

This recording is an interview with Don Stewart, a longtime New Westminster resident, who grew up on Spring Ranch in the Connaught Heights area of New Westminster. The main topics discussed in the interview are Spring Ranch, descriptions of downtown New Westminster during the 1950s, and his perspective on the changes that have occurred in the city and society since the 1940s.

Interviewer: Courtney Manlove

Interview Date: 3 March 2014

Date range: 1940 – present, with an emphasis on the 1950s.

Recording time: 52:23

Don Stewart was born at St Mary's Hospital in New Westminster in 1944, and had six siblings. He was the son of a mill worker at MacMillan Bloedel, who was also a caretaker at Spring Ranch located in the Connaught Heights area of New Westminster. It was called Spring Ranch because it had its own "artesian well" or spring that generated two small pools that Stewart and his friends would swim in during the summer. The family lived on the ranch between 1944 and 1952, and Stewart's descriptions of the city during the interview are mainly from the 1950s. The ranch was demolished during the building of the new Queensborough Bridge in 1960, and Stewart shares his perspective on the shift from what was a quiet Connaught Heights life to what is now the busy city of New Westminster.

The interview was conducted as part of History 461 – Oral History Practicum at Simon Fraser University.

Section 00:00 – 12:04

In this portion of the interview, Stewart provides the background to his family's residence at Spring Ranch. He describes the ranch and its different components, and states that he never met the owner, but knew he had a lot of money because he owned racehorses. Stewart states that the ranch "appeared magical" to him as a child and tells a story about sitting atop a fence to watch the steam trains go by. The ranch had a long driveway lined with what he remembers as 60 ft high maple trees that Stewart and his friends would climb.

Section 12:05 – 16:55

In this portion of the interview, Stewart explains that the property was demolished with the building of the new Queensborough Bridge in 1960, as the approach for the bridge starts at the ranch location. Stewart describes a number of traffic accidents that resulted from the increased traffic.

Section 16:56 – 20:21

In this portion of the interview, Stewart talks about the area around the ranch in the 1940s and 1950s. North of Marine Dr., there were five houses and a general store. He states that the area of the current train yard was filled with heavy vegetation, and that multiple farms were located along Trapp Road. He and his brothers caught eel or "bloodsuckers" in the ditches by Trapp Road, and sold them to fishermen for bait. They also caught eulachons in the Fraser River, and he describes the way his father prepared them.

Section 20:22 – 25:54

In this portion of the interview, the conversation turns to topic of change and progress in the city. He notes that his wife's family has been in the city for six generations. Stewart reports walking on the train tracks and play in the sand dune at Lafarge Cement (in 1952), and other places where he was not allowed to play. He claims that the tracks were not dangerous, as they knew when the trains were coming. He and his friends also visited Poplar Island, and he describes riding the BC electric tram.

Section 25:55 – 36:48

In this portion of the interview, Stewart explains that his family was self-sustaining in terms of food on the ranch, but could get anything else they needed at the Army & Navy on Columbia St. He recalls a time when the Barnum & Bailey's Circus came to Moody Park, the large Farmer's Market in the city, and learning how to create the Maypole for May Day at Queen's Park. Stewart attended Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary School for three years during the time at Spring Ranch, and he states that everyone knew you when walked through the community and there was little sense of danger. Stewart talks about community feeling, and how one cannot compare the modern urbanized city with the reality of New Westminster in the 1950s.

Section 36:49 – 52:23

In this portion of the interview, Stewart describes popular sites in the downtown New Westminster in the 1950s. These was Marshall Well's hardware store, the Metro Theater, the Odeon Theatre, Eaton's Department Store, the King Neptune restaurant, and Kresge's with its "soda bar." He remembers the joy of ordering a raspberry sauce float at Kresge's. He observes that he could buy 5 jawbreaker candies for a penny at his aunt's store "Honours" on the corner of 5th Ave and 12th St., and that he would then trade candy for a marble or a baseball card amongst his friends.