non-profit organization with a mission of “preserving the past for the future” (MOU 2012, 2); KHS members thus had a distinct motivation for joining this collaborative project. With their focus on preserving heritage buildings and artifacts, KHS members welcomed the opportunity to take on both the oral history and archival components of the Tranquille project.

While the TOHP emerged in response to the needs and desires of the community, it was also driven, in part, by self-interest on the part of the developers and academics (Dubinsky 2006). The significance of Tranquille’s historic ties are acknowledged in the TOL neighbourhood plan (TOL 2012), which lists “heritage recognition” as one of the development’s guiding principles: “The Tranquille On the Lake property has a rich history of uses including First Nations hunting and fishing activities, ranching, farming, gold mining, and several provincially significant health institutions. Tranquille On the Lake will respect previous uses and peoples who are part of the site’s heritage in a meaningful and sustainable manner” (22). Of course, TOL is a business venture, and the commitment to heritage is likely motivated, in part, by an understanding that such a commitment will enhance the appeal of the proposed development. As well, the developers presumably recognize that the success of their venture partially depends on the extent to which they can nurture and maintain a positive relationship with the wider community. While some stakeholders see Tranquille primarily as a business venture and others see it, firstly, as a heritage site, TRU CURA faculty see it as a place rich with research possibilities. Given the importance of its relationship with Kamloops, Tranquille fits nicely with the CURA focus on small cities. More generally, community partnerships such as the TOHP appeal to faculty concerned to make their research more relevant and impactful both within and outside academia. While this is not a new concern, scholars are under increasing pressure to demonstrate the relevance and impact of their research in order to secure external funding, tenure, and promotion.

As a specialist in British Columbia history with an interest in local history and experiential learning, I saw the Tranquille project as an opportunity to offer a unique, hands-on research experience to undergraduate

students.⁶ Given that it was based in the community, the project seemed an ideal endeavour for undergraduate service learning. According to Ginny Ratsoy (2008), service learning “is experiential learning that actively engages students in projects that connect them to a community and, significantly, requires them to reflect upon that engagement” (2). Although they differ somewhat across institutions, service learning courses typically include both an experiential and reflective component. Service learners receive course credit (on a pass/fail basis) for their work with community organizations, which can involve a range of creative, administrative, or other types of service. Service learning is not reducible to volunteer work, as students are required to critically reflect upon the meaning and impact of the experience within their own lives and the wider community (Ratsoy 2008; Weber and Sleeper 2003). According to Mark Chupp and Mark Joseph (2010), “without structured critical reflection, it is possible that students do not consider their service experience in its larger social and political context, nor determine implications for how to apply the experience to future action” (194). Service learning is increasingly appealing to instructors searching for innovative ways of enhancing undergraduate student engagement and of moving beyond the “passive classroom learner” model (Chupp and Joseph 2010, 193). Research has shown that service learning can help to at least partially resolve the “disconnect” between the university classroom and the so-called “real world” (Post 2012, 414). Historians are not well represented among the advocates of service learning, which, observes A. Glenn Crothers (2002), is somewhat “ironic,” as “many historians claim that their teaching aims to help produce individuals who are highly engaged in civic and political life” (1447). Service learning enhances both student and faculty engagement, and can help history instructors in their quest to make studying history about more than just memorizing the dates and details of the past (Carpio, Luk, and Bush 2013; Lyons 2007). In the case of the Tranquille Oral History Project, service learning not only allowed my students to engage with the past in new ways, it inspired me to get out of the classroom and into the community.

In the summer sessions of 2012 and 2013, I invited a total of four students (two each summer) to become involved in the TOHP through service learning. Each student completed a 13-week course that included both an experiential and reflective component. In addition to reading some key

works on the history of Tranquille and oral history methodology, students were required to complete a minimum of 65 hours of hands-on work. While the students did everything from assisting the Kamloops Heritage Society to undertaking some preliminary archival and heritage display work, their focus was on conducting interviews with former employees and residents of Tranquille. The students learned about the research ethics process and were actively involved in the creation of the interview questions. They located potential interviewees with the assistance of the KHS and were responsible for coordinating and carrying out the interviews. I structured the course loosely and gave the students the freedom and flexibility to carve out their own research path—to become historians in their own right. As Patricia Mooney-Melvin (2014) remarks in her reflection on a public history initiative in Chicago, “when students are actively engaged in the process of inquiry they are more committed to learning, work collaboratively toward a larger goal, and take ownership of the knowledge they are producing” (470).

In the end, each student conducted three in-depth interviews, most of which were with former employees of the medical institution, and completed full transcriptions of those interviews. Several studies indicate that students benefit immensely when they are actively involved in all aspects of the research process (Healey 2005). Although arduous and time-consuming, transcription is a critical step in oral history research; through the process of transcribing the interviews, my students deepened their connection to the participants and their stories, and learned first-hand what it means to create primary source material. As service learners, these students not only became involved in the community but gained practical experience in the historian’s craft. Those who agreed to be interviewed for the project were informed that the transcriptions of their interviews would likely be deposited, at a future date, into an archives and interpretive centre. The students recognized that their work would constitute an invaluable resource not only for themselves but for others, and that it would contribute to a “permanent historical resource for the community” (Crothers 2002, 1447). If established, this permanent resource will also include the students’ reflective papers on the TOHP and the history of Tranquille. I required that the students not only contribute their written work to the archives but that they present their research to a conference,

class, or community group. Such presentations not only enriched the students' own learning but allowed them to share their newfound knowledge with their peers and the wider community. Through their work with the TOHP, students learned that the work of the historian extends beyond the classroom. As Peter Knupfer (2013) notes in his analysis of a local history project in Michigan, the "students discovered that the learning and sharing of history need not be confined to classrooms and formal works of scholarship, that it need not arise from cutting-edge research into a recently opened gap in the literature, and that it can instead be taken into a community to serve a community's needs" (1162).

All collaborations bring certain challenges, as the contributions to this volume make clear, and the Tranquille Oral History Project was no exception. As a primarily organic collaboration that evolved from "emergent conditions or opportunities" (Dubinsky 2006, 100), the TOHP brought together participants from varied social locations with a common interest in preserving Tranquille's heritage. At the same time, each stakeholder had somewhat distinct motivations for joining the project, and varied expectations about priorities and outcomes. During the course of my involvement in the TOHP, I became ever more cognizant of the reality that "community organizations and universities do not necessarily speak the same language or hold the same objectives and values" (Garrett-Petts 2005, 4). To KHS members, the recording, though not the transcribing, of the oral histories was of utmost priority, especially given the advanced age of many interviewees. Despite sharing with other stakeholders a concern for heritage preservation, my central focus was engaged learning and student training. I was therefore less concerned with the timely completion of all possible interviews than I was with ensuring that my students received a rigorous and hands-on experience in the practice of oral history. It was important that the students learn the skills of effective transcription, even though "this is a time-consuming and difficult process that can be burdensome" (Mills et al. 2011, 42). Given the immense time commitment, the students were able to complete far fewer interviews than originally anticipated. There are still possibly hundreds of interviews to conduct, in spite of the efforts of KHS members and volunteers to complete them.

Although it was established by a Memorandum of Understanding, the TOHP was loosely structured and lacking in any formal or defined

leadership. As Dubinsky (2006) notes, organic collaborations are often quite informal and “guided by inherent trust and clarity about expectations and responsibilities” (100). While the informality of the TOHP was not in itself an issue, such informality was not balanced with a clear, shared understanding regarding expectations and responsibilities. The initial impetus for this collaboration came from the developers, but it was the KHS that took a leadership role in the day-to-day work of the project. While the TOHP would have floundered without the energetic leadership of KHS members, such leadership was limited, and likely frustrated, by a relative lack of clarity around roles, objectives, and anticipated outcomes. From the outset, I considered the initiative to be a long-term project with ongoing opportunities for research and student training; others seemed to envision it as a short-term endeavour with a firm completion date. It was challenging to negotiate and reconcile such competing expectations, which reflected a lack of consensus about the pace and timeline of the project. Chupp and Joseph (2010) note that “real limits exist to the alignment between the role and functioning of the academy and the workings of the real world.” They go on to suggest that such limits, which include the “artificial constraints of the academic calendar,” should be made clear through “proactive communication with community partners” (206). The TOHP would have benefited, at the beginning, from an open discussion regarding academic priorities, requirements, and constraints. Furthermore, a formalized leadership structure and succession plan would have helped to guide and sustain this research partnership in the long term.

Like the Public Produce Project discussed in Chapter 4 of this volume by Robin Reid and Kendra Besanger, the TOHP struggled to maintain a stable cadre of volunteers and to secure adequate funding. The momentum and energy that characterized the project in its initial stages proved difficult to sustain. As is common in collaborative work, there were varying levels of commitment to the TOHP, and some participants were willing and able to devote more time to it than others. Despite the “culture of participation” characteristic of Kamloops, volunteer participation in the TOHP was sporadic and inconsistent. While this is to be expected, those who made this project a priority, and who were anxious to see it completed, risked becoming overwhelmed by the workload and frustrated by the relatively slow progress. Such challenges were not unique to this particular

collaboration and, as with most volunteer projects, would have been at least partially mitigated by access to external funding. Limited funds exist for community-engaged collaborations and heritage projects, and efforts to secure external funds for the Tranquille project were unsuccessful (Dick 2009). As such, TOHP participants relied largely on their own or borrowed equipment and on volunteer and student labour. The developers provided access to the site and potential interview contacts, but the project would have greatly benefited from stable funding for equipment, archival expertise, and transcription.

Genevieve Carpio, Sharon Luk, and Adam Bush (2013) note that community-university collaborations often flounder due to a lack of consistent, sustained support; the success of such collaborations, they argue, requires “universities to make more time, energy, and resources available for them” (1187). Thompson Rivers University offered important support in the form of student and faculty participation, but such participation was somewhat limited due to time and resource constraints. The particular environment of TRU—a comprehensive, learner-centred, primarily undergraduate university—both facilitated and challenged the development of the TOHP. In his work on the linkages between research and teaching, Mick Healey (2005) draws on findings that suggest “it was easier in less research-intensive universities to develop the linkages than in more intensive ones because a wider definition of what counts as research was taken in the former” (194). TRU recognizes a broad concept of research, encourages the scholarship of teaching and learning, and provides wide-ranging support for community-engaged research. It is also home to a thriving culture of undergraduate research, which is reflected in two vibrant, annual undergraduate conferences and numerous funding opportunities for undergraduate students to pursue original research. At the same time, unlike most large universities, TRU has neither an archivist nor a special collections, both of which might have helped to expedite the management and preservation of Tranquille-related records.⁷ In addition, while TRU faculty are free to engage students in service learning, such work is not factored in a concrete way into teaching workloads, which may dissuade some from participating.⁸

Despite certain challenges, the Tranquille Oral History Project was a worthwhile and rewarding initiative. With their involvement in the

project, and their inclusion of heritage recognition in the Tranquille on the Lake plan, the developers engaged the wider community and acknowledged the importance of Tranquille's unique history. For their part, the students discovered a history of Tranquille that is far more compelling and complex than popularly imagined. As Natalie Ames and Stephene Diepstra (2006) note, intergenerational oral history service learning projects give students the opportunity to "understand the impact of the social environment on human development, and to develop an empathetic understanding of another person's reality" (733). In their conversations with people who lived and worked at Tranquille, students learned about the long-lasting friendships forged between workers and patients, and about the deep impact that the medical facility's closure had on many Kamloops families. With its focus on heritage, the TOHP departed from the traditional service learning emphasis on social issues such as poverty. But, as Ratsoy (2008) suggests, service learning "can equally effectively engage and influence students when the placement is with artistic, cultural, and academic organizations" (3). The TOHP service learners became actively engaged in preserving the heritage of their community, gained valuable, hands-on experience in public history, and discovered a past that was more "immediate, tangible, and relevant" than that found in any textbook (Crothers 2002, 1447). In giving students the opportunity to conduct oral histories and create primary source material, the TOHP "turned students into knowledge producers rather than just consumers" (Mooney-Melvin 2014, 474). The project also enabled Kamloops Heritage Society members to branch into a new area of heritage preservation—oral history—and to deepen their ties with TRU students, faculty, and other community members. Thompson Rivers University is part of, rather than separate from, the Kamloops community—but it doesn't always feel so. Public history projects, such as the TOHP, can be used to "breach the traditional walls between 'town and gown'" (Coles and Welch 2002, 229). Scott Casper (2013) observes that "town and gown"—or the community and the university—"have often existed in tension, typically surrounding the different sorts of economic, social, and cultural capital they represent" (1159). Like Ginny Ratsoy in her work with the Kamloops Adult Learners Society, my involvement with the TOHP revitalized my teaching and research and deepened my engagement with the wider community. As a

historian accustomed to researching, writing, and preparing lectures in relative isolation, I was energized by new connections with local non-profit organizations and private industry, and inspired by their enthusiasm for exploring and understanding the past.

The benefits of the TOHP extended beyond the official stakeholders to the wider Kamloops community. The potential impact of the Tranquille project on quality of life in the small city of Kamloops is perhaps less obvious than other important initiatives discussed in this volume, such as a public produce garden or an accessible shower for the homeless. Heritage projects such as the TOHP can, however, help to fulfill one of Charles Montgomery's (2013) central requirements for a "happy city": the city "should enable us to build and strengthen the bonds between friends, families, and strangers that give life meaning, bonds that represent the city's greatest achievement and opportunity" (43). Heritage projects are about more than preserving buildings and collecting memories; as in the case of the TOHP, such projects can "build and strengthen bonds" between people with shared interests, connect students with seniors, and make for a more caring community. In effect, they can help to nurture and sustain a sense of community. The impetus for, and significance of, the Tranquille project at least partly reflects the social proximities within this small city (Dubinsky 2006). When word got out about the emergent development at Tranquille, Kamloopsians made their voices heard about the importance of protecting the heritage of the site. In part, this outpouring reflects the "power of proximity" at work, as Tranquille, along with its history, looms larger in Kamloops than it might were it situated in a more populous urban centre. A large number of people from the Kamloops region have, or know someone who has, some connection to the history of Tranquille. The site was and is, Diane Purvey notes, "intimately linked to Kamloops through a web of well-travelled connections." Such connections persist, at least in the collective memory, and reflect Tranquille's history as a major employer, residence, and economic driver for Kamloops. In a recent interview, a former employee of the medical institution described her enduring attachment to Tranquille: "You still have that attachment. It's still there . . . Just, I don't know, it's just a part of your life" (G. Crowston, personal communication with Brandon Frederick, July 25, 2013). From the perspective of many former and current Kamloopsians, then, the history

of Tranquille is inseparable from the history of the city itself. The small-city context is not tangential here. In contrast to many large urban centres, with their plethora of provincial institutions and heritage developments, Tranquille's historic prominence in the social and economic landscape of Kamloops seems to be relatively unmatched.

As Diane Purvey notes, although the institution has been closed for many years, "the memory of Tranquille remains embedded in the Kamloops psyche, a testament to its enduring influence." Over the years, it has been common to hear those who used to live, work, or visit at Tranquille express their sadness and dismay at the site's deterioration. One former employee of the medical institution recently recalled her sadness at the site's decline: "And then one day, we drove out there, just to drive out there, and it was really sad because, well the way I put it was watching an old friend deteriorate, you know. It was the grounds were getting overgrown with weeds, and the buildings were starting to deteriorate." (G. Crowston, personal communication with Brandon Frederick, July 25, 2013). The many people who lived and worked at Tranquille are honoured, and the value of their history affirmed, by recent efforts to preserve the oral and material heritage of the site. There is a growing emphasis in community-engaged research on approaches that seek to reduce the power imbalance between "the researcher and the researched" and that are "marked by local stakeholders being directly engaged in the research process itself" (Boser 2006, 10). Likewise, there has long been a movement in oral history toward "shared authority" between interviewer and interviewee, and calls for more careful attention to power relations inherent within the interview context (Frisch 1990). By making their voices heard about the importance of the site, and eagerly sharing their memories, Tranquillians played a key role in initiating the TOHP. As well, during the interviews, participants were asked relatively open-ended questions and encouraged to take an active part in directing the conversations. Nonetheless, unequal power relations remained, as the project was largely designed, directed, and carried out by community and university-based researchers, rather than by former residents and employees of Tranquille themselves.

While the TOHP did not subvert conventional power relations in the research process, it did help to challenge popular caricatures of Tranquille and to foreground stories that might not otherwise have been told.

Historian Chad Reimer (2000) notes that local history is, in some ways, “inherently democratic,” based as it is in “the claim that history is not just the story of great men and wars, but also of ordinary people making a living” (111). The TOHP focused on the “ordinary people” of Tranquille, and in so doing offered a rich, compelling view of everyday life at the medical institution. The interviewees generally shared fond memories of the medical institution, and of the relationships they established there; one interviewee described the employees and residents of the medical institution as a “large family” (D. Richard⁹, personal communication with Brandon Frederick, August 13, 2013). Tranquille emerged in the oral interviews, not as eerie and haunted, but rather as a place where ordinary people worked and played, lived and died. The popular preoccupation with ghost stories disrespects these people and detracts from their histories. By inviting them to share their memories, be they happy or sad, exciting or mundane, the TOHP helped to uncover a history that is far more nuanced than rumours suggest. This project also helped to give a voice to those who were deeply affected by the abrupt closure of the medical institution in 1984. One interviewee recalled feeling “devastated” by the closure, a sentiment that was echoed by others (F. Walker,¹⁰ personal communication with Justin Potestio, July 22, 2013). The unexpectedly rapid closure had a significant impact not only on the residents and their families but on the workers. According to Diane Purvey, some of the workers “found that their work was not valued, and they became ashamed to tell people that they had worked at Tranquille.”¹¹ In offering an outlet for people to share their recollections of the closure, the TOHP helped to shed new light on the process of deinstitutionalization and the personal, often emotional impact of that process on those who lived in small cities.

According to historian James Opp (2011), the production of heritage is “inherently dissonant and contested.” We need to be cautious, he urges, about “totalizing the experience of place” (243). Thus far, the oral history of Tranquille that has been captured is selective, partial, and centred on the medical institution. Efforts need to be made to capture the many other voices and histories of the area, which will require branching out beyond oral history to incorporate a range of methodologies. Despite the conclusion of this oral history collaboration, research on Tranquille continues. Given such ongoing interest, it is likely that over the next few years



FIGURE 6.3. Present-day Tranquille, photograph by Tina Block.



FIGURE 6.4. Panoramic view of Tranquille, photograph by Tina Block.

new research collaborations will emerge, resulting—it is hoped—in the establishment of a permanent Tranquille archives and interpretive centre. Although it was not without challenges, the Tranquille Oral History Project benefited those directly involved and enhanced quality of life in the broader Kamloops community. For my part, I learned first-hand that “good things happen when historians broaden their mandate, seeing the university as an integral part of the community in which it functions” (Crothers 2002, 1450). There are, I suspect, more “good things” to come at Tranquille, as researchers and community members continue their work of exploring the site’s unique landscape, aesthetics, and history.

NOTES

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- 1 Pseudonym.
- 2 As of January 2016, Tranquille on the Lake was listed for sale. According to the development manager, Tim McLeod, the current owners seek to either sell the property or find a development partner (CBC Kamloops 2016).
- 3 I am grateful to both Dr. Terry Kading and Dr. Will Garrett-Petts for inviting and encouraging me to become involved in this project.
- 4 TOL development manager Tim McLeod uses the term “Tranquillians” to refer to people with historic ties to the site.
- 5 I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Walmsley for drawing my attention to several former provincial institutions in BC that have since become housing developments.
- 6 I am grateful to Ginny Ratsoy for introducing me to, and inspiring me to try, service learning. The service learning program at TRU was originally developed by Dr. Will Garrett-Petts.
- 7 TRU is now home to TRUSpace, an institutional repository which digitally archives research materials created by the TRU community.
- 8 The literature on service learning suggests that TRU is not unique in this respect.
- 9 Pseudonym.
- 10 Pseudonym.
- 11 According to Purvey, former employees of Tranquille express varied, and sometimes competing, views about the closure of the institution and the broader process of deinstitutionalization.

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