

LADIES AND ESCORTS

*Gender Segregation and Public Policy in British Columbia Beer Parlours, 1925-1945**

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THE ACHIEVEMENT OF NATIONAL suffrage for most women in the First World War did not fundamentally alter their lives. As Veronica Strong-Boag has noted, the "predictions of major, even revolutionary, change from feminists and anti-feminists turned out to be far wide of the mark." The destiny of most women was to be wives and mothers, with their lives centred in the home. In the Second World War, despite the women who worked in non-traditional jobs and the 43,000 who served in the armed forces, social attitudes did not dramatically change. The National Selective Service regarded women as a bountiful supply of temporary labour for the war effort, but, to paraphrase Ruth Pierson, they were still women after all.¹

Yet the lives of women did not remain static after the First World War. Educational opportunities improved, and many middle-class women joined their working-class counterparts in the labour market for a few years between school and marriage. In fact, "maturity was increasingly associated with paid work." After a day's work, single women in particular were able to enjoy leisure activities that were now both more commercial and more "heterosocial" in orientation. Men and women together went to dance halls, amusement parks and most of all to the movies.²

* I thank Marlene LeGates, Catherine Gilbert Murdock, Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, and two anonymous readers for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Markham: Penguin, 1988), 2; Alison Prentice, et al., *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: HBJ, 1988), 303; Ruth Roach Pierson, "They're Still Women After All": *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 22.

² Strong-Boag, *New Day Recalled*, 41 (quote); Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 243-244. On the development of heterosocial leisure, see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), especially Chapters 1 and 3.

Increased leisure opportunities for women also included the possibility of licensed public drinking in hotel beer parlours, the successors to the hotel saloons of the pre-prohibition era. Yet an analysis of public policies and social attitudes toward women in British Columbia beer parlours from the 1920s through the Second World War reveals that they were largely driven by traditional views about women, public drinking, and female sexuality. The dominant belief was that women needed to be both protected and regulated. The official concern was that the presence of women in beer parlours increased the contacts between men and female prostitutes and thus facilitated the spread of venereal disease, whose victims included innocent women at home. Women, particularly those unescorted by men, who entered beer parlours were often regarded as prostitutes. Public policy was shaped by these attitudes with the result that beer parlours opened separate areas for women drinkers, with the goal of segregating unescorted women from unescorted men.

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Beer parlours were an indirect result of prohibition, which British Columbian male voters had endorsed, along with women suffrage, in 1916. B.C. women first used the provincial franchise in October 1920 to help vote out prohibition in favour of government liquor stores. Government control also closed the hotel saloons that had survived prohibition selling non-alcoholic near beer. Operating through the so-called Moderation League, hotel operators, veterans' groups, and the province's brewers were able to force a plebiscite on the sale of beer by the glass in 1924. The prohibition association and all prominent women's organizations argued that the sale of beer would ultimately mean the return of the saloon. On 20 June 1924 voters overall narrowly defeated beer by the glass, but it received approval in 23 of 40 electoral districts. Faced with these mixed results, the government, through the appointed Liquor Control Board (LCB), began to license parlours in those districts that had supported beer, which included Vancouver. The first beer parlours opened there in March 1925.³

³ On the relationship between suffrage and prohibition, see for example, Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 69-85; Wendy Mitchinson, "The wctu: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism," in *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*, ed. Linda Kealey (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1979), 151-167; Prentice, et al., *Canadian Women*, 169-211. On the origins of government

In return for a monopoly over beer licences, the hotels agreed to follow strict regulations that were designed to prevent a saloon atmosphere. No standup bar was allowed. In order to be served by waiters, customers had to remain seated at their tables. Beer parlours could not offer free lunches, or any food whatsoever (or cigarettes or soft drinks, either). The rules forbade all games and entertainment. Nothing in the parlours was to encourage excessive consumption; yet, at first glance, all one could do in a beer parlour was drink. What was less clear was whether women could drink with men in beer parlours.⁴

In 1925 Quebec and Alberta were the only other provinces that permitted licensed public drinking. Quebec law banned women outright from taverns (the equivalent to beer parlours), and in Alberta women were barred from urban beer parlours. The chairman of the British Columbia LCB said he had considered refusing service to women, but “this appeared unreasonable and ungallant to the fair sex.” In British Columbia the only legal restriction was that a woman could not serve beer unless she held the licence. At one level even this restriction seemed puzzling. After all, women now had the vote and led more visibly public lives. Some even argued that the presence of women in beer parlours would curtail the excesses of male camaraderie. But the regulations also stated that licence holders could not allow “persons of a notoriously bad character, or disorderly persons” to enter a beer parlour. This general restriction applied in particular to female prostitutes.⁵

PROSTITUTION, PUBLIC DRINKING AND PURITY

Overall, the nineteenth century saloon was the preserve of men, particularly working-class men, and in Canada it became more homosocial as the century passed. The saloon offered respite from both work and home. Saloon leisure — drinking, conversation, games, and what Madelon Powers calls the “code of reciprocity” (treating, loans, favours) — reinforced the bonds of masculinity. Saloon acculturation for men was a varied process, but it was one that largely

control and beer parlours, see Robert A. Campbell, *Demon Rum or Easy Money: Government Control of Liquor in British Columbia from Prohibition to Privatization* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 22–31, 47, 50–54.

⁴ *Fourth Annual Report of the Liquor Control Board of British Columbia (LCB Fourth AR)*, (1925), J64–J67. See also Robert A. Campbell, “Sit Down, Shut Up and Drink Your Beer,” in *Working Lives: Vancouver, 1886–1986*, ed. Working Lives Collective (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1985), 137.

⁵ James Gray, *The Roar of the Twenties* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975), 195; *Vancouver Sun*, 16 June 1984, A16; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 31 May 1925, 1 (first quote), 8 August 1926, Magazine Section, 8; *LCB Fourth AR*, J66, J67 (second quote).

excluded women, except for prostitutes. Judith Fingard has shown that in Victorian Halifax some working-class women did drink in saloons and some were proprietors, either of licensed facilities or illegal home-based operations. But in Halifax it was also common for barmaids to be prostitutes, and female proprietors often allowed prostitution on their premises. As Cheryl Krasnick Warsh has emphasized, by the 1880s "any public (or private) drinking had become unacceptable for respectable women." By the turn of the century public drinking had vanished as a norm for women, at least for women enmeshed in the discourse of respectability. The decline of public drinking by women went hand-in-hand with the rise of prohibition activities, which engaged the energy and enthusiasm of middle-class Canadians, both men and women. Prohibitionists concentrated on regulating saloons. By 1910 British Columbia had restricted saloon licences to hotels and specifically banned both prostitutes and women.⁶

Prohibitionists regarded prostitution as both a moral and health problem associated with saloons and one of many essential reasons to get rid of the bars. By the 1890s the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was a leader in the campaign for Social Purity, which emphasized the elimination rather than the regulation of prostitution. To the WCTU, regulation meant an unacceptable compromise with sin. When an English vice-president of the World WCTU hinted in 1897 that regulation might be acceptable, she provoked a howl of protests from sister branches across the Empire. In prewar Vancouver, reformers pushed a reluctant police department to crack down on

⁶ Madelon Powers, "The 'Poor Man's Friend': Saloonkeepers, Workers, and the Code of Reciprocity in U.S. Barrooms, 1870-1920," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 45 (Spring 1994): 1-3; Judith Fingard, "A Great Big Rum Shop: The Drink Trade in Victorian Halifax," in *Tempered by Rum: Rum in the History of the Maritime Provinces*, ed. James Morrison and James Moreira (Porters Lake, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1988), 93-96; Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1989), 101-102; Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, "Oh, Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart: The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada," in *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays*, ed. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 75 (quote)-76. Peter DeLottinville refers to Joe Beef's Canteen in Montreal as a "male bastion," although his sources make some references to prostitution. See Peter DeLottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal: Working-Class Culture and the Tavern, 1869-1889," *Labour/Le Travail* 8/9 (1981-1982): see endnote #24 (quote) and #2; British Columbia, *Revised Statutes of British Columbia*, 1911, c. 142 ("Liquor Licence Act"), ss. 64-65.

For some insightful comments on the male subculture of American saloons, see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 17-21 and especially Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 45-49, 58-59. See also Jon Kingsdale, "The 'Poor Man's Club': Social Functions of the Urban Working-Class Saloon," *American Quarterly* 20 (October 1973): 485-87, 489.

prostitution rather than tolerating it in restricted districts of the city.⁷

As Mariana Valverde has pointed out, "for many Canadians prostitution was *the* social evil," which was popularly, if not legally, defined to include almost any illicit sex between men and women. As well as gender demarcations, prostitution had class distinctions; respectability for working-class women was measured by their distance from this identity. Reformers, and in particular the the Salvation Army, showed some sympathy for the plight of "fallen women," who were lured into prostitution as victims of the "white slave" trade. But once a woman had lost respectability, it was extremely difficult for her to restore her reputation, which is why most reformers concentrated on preserving and enhancing respectability, rather than on redemption. In addition, despite what the law said, the legal system traditionally had dealt more harshly with prostitutes, than with their clients.⁸

Social attitudes about prostitution reflected middle-class perceptions of sexuality. Contrary to William Acton's oft-quoted mid-nineteenth century assertion that women were "sexually anaesthetic," female sexuality was acknowledged and sexual matters were discussed, especially by doctors. Yet a double standard emphasized the limited expression of sexuality for women, one focused on conception and child-bearing. Too much sexual desire that led in "undesirable or

⁷ Mitchinson, "The wctu," 163; Ian Tyrrell, "Women and Temperance in International Perspective: The World's wctu, 1880s-1920s," in *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, ed. Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 223, 227-228; Carol Bacchi, "Race Regeneration and Social Purity: A Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada's English-Speaking Suffragists," in *Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation* 2nd ed., ed. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (Toronto: Holt, 1986), 315; Deborah Nilsen, "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920," in *In Her Own Right*, ed. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), 208.

⁸ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 77 (quote)-79; Warsh, "'Oh, Lord, pour a cordial,'" 89-90; Karen Dubinsky, "'Maidenly Girls' or 'Designing Women?': The Crime of Seduction in Turn-of-the-Century Ontario," in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 30-31. Ellen Dubois and Linda Gordon have argued that first-wave American feminists considered prostitution, not rape, the ultimate form of sexual coercion. They tended to exaggerate both the magnitude and coerciveness of prostitution in the United States and were confounded by "unrepentant whores." See Ellen Dubois and Linda Gordon, "Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Sexual Thought," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carol Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 31-34 (quote). On how the law treated prostitutes in the late nineteenth century, see Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991), 237, 255-56 and Backhouse, "Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law Reflection of a Discriminatory Society," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 18 (November 1985): 387-423.

unproductive directions" was considered deviant behaviour. Since men were considered more active and energetic than women in general, their sex drive was seen to be more robust and difficult to control. Respectable women thus needed protection from excessive male sexual energy.⁹

Rather than simply being a campaign against prostitution, then, the Social Purity movement was also an attempt to impose a single standard of sexuality, one centred on monogamy, marriage, and reproduction — in short, the female standard of restraint. A number of historians have argued that "women gained moral stature and a certain amount of domestic power through affirming their sexual purity. . . ." Women were not to be overwhelmed by excessive male passion; men were to attempt to elevate themselves to the moral plane of women. Social Purity was also partly responsible for harsher attitudes toward masturbation (male and female), birth control products, and abortion, all of which facilitated sexual indulgence. Social attitudes were reinforced by common biological explanations that equated sexual energy with vital energy. To expend too much sexual energy was to risk a weakened mind and body. Because of the popular view that semen was condensed vital energy, the perceived risks were higher for men than for women, but both sexes benefited from restraint. In fact, purity advocates went as far as to link the pure life with patriotism and nation-building. Excessive sexuality weakened moral fibre and sapped the strength of the developing nation.¹⁰

Social Purity, prostitution, and biological assumptions all came together in a more practical way on the issue of venereal disease. By the mid-1890s the evidence was fairly persuasive that gonorrhoea caused sterility and blindness. Syphilis, though rarer, was worse because it was fatal in its later stages, and it had powerful congenital effects. The disease damaged fetuses physically and mentally. Moreover, before the development of antibiotics, both diseases were difficult, dangerous, and expensive to treat. For example, until 1910 the

⁹ Jay Cassel, *The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada, 1838-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 79, 80 (quotes); Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 100-107; Prentice, et al., *Canadian Women*, 146.

¹⁰ Bacchi, "Race Regeneration," 316-318, Prentice, et al., *Canadian Women*, 153, (quote); Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies*, 111-113; Cassel, *The Secret Plague*, 81; James Snell, "The White Life for Two: The Defence of Marriage and Sexual Morality in Canada, 1890-1914," in *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings*, ed. Bettina Bradbury (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1992), 392; Michael Bliss, "Pure Books on Avoided Subjects: Pre-Freudian Sexual Ideas in Canada" Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers* (1970), 100-101; Valverde, *The Age of Light*, 28-29, 70-71.

standard treatment for syphilis was large doses of mercury, which probably killed as many as it cured. Its more effective successor was a derivative of arsenic. The incidence of venereal disease in Canada at the turn of the century was not known, but reformers feared it had reached "staggering proportions."¹¹

Concerns about venereal disease exacerbated fears about deteriorating racial stock, and the racism of English Canadian reformers was a mix of hereditary and environmental assumptions. Women, or more precisely the respectable mothers of the "Anglo-Saxon" race, had to be protected from the ravages of venereal disease so they could continue to produce superior offspring. Those fears gave additional incentive to the promoters of Social Purity because most doctors believed "prostitutes constituted the principal reservoir of the disease." Nearly everyone tended to blame prostitutes, rather than their customers, for spreading venereal disease. Respectable women needed to be protected, but deviant ones needed to be controlled.¹²

Venereal disease became a particularly public issue during the First World War. By 1915, 28.7 per cent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Europe had become infected with venereal disease, compared to 5 per cent of the British forces. The Canadian army fought the scourge with Early Treatment Centres, "short arm parades" (visual inspection of the genitals), and lectures on health and "continence." The Canadian Army urged the English authorities to imprison "infected women" in order to keep them from the troops.¹³

Yet Canadian military officials also argued that 25 per cent of the cases had been infected in Canada. In response, the federal government in 1918 made it illegal for a woman infected with venereal disease to have sex with a member of the armed forces or even to solicit sex with a member of the armed forces. The new venereal disease regulations were supported by most women's organizations, including the National Council of Women of Canada. Following Ontario's lead, in 1919 British Columbia passed legislation that required all infected men

¹¹ Cassel, *The Secret Plague*, 20, 55, 58, 92, 107, 113; Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred*, 111 (quote), 114. See also Claude Quétel, *History of Syphilis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992; originally published as *Le Mal de Naples: histoire de la syphilis* (Paris: Seghers, 1986), esp. chapters 5 and 8, and Allan Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4-6.

¹² Mariana Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race Is Free': Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," in *Gender Conflicts*, 3-6; Bacchi, "Race regeneration," 315-316; Cassel, 20 (quote).

¹³ Cassel, *The Secret Plague*, 123, 128-131; Suzann Buckley and Janice McGinnis, "Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform in Canada" *Canadian Historical Review* 63 (September 1982): 338-339.

and women to obtain treatment, and the province made it a crime to knowingly infect another person. That year the federal government created a Department of Health, and one of its ten divisions was devoted to venereal disease control. The federal government allocated \$200,000 to fight venereal disease, most of which was to be given to the provinces on a shared-cost basis once they opened clinics that offered free treatment. British Columbia opened treatment centres in Vancouver and Victoria.¹⁴

While health officials urged a more scientific approach to venereal disease control in the 1920s, moral sentiments were never far below the surface. Authorities still targeted prostitutes and other "loose women" as the agents of infection. Many doctors opposed free treatment; they believed the diseased should have to pay for their sins. Despite the more scientific aura surrounding the approach to venereal disease, officials did not countenance the use of condoms, which would have facilitated what a later generation would call safe-sex. As birth-control devices condoms were technically illegal, but available. For health officials then, beer parlours provided unfortunate new opportunities for prostitutes to ply their trade and spread disease.¹⁵

"EVELESS BEER PARLOURS": REMOVING THE TEMPTRESS

Almost as soon as they opened their beer parlours in 1925, some members of the British Columbia Hotels Association (BCHA) wanted to exclude women. According to the *Vancouver Province* the operators feared "the building up of a considerable prejudice against their refreshment rooms if women are not forbidden entrance." The Attorney-General shared some of their concern, and the legislative counsel advised him in May 1925 that "there is nothing apparent in the law or otherwise to prohibit such a licensee from excluding from his premises any person or class of persons he may consider undesirable (e.g. women)." Even before the end of the month, some parlours in Vancouver had posted signs that said women would not be served. In June the LCB chairman sent a circular to all licence holders warning them of "the frequenting of 'Licensed Premises' by undesirable women. . . ." He also warned that licence holders "must

¹⁴ Cassel, *The Secret Plague*, 142-144, 169, 200; Buckley and McGinnis, "Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform," 341; British Columbia, *Statutes*, 1919, Ch. 88 ("Venereal Diseases Suppression Act"), ss. 3, 11.

¹⁵ Cassel, *The Secret Plague*, 190-191; Buckley and McGinnis, "Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform," 347-349.

take the consequences of allowing such persons to be upon the premises."¹⁶

Government officials and hotel operators feared that the prohibitionists would use the presence of women to damn parlours as havens for prostitutes. In April 1926 the Vancouver East Presbytery of the United Church sent observers to watch how many women frequented Vancouver parlours. On one evening, 2,396 men and 284 women entered 54 beer parlours in a one-hour period; on another evening, 766 men and 143 women entered five beer parlours in one hour of observation. Despite the low numbers of women, the Presbytery passed a resolution "that we view with alarm the proportion of women patronizing the beer parlors . . . and we believe that many of the young people of our city are being subjected unnecessarily to temptation in various forms. . . ." At an anti-beer rally in July 1926, J. D. O'Connell (dubbed the "orphan's friend" and "ardent prohibitionist" by the *Province*) declared "the greatest danger was in the beer parlour, where women are permitted." The *Province*, which supported parlours, also expressed concern about women: "there is no doubt that the presence of women makes it more difficult to conduct beer parlors in a decent and orderly manner." The paper recommended that the government consider excluding them.¹⁷

Prodded by LCB officials, the BCHA voted unanimously in late July 1926 to ban women from Vancouver beer parlours. President J. D. Pearson announced that "many men objected to the presence of women," and that the prohibitionists had denounced parlours for admitting women. The hotels acted to remove "this chief cause for criticism" because "we have no desire to give the public offense." He added that "no doubt, many women patrons will not appreciate the move," but he assured them that they could still buy beer at government liquor stores. The *Vancouver Sun* wondered about the legality of banning women, but the paper still strongly supported the move. An editorial noted that "whatever an odd woman here or there may say about it, public opinion and particularly that part of it contributed by women, is strongly averse to women frequenting beer parlors."¹⁸

Initially, the prohibitionists were critical of the ban, but gender

¹⁶ *Province*, 6 May 1925, quoted from "Memorandum for The Hon. Attorney-General," 8 May 1925, *British Columbia Archives and Record Service* (BCARS), GR1323, B2308 (2nd quote); *Province*, 21 May 1925, 1; LCB "Circular Letter No. 172," 12 June 1925, BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199B (3rd quote).

¹⁷ *Province*, 28 April 1926, 1, 23 July 1926, 7, 26 March 1926, 6 (editorial).

¹⁸ *Province*, 30 July 1926, 1, 29 July 1926, 1 (quotes); *Sun*, 31 July 1926, *LCB Scrapbooks*, Vol. 20, BCARS, GR62.

equality was not their primary concern. Speaking at a meeting of the Anti-Beer league, Reverend R. J. McIntyre, of the B.C. Prohibition Association, said the ban was “the deathbed repentance of the brewers.” He criticized it for violating the idea of equal rights. More important, he argued that the ban meant that parlours were unfit for decent women, and they “made a man, for the time being, unfit to associate with his own wife. It was an admission that beer lowered a man’s power to distinguish between right and wrong, and weakened his resistance to temptation.” Beer parlours attracted “women of the street” and “men of like repute.” The solution was to ban the beer parlours, not “decent” women. At the time the ban was announced, the dry forces were attempting to obtain another vote on beer parlours in Vancouver. They assumed, probably correctly, that if they could close the parlours in Vancouver, they would ultimately be victorious across the province. That goal, more than his assertion about equal rights, motivated McIntyre’s comments. Both dries and wets realized the importance of Vancouver in the beer parlour debate. Technically, the ban on women applied only in that city.¹⁹

On 16 August 1926 the *Sun* announced the opening of “Eveless Beer Parlors” in Vancouver. In theory, the ban against women was voluntary. As a “gentlemen’s agreement” among the parlour operators, it worked only so long as everyone agreed to abide by it. In May 1927 the Commercial Hotel on Cambie Street began to serve women again. When the police arrived on 25 May, of the approximately 100 patrons 29 were women, “a number” of whom were described as being “under the influence of liquor.” The LCB quickly suspended the proprietor’s licence. The chairman claimed the suspension was for serving inebriated male patrons, but he added that “I am determined that persons of questionable character shall not frequent licensed premises, and it is not always possible to guard against this condition if women are permitted.” The operator took the government to court, but the government won, although the judgment sidestepped the issue of whether women could be banned from beer parlours. By 1927 liquor officials had concluded that the ban was not legally enforceable. The LCB reached a compromise with the Commercial Hotel, which allowed beer service to women in a separate room watched over by a security guard. Other hotels soon followed suit. The government

¹⁹ *Province*, 30 July 1926, 24, (quotes), 23 July 1926, 7; *Victoria Times*, 30 July 1926, *LCB Scrapbooks*, Vol. 20, BCARS, GR62. Victoria, the capital, had voted against beer parlours in 1924.

drafted legislation that would have formalized gender segregation, but it was not introduced in the House.²⁰

In public at least, women themselves had little to say about the ban and separate facilities. The Vancouver Local Council of Women, for example, was more concerned about sterilization of the feeble-minded and immigration restriction. The lack of comment is understandable since women's groups generally had opposed the return of licensed public drinking, and the prohibition association was leading the fight against it. In the 1920s a strong possibility still existed that beer parlours could be eliminated. The issue was not the presence or absence of women but the existence of the beer parlours.²¹

Yet there were opposing voices. Mrs. T. D. Tattersall, who lived on Pacific Street in Vancouver, had approved of "beer-by-the-glass for women." She said the explanation that women had to be banned because of "bad women" was "the worst insult ever offered to the women of Vancouver." She believed the ban was a threat to female suffrage and warned that "this is the thin edge of the wedge. Don't let it go farther." As we have seen, many anonymous women supported Mrs. Tattersall by patronizing the Commercial Hotel and other beer parlours. An important shift had occurred. Some women were no longer willing to accept that public drinking was a respectable activity for men only, and they challenged them on their own turf.²²

For the time being the issue of women in beer parlours faded from the public spotlight. The dries were not able to obtain another plebiscite, so hotel owners became less concerned about separation of the sexes. In 1930 the LCB chairman informed the Alberta Liquor Control Board that women were not legally barred from British Columbia parlours but that "many licensees particularly in large centres have voluntarily provided separate rooms for the service of women and women with male escorts in an endeavor to safeguard their licenses by minimizing the risks thereto offered by undesirable females." Many parlours simply provided a separate area in the main parlour for solo women and women with male escorts. Some let all women and men openly drink together.²³

²⁰ *Sun*, 16 August 1926, *LCB Scrapbooks*, Vol. 20, BCARS, GR62; Tuley to Sutherland, 26 May 1927, BCARS, GR1323, B2309 (1st quote); *Province*, 27 May 1927, *LCB Scrapbooks*, Vol. 20 (2nd quote); Tysoe to Attorney General, 22 June 1927, BCARS, GR1323, B2309; *Province* 6 July 1927, 28, 7 July 1927, 1; "Government Liquor Act-Suggested amendment of section 27, [1927]" GR1323, B2308.

²¹ Local Council of Women, Special Collections, University of British Columbia, Box 1, Files 3 and 4.

²² *Province*, 31 October 1926, 12.

²³ Secretary to Davidson, 7 August 1930, BCARS GR770, Box 2, File 109.

Beer parlours attracted official attention again when they became indirectly part of a provincial campaign to improve public health. In 1933 the British Columbia government, following the lead of Alberta, passed a eugenics law that allowed for the sterilization of the "feeble-minded." Those who wanted to improve "the race" by promoting the reproduction of the "fit" and restricting the reproduction of "the unfit" saw a connection between feeble-mindedness and venereal disease. Eugenicists had long argued that syphilis and its "conduit" (prostitution) imperilled the race because of the disease's alleged hereditary characteristics. The disease led to degeneration, depopulation (of the fit), infant mortality, and inefficiency. Some argued that prostitution was an inherited predisposition and that prostitutes in general were feeble-minded. The links were clear and simple. The mentally unfit became prostitutes, and their actions spread syphilis, which resulted in the birth of more feeble-minded and a new generation of prostitutes. Placing restrictions on prostitutes would help reduce feeble-mindedness.²⁴

To maintain the support of Catholics, who opposed any interference with reproduction, opposition leader Thomas "Duff" Pattullo had voted against the government's Sexual Sterilization Act. Personally, though, he had long "toyed with the notion of eugenics." More important, when he became Liberal Premier in 1933 his government displayed a commitment to use state power to improve society's health. The government's primary interest was public health insurance, but in November 1936 Provincial Secretary George Weir, the strongest supporter in the cabinet of state medicine, announced a new campaign to reduce venereal disease, which he claimed affected 20 per cent of the population. The five-year plan, implemented in 1937, called for more venereal disease clinics, a public awareness program and increased enforcement. According to Dr. Donald H. Williams, who was appointed the Director of Venereal Disease Control in the Provincial Board of Health in 1938, the key to eliminating venereal disease was "a policy of vigorous enforcement of law directed against commercialized prostitution. . . ." Between October 1936 and August 1940 the board's Vancouver office examined 65 "professional pros-

²⁴ Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), 40, 72-73, 91; Buckley and McGinnis, "Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform," 350-351. Until the introduction of antibiotics, the concept of hereditary syphilis was widely accepted in western countries, particularly in the interwar years. See Quetel, *History of Syphilis*, 165-170.

titutes" and over 70 per cent were infected with gonorrhoea or syphilis or both.²⁵

In February 1937, at the suggestion of the LCB chairman, the secretary of the BCHA had sent a letter to all members warning them "not to allow men unaccompanied by a lady, to be seated in the ladies' part of the beer parlour." He added that "if present conditions are not rectified at once," the LCB might compel operators "to put in a ceiling high partition definitely dividing the ladies' section from the men's." The secretary also pointed out that some operators had allowed some patrons "to become very unladylike and ungentlemanly in their conduct." He concluded by noting that "present conditions" could put beer parlours "into disrepute in the eyes of the public, thereby jeopardizing our franchise."²⁶

Both provincial and urban authorities were anxious to spruce up Vancouver in preparation for the pending spring visit of the King and Queen in 1939. In a January speech to the Vancouver Board of Trade, Dr. Williams claimed that "in many of the mixed beer parlors of Vancouver there is at least one prostitute who plies her trade in a room in the hotel to which the beer parlor is attached." He characterized central Vancouver as a "cesspool of prostitution, bootlegging and moral degredation [*sic*]." In February known Vancouver "disorderly houses" were closed down, and authorities were concerned that more prostitutes would move into beer parlours. By then the LCB chairman had already decided that "in view of the publicity being given to the present vice-drive in the City of Vancouver," the LCB would work more closely with the Division of Venereal Disease Control. Patients of public health clinics who admitted that "contact was made in a beer parlour or while under the influence of liquor" would have their liquor permits cancelled. Permits were necessary to buy liquor in government stores and in beer parlours. On paper the ruling was gender-neutral; it did not have to be specified that the patients would be men who had been infected by women.²⁷

The BCHA also pledged its full cooperation with the Board of Health "in connection with the problem of prostitution and venereal disease." In March 1939, however, Dr. Williams informed the BCHA

²⁵ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 103-104; Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 139 (quote); Cassel, *The Secret Plague*, 200-201; Province, 19 March 1938, 6; Donald H. Williams, "Commercialized Prostitution and Venereal-Disease Control," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 31 (1940): 465 (quote), 466.

²⁶ Kahn to Kennedy, 22 February 1937, BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199.

²⁷ Williams, "Commercialized Prostitution," 465; Province, 12 January 1939, 5 (Board of Trade); Kennedy to Wismer, 27 January 1939, BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199.

that despite the crackdown, there were "still a considerable number of known prostitutes and known infected patients using the beer parlours in Vancouver." Williams claimed that "the prostitute is the main root and source of venereal disease in this province" and tracking infected prostitutes often took health workers to beer parlours. Williams was particularly concerned because he believed that "alcohol flares an almost healed gonorrhoea into full blown activity and it cancels out the value of treatment in syphilis."²⁸

In June the BCHA executive met with Dr. Williams and the Vancouver city prosecutor to discuss the "menace" of prostitution in beer parlours. Williams said he had "found a great improvement until immediately after the visit of the King and Queen and then things got very bad and disagreeable." The hotel owners were defensive about being singled out, and the BCHA president claimed that prostitutes could be found "in all public places." Dr. Williams countered that during one evening, his workers had found "40 women with known or suspected promiscuous habits in 10 beer parlors, of these women 14 had venereal disease." He also warned the hotel owners that if action were not taken, "there may be a hue and cry for segregation of sexes in beer parlors" because the public was "sending letters to Dr. Williams' office protesting against these people flocking to the beer parlors." Williams added that eight women might be prosecuted because they had broken their treatment by consuming liquor. At the end of the meeting Dr. Williams agreed that his workers would pass on the names of known prostitutes to beer parlour operators so they could refuse them service.²⁹

By the fall of 1939 the BCHA had become fed up with Williams. In October the secretary of the BCHA wrote the private secretary of the federal Minister of Health in anticipation of a visit to Ottawa by Dr. Williams. The BCHA claimed that he had "hounded and harassed the beer parlors," even though "the ten cent dance halls" constituted "the main source of [venereal] pollution [*sic*]." The hotel association secretary added that Dr. Williams "faked statistics" in order to discredit the parlours. He believed that Williams' ultimate goal was to "wreck the beer parlor business."³⁰

PARTITIONED PLEASURE

With the beginning of the Second World War, however, Dr. Williams intensified the campaign against beer parlour prostitution, and the

²⁸ Williams to Kahn, 7 March 1939, BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199B.

²⁹ "Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting," 7 June 1939, *ibid*.

³⁰ Kahn to Senior, 6 October 1939, BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199B.

hotels had little choice but to cooperate officially. Williams referred to beer parlours "frequented by diseased women" as "an alien fifth column which is insidiously undermining the health of His Majesty's Forces and spreading infection to potential recruiting material among the young male population." In April 1942 he sent the Attorney-General a list of nineteen Vancouver beer parlours that he considered "a menace to national defence" because of "diseased prostitutes using their premises for solicitation." Later that month the LCB and BCHA agreed that beer parlours in Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and Esquimalt would erect barriers that would physically separate the area reserved for men only from that for "ladies and their escorts." Parlours elsewhere were encouraged to raise barriers between men and women. While the BCHA resented the harsh opinions of Dr. Williams, the hotel owners knew they had to be publicly seen to be taking action. Almost as soon as the war had started, prohibitionists launched a campaign to curtail public drinking for the duration, and by 1942 they had achieved some support. By mid-June the parlours had the partitions in place.³¹

Throughout the war the Division of Venereal Disease Control monitored cases of disease allegedly acquired in beer parlours. To track them, the division relied almost exclusively on interviews with infected men. In the official record, women transmitted venereal disease to men: "It has come to the attention of this Division that five male patients who are under care for acute gonorrhoea allegedly acquired their infections from girls, not previously known to them, whom they met in beer parlours in this city." Unstated was that at some point these women were probably infected by men. Also unstated in the documents was the assumption that single women who met men in beer parlours were prostitutes, or at least women of "suspected promiscuous habits." In one encounter at the Rainier Hotel in Vancouver, a man invited "a girl who was sitting alone" to join his group. The two went to his room "where the exposure occurred. No charge was made by the girl. . . ."³²

In early January 1944, health officials sent a "female employee" to visit Vancouver beer parlours "in search of girls who had been reported as alleged sources of venereal disease." The inspector did not always

³¹ Kennedy to Angelus Holding Company, 13 January 1941, BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199B (1st quote); Williams to Wismer, 8 April 1942, GR770, File 199A; "Partitions in Beer Parlours," 23 April 1942, GR770, Box 5, File 199A; Kennedy to Blackwell, 13 December 1944, GR770, Box 5, File 199B; Galvin to Kennedy, 15 June 1942, GR770, Box 5, File 199A.

³² Cleveland to Kennedy, 9 December 1942, (quotes), BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199A; Saxton to Kennedy, 13 November 1943, Box 5, File 199B.

receive a warm welcome. At the Dodson Hotel the "waiters were reported to be extremely rude and indifferent." At the Main Hotel "the bartender and a waiter . . . were also rude and lacking in ordinary civility. They said that they were too busy to be bothered and that they did not know the names of their patrons anyway." It is difficult to assess what motivated the workers' hostility. They may have feared for their jobs; offending parlours were liable to have their beer licences suspended. But neither of these hotels had large numbers of infections allegedly acquired in their parlours. In 1943 the Main had three offences, the Dodson two. By contrast the Pennsylvania had thirteen offences in 1943, but there the woman inspector found waiters who were "agreeable and cooperative." Maybe the men at the Dodson and Main were just busy. Perhaps, however, they resented a woman in a position of authority inspecting their parlours.³³

Venereal infections allegedly acquired in beer parlours hardly constituted a threat to national defence. Between 1939 and 1944 the Division of Venereal Disease Control attributed 562 cases of venereal disease to beer parlours. Of those, 513 were in Vancouver, and the Halfway House in Esquimalt on Vancouver Island accounted for nearly half of the rest. In 1939, before the war and the influx of military personnel to the province, Dr. Williams reported that the Vancouver clinic alone treated 1,600 cases each week. In 1942 the military infection rate was less than half that of the civilian rate in Vancouver, and the *Vancouver News-Herald* said the city "boasts one of the lowest V.D. rates on the continent." The complaints of the BCHA about Dr. Williams had at least some credibility.³⁴

Official attitudes towards the spread of venereal disease in British Columbia beer parlours paralleled those of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. As Ruth Roach Pierson has noted, the members of the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) were treated differently from their male counterparts. Until 1942 CWAC members infected with venereal disease were discharged, while male army personnel received treatment. The army gave men (still illegal) condoms; women were given only education. Men who had illicit sex had committed a bad act, but women who had illicit sex had become bad. They were loose or promiscuous. Educational information stressed that infected women preyed on men, particularly those under the influence of alcohol. One 1944 booklet highlighted the "Three

³³ Cleveland to Kennedy, 21 January 1944, BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199B (quotes); "V.D. Infections Allegedly Acquired From Persons Met in Beer Parlours, 1939-1944," *ibid.*

³⁴ V.D. Infections Allegedly Acquired From Persons Met In Beer Parlours, 1939-1944," BCARS, GR770, Box 5 File 199B; *Vancouver News-Herald*, 15 October 1942, 9.

Queens." In it syphilis and gonorrhoea were personified as two adult women, Gonnie and Syph. They travelled with the third queen — "easy women" — looking for male soldiers to entertain and infect. Male soldiers waiting for repatriation were told that "Liquor plus loose women equals Syphilis and Gonorrhoea." As in the beer parlours, in the army only women were loose, and only women spread venereal disease.³⁵

A superficial explanation for the army's attitudes could be that in 1943 Dr. Donald Williams became Lieutenant-Colonel Donald Williams, the Army Venereal Disease Control Officer. In reality, Williams represented widely held views, and he actually attempted to make some changes. For example, he unsuccessfully recommended the cancellation of the Three Queens booklet. As well, in his own writing during the war, he displayed increasing sympathy for prostitutes, although he still regarded them as the main source of venereal disease. He may have been implicitly referring to some of his own publications when he stated that "too often and too long have we permitted the term 'suppression of prostitution' to crack the whip lash of community legal action against unfortunate, unhealthy women. . . ." He now directed his venom at the "facilitators" of prostitution, which meant both the pimps and procurers and the places where contacts were made, such as brothels, dance halls and, of course, beer parlours. Williams considered alcohol "the lubricant of the facilitation process," and he argued that "the community should 'suppress facilitation' rather than prostitution."³⁶

While there was not the same fear that had existed in 1918, official concern about prostitution and venereal disease remained after the Second World War. With the introduction of sulpha drugs in the late 1930s and penicillin in 1943, many people believed venereal disease would be eradicated. Those hopes were mistaken. According to figures compiled by the Division of Venereal Disease Control, when British Columbia abandoned wartime liquor rationing in 1947, one result was an increase of venereal infections allegedly acquired in beer parlours, particularly those in Vancouver. In response, the LCB, hotels, and health officials created an at-first informal "facilitation" committee. Within a couple of years the membership had expanded to

³⁵ Ruth Roach Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, 190, 200-201, 204, 206 (quotes).

³⁶ Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, 189, 206; Donald H. Williams, "The Facilitation Process and Venereal Disease Control: A Study of Source Finding and Suppression of Facilitation in the Greater Vancouver Area," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 34 (September 1943), 394, 397. See also Williams, "Canada's National Health and Venereal Disease Control," *ibid.*, 261-266.

include the police, religious representatives, and social workers. The committee met periodically to discuss ways to reduce contacts between prostitutes and potential clients in public places. In 1947 the government also updated the "Venereal Diseases Suppression Act"; infected people could be "detained" for up to a year if they refused or did not continue their treatment for venereal disease. In addition, "as a means of improving the liaison between the City Police Department and the Health authorities," a "Police Station Examination Centre" was opened in Vancouver. "Each morning all women in custody" were "examined routinely for venereal disease. . . ."³⁷

Beer parlour partitions also remained in British Columbia after the war. The dries, including the B.C. Temperance League (the "prohibition" title had been dropped in the mid-1930s) and the venerable WCRU, called for complete gender segregation in licensed facilities. They could no longer hope to eliminate public drinking, so they tried to place as many restrictions on it as possible. While temperance supporters remained determined, the beer parlours were no longer in danger of being closed down. Yet the partitions became permanent fixtures. Outside hotels, neon lights advertised the "Men's Entrance" and that for "Ladies and Escorts." Only in 1963 did the LCB authorize their removal, but many parlours chose not to remodel their premises for more than another decade.³⁸

* * *

British Columbia was not Canada, but the Pacific province was not unique. Gender restrictions were the norm across the country, and established practices died slowly. In the late 1970s two female reporters were refused service in the "men only" side of an Ottawa tavern. One reporter attempted to sit with some off-duty male police officers. She was dumped from her chair, and an officer yelled, "Go on, get the hell outta here. We don't want these whores sitting with us." When a male reporter tried to buy drinks for the women in another tavern, he was beaten up. As late as 1984 Quebec still had over 200 taverns that

³⁷ Cassel, *The Secret Plague*, II, 58; Kennedy to Elliot, 3 October 1947, BCARS, GR770, Box 5, File 199A; Elliot to Kennedy, 21 November 1947, *ibid.*; "Minutes of the Quarterly Facilitation Meeting, 18 November 1949," *ibid.*; British Columbia, *Statutes*, 1947, Ch. 95 ("Venereal Diseases Suppression Act"), s. 8; "Minutes of the Facilitation Meeting," n.d. [1948] (examination centre). Dr. Williams resumed his position in B.C. in February 1945, but retired to private practice in November. See *Sun*, 16 February 1945, 5, *Province*, 20 November 1945, 5.

³⁸ WCRU to Maitland, 28 February 1945, *Records Management Branch (RMB)*, Attorney-General's Files, Reel 371; *Province*, 3 March 1947, 3; *Sun*, 3 December 1963.

banned women, and in 1986 the Roblin Hotel in Winnipeg still refused to serve women in the beer parlour. One of the Roblin's customers moaned, "I have nothing against mixed hotels, but this is the only place in town a man can have a social beer with no one bothering him." The "no one," of course, referred to women.³⁹

At the most general, level gender segregation in British Columbia beer parlours underscored the tension between commercialized leisure that had become increasingly heterosocial and the traditionally homosocial world of licensed public drinking. Yet, by design, beer parlours were not saloons. While the press regarded parlours as "workingman's clubs," the LCB and hotel operators had attempted to excise the alleged evils of the working-class saloon. It is common to analyse public drinking in class terms, but gender also played an important role in beer parlours.

From the beginning, beer parlours were a site of gender contention. A few people argued that parlours were not only safe for women, but women could curtail excessive male camaraderie. Men might not want them there, but women would be good for them — as long as they were good women. While some women might have a positive influence, others, prostitutes, could put the parlours on the slippery slope to the saloon. In the moral reform discourse the farthest a woman could fall was to become a diseased, drunken prostitute, which made her a direct threat to her male customers and an indirect one to home and family. This rhetoric remained prominent, even though some women were determined to counter it. Women who frequented beer parlours were wiser not to enter them alone, and they were often discouraged from entering them at all.

Beer parlour segregation in British Columbia served a number of not entirely consistent purposes. In the 1920s and again during the Second World War hotel operators and liquor officials used segregation politically to blunt criticism of the parlours by temperance forces. Hotel operators pushed out prostitutes, but they did not push too hard. Prostitutes were an attraction for some customers, and they provided additional revenue for hotels from the rental of rooms where prostitutes pursued their trade. Parlours and prostitutes had a more symbiotic relationship than the operators would have ever admitted in public or to the LCB.

Separate facilities also show the state's attempt to socially engineer public drinking after prohibition. It would be simple to conclude that the state (especially liquor officials and health authorities) decided

³⁹ *Province*, 3 October 1978 (Ontario); *Sun*, 16 June 1984, A-16, 10 March 1986, A-4.

what was proper behaviour in beer parlours and issued the legal decrees and exercised the appropriate sanctions. What happened was more complex and more limiting for the authorities. The LCB first allowed women to enter parlours, then encouraged a ban of them, then segregated them from single men. Official policy dictated that parlour prostitution would not be tolerated, but in the end the authorities did not have the power to eliminate it. Instead they helped regulate it, particularly by monitoring venereal disease. Regulation on the ground was a process, and not always an obvious one, of negotiation and adaptation among a variety of interest groups.

Finally, parlour segregation was also a genuine effort by health authorities to fight the spread of venereal disease. By the 1930s public health officials had become more prominent than moral reformers in the anti-venereal campaign. Yet, as Claude Quétel notes, "anti-venereal discourse was not merely medical but moral." In British Columbia the medical was as moral as it was scientific. Health officials were still influenced by the traditional views of women and public drinking espoused by moral reformers. They continued to blame female prostitutes for the spread of venereal disease, and they put women who had sex with men in hotels in the same category as prostitutes. Official figures showed that parlour prostitution did not undermine the war effort, but health authorities supported the installation and the partitions.⁴⁰

The resilience of the partitions gave substance to a speculation that the *Province* had made when the walls were going up in 1942. An editorial writer had wondered if the real objection was "to men and women drinking beer together in public upon any terms whatever. . . ." The speculation has warranted some discussion.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Claude Quétel, *History of Syphilis*, 192.

⁴¹ *Province*, 22 April 1942, 4.