PART I: QUESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION

QUESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION

The concern of the "new urban history" with more precise description of inequality and related differences in transiency, participation, and leadership among whole populations seems to us to have a special usefulness for the study of New Zealand cities. This is a new settler society where it has been easier for historians to emphasize similarities in traits and experience than it has been in the United States. Correspondingly there is even more need in New Zealand for systematic investigation of social differences.

Colonized at the very time when modernization reached its climax in Britain and when technological change rapidly improved ease of communication and transportation, New Zealand had no extended period of isolation or of traditional methods in agriculture. Its level of urbanization was high from the beginning although its cities were small in absolute size and depended upon an extractive and agricultural export economy. Its European population in city and country alike was drawn overwhelmingly from within the British empire and so was less diverse in ethnic and religious inheritance than the United States' European population. New Zealand's national government was much more consistently interventionist and, after the 1890s, more aggressive in reducing social extremes and antagonisms through land policy, industrial arbitration, and social welfare measures. Its early achievement of one of the highest standards of living in the world added to the tendency to make pride in its decent, comfortable, and more egalitarian way of life central to comparisons with the mother country and to its own sense of national identity.

Given the relative absence of highly visible social extremes –
of great mansions, extensive slum districts, large satanic mills, and
hordes of alien newcomers – it is not surprising that historical
portraits of society in New Zealand have tended to dwell more upon
general patterns and conditions than upon differences between class,
ethnic and other groups. Indeed, the previous preoccupation of historians
everywhere with politics may continue to have more justification in New
Zealand because of the role of public policy in shaping so many aspects
of national development since 1840. But there are some unfortunate
consequences. Urban history generally, even the more conventional form
of urban biography common to the English-speaking world, is underdeveloped.

Theses on an individual city like Auckland have tended to
investigate a variety of aspects of urban life during a short span of
time, usually less than a decade. While the best theses usually comment
on group differences, especially between social classes, they have not
tried to investigate them systematically – with rare exceptions like
Russell Stone's study of Auckland's businessmen. Like most urban history
everywhere until recently, the theses do not include rural/urban comparisons
so that they do not show which patterns are distinctively urban and which
are simply general to the society. And because of the short span of time
covered in most of the theses, they offer largely static pictures which
do not help much in determining the process and the timing of urban
change and how it relates to change in rural and small-town New Zealand
and to public policy.

As this commentary on the limitations of previous work (much of
it very well done for its own purposes) suggests, we think that a more
self-consciously pluralistic and comparative approach to the social history

of Auckland will not only benefit urban history but also the social
history of New Zealand generally. For example, one immediate need is
the testing of the relative applicability to cities, towns, and rural
districts of generalizations about social fluidity, especially of
change in fluidity over time.

Does occupational mobility diminish over time in New Zealand
regardless of environment? Or is decline in mobility true of rural
districts and perhaps of small towns, but not of cities, at least not
those enjoying the most rapid growth like Auckland. Was occupational
versatility during the period of settlement (up to the 1890s) ever as
characteristic of New Zealand's major cities? How much do these cities
differ from small towns and rural districts in rates of occupational
continuity? When does increasing specialization in occupations become
visible and how much earlier than in less-urbanized environments? Is
there really any general decline in transiency in the so-called period
of stabilization from the 1890s to the 1920s? Or is greater persistence
related to shifts in the importance of particular industries and
occupational groups. For example, is there any significant change in
the transiency of less-skilled workers in the cities? If there is,
does it relate to the changing proportions of casual labour and factory
operatives? (Similarly, is decline in rural transiency related to the
changing relative importance of extractive industries like mining and
timbering and of large pastoral stations compared to family farms?) Is
there an overall shift, analogous to that found in United States mobility
studies, from the nineteenth to the twentieth centures of decreasing
geographic mobility for manual workers and of increasing geographical

mobility for high non-manual workers (among whom the ratio of managers to proprietors changes significantly)?

For outsiders like ourselves, the most interesting and challenging larger question which the methods of the new urban history could help answer is not concerned with urban and rural comparisons, however, but with urban social dynamics and spatial development. How have New Zealand's major cities reduced overt social distance among their inhabitants? (Or to phrase the question more loosely, pejoratively, and comparatively: how have they managed to achieve so many of the virtues with so few of the vices of the American small town?)

Cities of similar size and ethnic homogeneity in the United States have long had more visible social differences. They also show more signs of becoming "urban wildernesses" (to use Sam Bass Warner, Jr's title) where inhabitants lack a clearly-focused, comfortable sense of neighborhood, or ease in navigating their city and managing the problems of everyday life.

As this comparison suggests, the difference is a matter of perception as well as of reality. It is possible that New Zealanders have been less disposed to see the extent of social differences than have Americans; New Zealanders may have been more inclined to emphasise the cohesiveness of even their more socially diverse urban areas and so to work harder at maintaining common meeting places and institutions. Investigation of the relation between the perceptions and the realities of urban areas will require a closer examination of cultural and political history, but quantitative analyses characteristic of the new urban and social history would provide the foundation. Investigation

would begin by determining the homogeneity or heterogeneity in occupational level, property ownership, religious affiliation, and other economic and social traits of different areas within the Auckland metropolitan region, whether defined by contemporary perceptions of neighborhood boundaries, political units, topography, or - before settlement becomes contiguous - geographic extent.

General questions for investigation include: How true is the common perception that the rich lived on the ridges, the middle class on the slopes, and workers in the gullies? Was there a fairly clear class division between home-owners and renters? When and how rapidly did working-class home ownership increase? Was it the usual case that neighborhoods as contemporaries defined them contained all three? In inclusive neighborhoods were parochial institutions, such as churches, socially differentiated, or did they mix groups? Has the degree of separation between groups in residence and parochial institutions changed much over time, and, if so, when? Do the more successful inhabitants in all areas tend to persist there as well as in the city more often than the less successful? Do the more successful dominate (and also provide continuity in) the leadership of parochial institutions? How frequent was movement between areas within the city at all levels of occupation and property? How often was it movement to areas with similar social and economic traits? Is there a strong correlation between occupational mobility and movement to an area with different traits? In sum, how do patterns of residence, voluntary association, occupational and geographic mobility increase or reduce the separation of social groups within the city?

In pursuing these and other questions of the new urban history
in case studies of localities within the Auckland urban region, students
will need to make systematic analyses of variables essential to a general
description of Auckland society at different points in time. Discussion
of the advantages and disadvantages of particular sources for such
analyses and problems in using the sources are included with their
description in Parts II and III of this report, but a very general and
preliminary commentary may be useful here.

Some variables and some social groups will be much easier to
investigate than others because of differences in the availability and
characteristics of records. Occupational structure, home ownership,
participation in voluntary associations, residential distribution, the
journey to work, and the location of retail shops, recreation, churches,
and other institutions can be determined readily for different points
in time from city directories, electoral rolls, valuation rolls, and
the field books for valuation, used in varying combinations. Change in
the ownership of property in any area can be traced most satisfactorily
through the use of Certificates of Title.

Generally, the study of the social characteristics of urban
areas will be easier than the tracing of individuals over time because
of the past destruction in New Zealand of the manuscript census which
included age, birthplace, and other data helpful in linking records
for a given individual. Base-line samples may be drawn from birth,
marriage, and death records, but there are a variety of practical
problems to be faced even in the drawing of the samples in an urban
region like Auckland. (See the discussion of these records in Part III:
Sources). Samples can be drawn much more easily for certain special
groups, such as applicants for relief.

Individual occupational mobility and geographic mobility within
career can be traced through city directories and electoral rolls, but
the absence of age data in these sources seriously limits the analyses
which can be made - unless you start with a source like marriage or
death certificates which includes that data. The best source for both
career and intergenerational mobility studies is the marriage certificate,
but complete records for an area are in Lower Hutt only and drawing a sample
from the records available near the locality itself will be complicated
by the problem of differences in parish and registry boundaries.

Except for certain groups, such as the applicants for poor relief,
family membership at given points in time cannot be reconstructed easily.
There are even fewer sources (like the Auckland police censuses of the
early 1840s which P.H. Curson used) which permit analysis of household
structure including boarders and servants. The analysis of "life transitions"
for family members - when they leave school, start work, leave home, marry,
etc. - which is possible with the U.S. manuscript census (see Tamara Hareven's
Family Time and Industrial Time) does not seem feasible for New Zealand. The
compensation, hinted at earlier, is that the sources available for studying
the social characteristics of urban neighborhoods in Auckland at least
(especially the field books for valuation and the remarkable photographic
record) should permit a more richly-textured description than is possible
for most American cities.

In studies of individual localities the data should be collected in
a form as close to the original record as possible so that other researchers
may be able to make use of the data subsequently for other purposes. Since
comparability among studies of different localities is important for any

cumulative contribution to the social history of the Auckland metropolitan region as a whole, students should try to use commonly accepted categories and measurements wherever possible.