

This interview is of Catherine Ouelett-Martin who is the executive director of the Fraser River Discovery Centre in New Westminster. The major themes discussed are the Fraser River, the “working river,” Fraser River Discovery Centre, exhibitions, Lucille Johnstone, and the New Westminster’s waterfront.

Interviewers: Pamela Stern and Andreas Hovland

Date Recorded: May 28, 2014

Date Range: 1980s – 2014

Sound Recording Length: 1:02:48

Catherine Ouelett-Martin is the first, and to date only, executive director of the Fraser River Discovery Centre in New Westminster. In 1989, Ouelett-Martin moved to New Westminster from Quebec, where she lived near the St. Lawrence River. She studied English at Douglas College and then transferred to Simon Fraser University to complete her bachelor’s degree in history. Afterwards, she completed a post baccalaureate certificate in public history, as a step towards a career in museums and archives. She did a variety jobs and volunteered with museums in the Lower Mainland. In 1997, she landed a job at the Delta Museum and Archives, and worked there for 10 years. She has been working at the Fraser River Discovery Centre since the fall of 2008. The Centre’s mission is to be an advocate for the Fraser River by educating and informing visitors. Ouelett-Martin describes her role as giving “soul” to the Centre. Throughout the interview she describes the responsibilities of the executive director of the Fraser River Discovery Centre, the process of planning and executing the Centre’s exhibitions, and speaks enthusiastically about her work and the “working” Fraser River.

Section 0:00 – 11:59

- In this section of the interview Ouelett-Martin describes her educational background, how she became interested in a career in historical museums, and how she landed the job as the executive director of the Fraser River Discovery Centre. She describes the history of the Centre starting from its first inception, following Expo 1986, by a group of New Westminster volunteers who created the Fraser River Society to the Centre’s opening in 2008. The facility was first built to serve as an entry hall for the riverboat, Star Fortune Casino, but with the Centre in mind as the long-term use for the building. She describes the series of renovations the space has gone through till its official opening as the FRDC.

Section 12:00 – 18:45

- In this section of the interview Ouelett-Martin lists the major donors who helped support the Centre, especially Lucille Johnstone who made a significant contribution to

the Centre. She provides a brief biography of Johnstone, who started working on the Fraser River during the 1940s as the secretary for RivTow. At the end of her 45 year career she was the president of the company. Ouelett-Martin describes Johnstone as a “legend on the river,” whose fundraising work made the FRDC possible. Johnstone used her connections to corporations associated with the Fraser River and convinced ten companies to donate \$100,000 each for the Centre.

Section 18:46 – 23:36

- In this section of the interview Ouelett-Martin describes her duties as an executive director. She reports that she spends 80% of her time writing grants and proposal, networking the corporate world, and convincing potential donors that the Centre is an important place and that its projects need their support. The “other 80%” of the time she manages the place, deals with human resources, does the strategic planning with the board of directors, and maintains the Centre. She discusses how the ideas of the exhibition come from a variety of places, from other people’s ideas or the planning committee.

23:36 – 40:30

- In this section of the interview Ouelett-Martin discusses the relationship that Port Metro Vancouver has with the Centre, describing PMV as a “friend and an ally.” She states that PMV is the Centre’s best supporter, as they view the Centre as an important tool to communicate to the general public why the working river is important. She acknowledges the controversy engendered by the Centre’s public statement in 2013 that shipping coal on the Fraser River is consistent with the “working” nature of the river, but emphasizes that the Centre’s role is to educate and to provide fact-based information rather than to take sides in public debates. She explains the Centre’s mission to promote three pillars: the socio-cultural, economic, and environment value of the Fraser River. She describes the composition of the Centre’s staff, which mostly constituted of volunteers, and her role amongst the staff members.

40:31 – 49:04

- In this section of the interview Ouelett-Martin describes the composition Centre’s 30,000 annual visitors, which include both tourists and local residents, and her experience first coming to New Westminster. She states that the families of Metro Vancouver are their main audience, as well as local organizations and businesses that have an interest in the Fraser River. Ouelett-Martin came to New Westminster in 1989 from Quebec where she lived by the St. Lawrence River, which is where her initial

knowledge of rivers comes from. She describes New Westminster when she first arrived, she recalls the River Market was thriving, and there was a lot of activity on the waterfront. However, once the River Market closed down for redevelopment and the waterfront became half full. She states that the New Westminster waterfront has always been a local jewel for her.

49:05- 1:00:00

- In this section of the interview Ouelett-Martin discusses the relationship that the Centre has with its neighbours, such as Paddlewheeler Tours and the River Market, and the collaborations they have done together. She emphasizes that the Centre's role is to educate children about things that they may not learn in school, such as how the Fraser River plays a significant role in the province's economy. She discusses the Centre's role as temporary tourist information centre until the Anvil Centre is opens (in September 2014). Lastly, Ouelett-Martin describes the ways she gets to work from her house in Sapperton to the Centre, and how she fully embraces the working river.