

VANCOUVER'S PLAYGROUND:

Leisure and Sociability on Bowen Island, 1902-57

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IN THE 14 SEPTEMBER 1967 issue of the *Vancouver Sun*, popular columnist Penny Wise waxed nostalgic:

It was Saturday evening at Bowen Island, midsummer. The good ship *Lady Alexandra* sidled up to the long pier to disgorge close to 1,000 young passengers, all on the Moonlight Cruise to spend the night dancing at the big island pavilion. Fourteen hundred more happy people, from one to 90 years, piled onto the emptied *Lady Alex* to go back to Vancouver after a 10-hour day of picnicking on the half dozen well-organized Union Steamship grounds. At the luxurious Bowen Inn guests enjoyed a leisurely, late dinner. Lawn bowlers rolled the last ball of the day along the eight lovely greens. Tired riders guided the saddle horses to the barn. Hikers straggled in from the trip to beautiful Lake Killarney. Visiting launches chugged quietly in to tie up for the night. A few late swimmers swam. Beach fires started to blaze; the sun's last glow colored the west; the moon loomed in the east. Soon from the dance pavilion came the music of Barney Potts' band ... "How Deep is the Ocean" ... "We Just Couldn't Say Goodby" ... "Sundown" ... "Ain't Misbehavin'" ...

It was those lazy, crazy, hazy days of summer during Bowen Island's heyday – the mid 1930s. It was the Union Steamships [sic] Company at the peak of its passenger service, providing transportation and family fun for one and all. Now it's all gone. And gone forever. What happened to Bowen Island?¹

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¹ Penny Wise, "Whatever Happened to Bowen Island?" *Vancouver Sun*, 14 September 1967. See also Irene Howard, *Bowen Island, 1872-1972* (Bowen Island Bowen Island Historians, 1973), 106-7.

This is not the usual image one has of the Dirty Thirties, especially as the short cruise from Union Pier in Vancouver's harbour to Snug Cove on Bowen Island was not an exclusively middle-class experience. Aside from the young crowds on the Wednesday and Saturday night dance cruises, there were large-scale family picnics organized by corporations as well as voluntary societies and churches. While the history of tourism is becoming an increasingly popular area of research, historians have paid much less attention to the excursion, or day-tripping, phenomenon, despite the large numbers of people involved from the onset of the steam transportation era. Tourism may be more important in the strictly economic terms of introducing money from outside the province or country, but, difficult to quantify as they may be, excursions were initially clearly more important in promoting sociability and consumerism beyond the ranks of the middle class.

Carlos Schwantes describes how, in order to stimulate ticket sales, railway and streetcar companies developed popular summer resorts near the urban centres of the American Pacific Northwest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² And, as Dale Barbour has recently shown, the Canadian Pacific Railway had the same end in mind when it opened its resort at Winnipeg Beach in 1901.³ A different path was followed for Vancouver, however, where the focus was instead on its sheltered coastal offshore, and where the picnic excursions to Bowen Island at the entrance of Howe Sound remained popular into the 1950s. This article examines the evolution of Bowen Island as a seaside resort, only an hour's sail from downtown Vancouver, but I begin by returning to Penny Wise's question: "What happened to Bowen Island?" Her answer is simply *Fordicus modelus* – the automobile. While she is basically right, the fact that the family car spelled the end of popular excursion sites south of the border as early as the 1920s suggests that Vancouverites continued to engage in a highly sociable leisure activity considerably longer than did the citizens of most other cities in North America.⁴

For an explanation as to why this was so we need to turn to geography, for what was distinctive about British Columbia's Lower Mainland was not only that Vancouver Island protected it from the open Pacific

² Carlos A. Schwantes, "Tourists in Wonderland: Early Railroad Tourism in the Pacific Northwest," *Columbia* (magazine), winter 1993/94, 22–30.

³ Dale Barbour, *Winnipeg Beach: Leisure and Courtship in a Resort Town, 1900–1967* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011).

⁴ According to a *Fortune* magazine survey taken in 1936, three-quarters of American vacationers drove cars to their destinations that year. See Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 244.

but also that the coastal mountains presented a challenge to the construction of good roads into the interior of the province. As late as 1930 there was only one such road, and it was circuitous and slow.⁵ Only after Premier W.A.C. Bennett began his ambitious road-building program in the 1950s did Vancouverites abandon the summer cruises and seaside resorts to drive long distances in order to view new sites and to experience more private, family-centred vacations. Keeping in mind Marshall McLuhan's well-known observation that the automobile is an instrument of social isolation,⁶ this history of Bowen Island as a popular excursion destination suggests that, for over half a century, the steamship served as an instrument of social interaction for the people of a young and rapidly developing city – people who, for the most part, had been born elsewhere.

Once a neutral meeting place for the nearby Squamish and other First Nations travelling up and down the coast, Bowen Island lies at the entrance to Howe Sound, twenty minutes by ferry from the mainland at Horseshoe Bay. There is little arable land on the mountainous island, which is roughly twelve-by-six kilometres in dimension, but during the later 1880s it became a source of lumber and blue clay for the sawmills and brickyards of the mainland as well as Vancouver Island. Early settlers cut logs, produced dogfish oil for the skid roads, and sold apples, butter, and eggs; they also relied on ample supplies of fish and game.⁷ Taking advantage of Bowen's accessibility to the mainland, and lured by camping opportunities as well as by boat rentals, vacationers began to arrive even before the turn of the century, when Vancouver was still a very young city. The small Howe Sound Hotel opened in 1901 at Hood Point, on the island's remote north end,⁸ but it was only in 1902, when John Andrew Cates, and three partners, established the Terminal Steamship Company that large numbers began to visit the island. The new company launched a thirty-two metre (105-foot) steam-screw vessel, christened the *Britannia*, with a carrying capacity of three hundred passengers. (See Figure 1.) With two salons (one for ladies and

⁵ Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 172–74. See also Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890–1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 4, 96–97, 113; and Patricia E. Roy and John Herd Thompson, *British Columbia: Land of Promises* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2005), 116.

⁶ Further on “automobility,” see John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 57–64.

⁷ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 23–39.

⁸ Robert J. Cathro, “Bowen Island's Howe Sound Hotel,” *BC Historical News*, Winter 1999/2000, 19–21.

one for gentlemen), seats upholstered in maroon plush, a dining room on the lower deck and a promenade deck above, the *Britannia* was a costly investment, but it proved to be a profitable one. According to local historian Irene Howard, “With the launching of the *Britannia*, Captain Cates made the name of Bowen Island synonymous with the picnic excursion.”⁹

Cates had acquired 130 hectares at Snug Cove and Deep Bay on the southeast coast of the island, where he planted three hundred fruit trees, laid fifteen hundred metres of water pipe, brought in twelve portable houses, and erected a general store. The *Vancouver Daily Province* reported: “Captain Cates says that logging engines are now at work clearing up about 40 acres [16.2 hectares] more land, where a fenced enclosure will be made for the cattle which last summer roamed at will among the tents of the campers, browsing on tin cans and other dainties, and sometimes making raids on boxes of apples and other eatables in the tents themselves.” (See Figure 2.) Cates issued camping permits and promoted group picnics such as the one organized for 350 people by Vancouver’s First Presbyterian Church.¹⁰ (See Figures 3 and 4.) With the developed section of Stanley Park becoming increasingly overcrowded and the rest of it not easily accessible to picnickers, the *Vancouver World* advised its readers in late July 1908: “Where can we go to get out of the heat? Go to Bowen Island, where there is a cool sea breeze, fine shady trees, good water, good bathing and one of the finest cafes on the coast.”¹¹

The Terminal Steamship Company also provided freight and passenger service to a dozen or so small settlements on Burrard Inlet and along the Howe Sound coast to Squamish, but it was the summer excursion trade that led to the purchase in 1909 of a large paddlewheel steamer (that had served on the Fraser River) as well as two more ships in 1912 and 1914, both more than twice the size of the *Britannia*. Dominion Day festivities on Bowen were so popular in 1914 that all three ships were required to carry holidaymakers back to Vancouver.¹² The company that Cates now owned outright purchased another eighty-nine hectares in the Snug Cove area, but he had in mind more than campers and picnickers for he had also opened the Terminal Hotel on neighbouring

⁹ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 51–54.

¹⁰ Ibid. On the origins of summer camping in the United States, see Aron, *Working at Play*, chap. 6.

¹¹ Robert A.J. McDonald, “‘Holy Retreat’ or ‘Practical Breathing Spot’? Class Perceptions of Vancouver’s Stanley Park,” *Canadian Historical Review* 65, 2 (1984): 144, 153. The newspaper quotes are from Howard, *Bowen Island*, 55.

¹² Howard, *Bowen Island*, 55–56.



Figure 1. A crowded *S.S. Britannia* alongside the pier at Bowen Island's Snug Cove, with one of the Sannie foot-passenger ferries and a canoe alongside, pre-1920. Launched by the Terminal Steamship Company in 1902, this was the first vessel to serve the excursion traffic to the island. *Source:* Vancouver Public Library, accession no. 2881.



Figure 2. Picnickers and stray cows at the litter-strewn Terminal Steamship Company picnic grounds in Snug Cove, pre-1920. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Union Steamship Co. Collection, CVA 374-429.



Figure 3. The name above the tent in this undated postcard illustration is 'Sock-Eye Camp,' suggesting that fishing (not fighting) was a favourite occupation for the men, but this was clearly a family experience as well as a social one. The woman with the apron on the left and the dark-skinned young man in the front right also point to the class dimension of this camp. *Source:* Bowen Island Historians Archives, photograph box no. 2.



Figure 4. Women in a race at the No. 1 Picnic Grounds in Deep Bay during the Printers' Dominion Day picnic, 1 July 1912. Encumbered though they were by their long dresses or skirts, some of these young women at least removed their shoes for the race. *Source:* Bowen Island Historians Archives, photograph box no. 4.

Deep Bay. On 121 hectares of farmland surrounding nearby Killarney Lake, Cates erected greenhouses, barns and stables, a slaughterhouse, a silo, and a dairy for his prize-winning herd of dairy cows in order to supply his hotel and store. Killarney Creek was dammed to supply water for a hydro-electric generator, and in the pond thus created Cates placed scale models of his vessels. Finally, according to Howard, "Bridges and paths were designed in the manner of the Japanese garden by the works foreman, the invaluable Koga, and constructed with the aid of his crew of workmen, mostly Japanese, who did the maintenance work on the estate."¹³ (See Figures 5 and 6.)

In his 1917 company brochure, Cates was able to advertise a "well-planned" 365-hectare park with several picnic grounds, featuring covered tables, a dance pavilion, a fine hotel dining room, and "refreshment parlors," in contrast to the naturalistic Stanley Park, which had only tennis courts, putting and bowling greens, and children's playground facilities.¹⁴ Bowen Island even had a carousel for a brief time, but it never became the site of an artificial amusement park such as the ones that, according to Schwantes, had largely superseded picnic groves and other natural attractions in the state of Washington by World War I.¹⁵ Winnipeg Beach also became the site of a public leisure zone during the war,¹⁶ but Vancouverites had only Happyland in east-end Hastings Park which remained connected to the week-long Pacific National Exhibition (aside from a small permanent amusement area that was developed in the mid-1920s).¹⁷ The owners of the Bowen Island resort could therefore take advantage of a demand for popular recreation areas that was largely satisfied by amusement parks on the fringes of other North American cities.

The First World War failed to stop expansion on Bowen Island as more cottages were built and company assets totalled nearly \$250,000 by the end of 1919. Fifty years later, K.U. Koga, the son of the Japanese

¹³ Ibid., 57-58.

¹⁴ In Robert McDonald's words: "Natural parks were to be used principally for passive rather than active recreation." There were sports grounds at Brockton Point, but they were controlled by an association that charged fees. See McDonald, "Holy Retreat," 139-40, 144-45, 152.

¹⁵ Schwantes, "Tourists in Wonderland," 28-29.

¹⁶ Barbour, *Winnipeg Beach*, 11.

¹⁷ The number of visitors reportedly increased from 197,000 in 1925 to 377,000 in 1936, but Happyland suffered from financial mismanagement and from being closed for military purposes during the Second World War. See David Breen and Kenneth Coates, *Vancouver's Fair: An Administrative and Political History of the Pacific National Exhibition* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1982), 29, 57-58, 73, 78-79, 82-83, 130; Grant Buday, "Happyland: the Birth of the Pacific National Exhibition," 17 January 2011, available at www.suite101.com/content/happyland (accessed 26 February 2011).

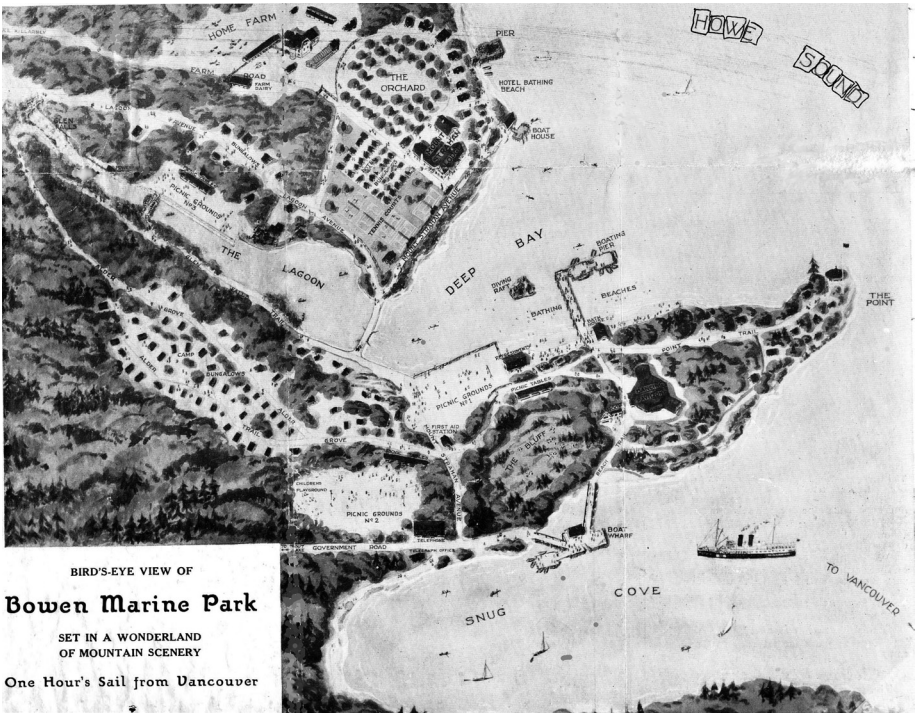


Figure 5. Bird's-Eye View of Bowen Marine Park. This undated map includes all the main features of the Bowen resort, including the wharf, picnic grounds, bungalows, store (labeled 'telephone'), bathing beach, dance pavilion, lagoon, tennis courts, orchard, farm buildings, and hotel. *Source:* Bowen Island Historians Archives, Union Steamship Company Fonds.

foreman, recalled that, after the war, many wounded soldiers, accompanied by nurses and physicians, were sent to the island for recreation picnics:

The happy cheering crowd welcomed the physically disabled soldiers. Picnic and feasting turned whole gathering into heavenly turmoil ... Heaven and paradise overtook the whole island at that time. The passengers [who] arrived in the morning were compelled to take the afternoon boat to go back to their home. Many reluctant to go home even when the time for their departure came. The waiting boat had to blow shrill signal whistle several times to pick up the last ... passengers. A day seemed too short to share the full enjoyment. Each time boat departed, the whole cove packed with people. You can well imagine what an excitement each time when the boat swung off from the cove, singing, shouting, crying almost drowned the whole island. Cheering voices never ended till the boat disappeared far away.¹⁸

¹⁸ Quoted in Howard, *Bowen Island*, 58-59.



Figure 6. Postcard photo of the 'Japanese Bridge' over Killarney Creek, with the duck pond in the foreground. *Source:* Bowen Island Historians Archives, photograph box no. 9.

In 1920, Cates sold his business to the Union Steamship Company, which had been serving the coast since 1889 and which, in 1917, had also acquired the All Red Line's two vessels and 2.8 hectares near Sechelt on the Sunshine Coast. There it had built a large picnic ground, a dozen waterfront cottages, tennis courts, and a large dance hall with a veranda restaurant overlooking Georgia Strait at what was known as Selma Park.¹⁹ Controlled since 1911 by J.H. Welsford and Company, a Liverpool cargo line, the Union Steamship Company turned its attention to Bowen Island in 1921 when it built the largest dance pavilion in the province with a sprung hardwood floor and space for eight hundred couples, and constructed a hundred "attractively designed" cottage bungalows as well as small camp cottages to replace what company historian, Gerald Rushton, refers to as Captain Cates's "old shacks and ramshackle 'tent-camps.'" The cottage bungalows, advertised as having "five rooms and modern conveniences," were obviously for the middle class; but the camp cottages, with only two rooms, were much more rudimentary. (See Figures 7 and 8.) Both categories were originally available on a seasonal basis only, from 1 May to 30 September, which explains why

¹⁹ Gerald A. Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet: The Union Steamship Story* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1974), 74-81; *Our Coastal Trips* (Union Steamship Co. [1923]), 30-31, Bowen Island Archives, Union Steamship Company Fonds. The company expanded by purchasing the Sechelt Hotel and about 97 hectares (240 acres) in 1926. See Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 105.

the Friday evening arrivals from Vancouver were known as the “Daddy boats.” Within the next couple of years a saltwater swimming pool was installed, new trails were extended from the cottage areas to Bridal Falls and Killarney Lake (which was advertised as having excellent fishing), and the Terminal Hotel was enlarged and renovated as Mount Strahan Lodge (later renamed the Bowen Inn). (See Figure 9.) Not only did the hotel have a “private dance room and modern billiard room, in addition to its very comfortable lounge,” according to a brochure published in 1925, but its “cuisine, with all the advantages of the Company’s home farm supplies” was said to be “under expert supervision.” For five dollars a night hotel guests received a front room with a balcony overlooking expansive lawns, flower beds, and a monkey tree as well as a view of Deep Bay, Howe Sound, and the coast mountains.²⁰

Upon becoming company manager in 1924, Major Harold Brown, a decorated military transportation manager in the Italian campaign of the First World War (see Figure 10), built more cottages as well as a new general store in the Tudor revival style, a shell for outdoor concerts, four hard tennis courts, and putting and lawn bowling greens. (See Figure 11.) Cost-conscious automobile travellers, known derogatively as “tin can tourists,” were spelling the end to the railway resorts in the American Pacific Northwest; however, with an operating profit of nearly a million dollars in three years,²¹ the Union Steamship Company was finding that the excursion boom was developing almost too rapidly to keep up with. In 1925 it purchased two converted mine sweepers, each with a capacity of nine hundred passengers, but it was the *Lady Alexandra*, ordered from a Scottish shipyard, that became the flagship of the new excursion fleet. Capable of carrying fourteen hundred people, the *Lady Alex*, as it was popularly known, was “the biggest excursion carrier north of San Francisco.” It boasted three spacious decks, six staterooms, “the finest dining room of any coastal steamer,” and a “splendid hardwood dance floor, extending the breadth of the ship.” Aside from the several trips a day to Bowen during the weekends, the *Lady Alex* was used on two evenings a week for moonlight cruises to Snug Cove, where the ship’s orchestra disembarked to continue playing at the dance pavilion – “nursery and hot-house to the sweet buds of summer romance,” according to one

²⁰ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 99-102; Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 86-87, 105; *Our Coastal Trips*, 18-23; *Mount Strahan Lodge, Bowen Island BC*, 1925, City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter cva), Union Steamship Company of British Columbia Fonds (hereafter uscvc Fonds).

²¹ Schwantes, “Tourists in Wonderland,” 30.



Figure 7. A row of rustic but uniform Bowen Island Resort cottages, with carefully tended window boxes, and fruit trees, ca. 1949. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Union Steamship Co. Collection, cva 374-379.



Figure 8. Several of the suburban-like Bowen Island Resort bungalows, with landscaped lawn, ca. 1946. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Union Steamship Co. Collection, cva 374-382.



Figure 9. Bowen Island Inn in the 1930s, with exotic young monkey tree. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Union Steamship Co. Collection, cva 374-327.



Figure 10 (right). Harold Brown, manager of the Union Steamship Company from 1924 to 1938, in his Vancouver office. *Source:* Vancouver Maritime Museum, Union Steamship Co. Collection.



Figure 11. Bowen Park store, ca. 1945. Now serving as the local library, this is the only use building apart from a few cottages and a dormitory to have been preserved. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Union Steamship Co. Collection, cva 374-360.

nostalgic account.²² Fares were clearly affordable, at ninety cents for a day-trip return ticket, and a moonlight cruise with admission to the dance pavilion costing only one dollar, which represented approximately an hour's labour for the average semi-skilled Vancouver labourer.²³

But it was the picnic grounds and the beach at Deep Bay, enhanced by several hundred tons of sand carried in ballast from Scotland, that attracted the most passengers. Reputed to be an admirer of national socialism, Brown was a strong advocate of the benefits of outdoor exercise and fresh air as reflected in colourful brochures that embraced the advertisers' increased emphasis on visual imagery and that were printed in the tens of thousands each year.²⁴ *A Foreword, about Summer*

²² Sam Roddan, "Bowen Island: Sweet Memories of Golden Youth," undated newspaper article, Bowen Island Archives.

²³ See Historical Statistics of Canada: Sect. E, 'Wages and Working Conditions' by Noah M. Meltz, Series E248-267, available at www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516--x/...4147438-eng.htm (accessed 16 October 2011).

²⁴ Howard, Bowen Island, 103; Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 53; Richard Mackie, "The Newcastle Island Resort Pavilion, 1931-1941," paper prepared for the Heritage Conservation Branch, Victoria, BC, March 1983, 26, 38. Brown advocated abolishing the province's party

Picnics, written in 1926, declared: “there is no invigoration so enduring as a refreshing trip on the open sea and a picnic at one of the enchanting sea-nooks dotted along the pathway of *Sunshine and Sea-Charm*.”²⁵ A year later, in *Bowen Island: Bright, Breezy, Bracing*, Brown claimed that “the keynote of life at Bowen Island is abounding vitality.” Attractions included “beautiful trails” winding through “woodland dells,” the “two fine bathing beaches,” and the Deep Cove pier that “leads out from the sands to a boating and bathing raft.” In addition, “scores of pleasure craft, canoes, row boats and sail boats ply around the Bay,” and the four picnic grounds could accommodate parties of any size “for a glorious day’s outing with all the facilities for sports and refreshments.”²⁶ The *Festival of Fitness* folder, which appeared in 1928, describes the need to renew vitality after the sedentary winter months and declares that “under no conditions can body and mind be more effectually re-invigorated than by the fresh and wholesome sea salt air.”²⁷ Another 1928 brochure promises that, “upon arrival, Bowen Park opens up a real ‘Pleasure Garden,’ with its summer delights, as EVERY OUTDOOR RECREATION is in full swing – Bathing, Boating, Dancing, Fishing, Tennis and Lawn Bowling.”²⁸

The same trend continued into the 1930s, a decade during which the Third Reich was promoting leisure travel and beach holidays as a means of physical rejuvenation of the *Volk* (late nineteenth-century Social Darwinism had fostered the fear that urbanization was causing overworked nervous system and racial decline).²⁹ The illustrated covers of Brown’s brochures focussed increasingly on stylish young women engaged in outdoor activities, thereby representing glamour, health, and modernity.³⁰ Sarah Morgan claims that, in Italy, the swimmer was

system as a means of dealing with the economic crisis. See *Vancouver Daily Province*, 11 and 15 April 1932). Robin Fisher claims, however, that most of the province’s business elite took the same position. See Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 223–25.

²⁵ “A Foreword about Summer Picnics,” annual letter penned by the general manager, 1926, CVA, USCBC Fonds.

²⁶ *Bowen Island: Bright, Breezy, Bracing*, 1927, CVA, USCBC Fonds.

²⁷ *The Festival of Fitness*, 1928, CVA, USCBC Fonds.

²⁸ *Bowen Pleasure Island: One Hour’s Delightful Sail from Vancouver*, CVA, USCBC Fonds, 1928.

²⁹ Kristin Semmens, “Travel in Merry Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich,” in *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity, and Conflict*, ed. John K. Walton (Clevedon, UK: Channel View Publications, 2005), 145; Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 243; Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 106–7.

³⁰ Brown was somewhat ahead of his time in this respect, at least as far as British Columbia was concerned, for, according to Dawson, it was only during the war period that advertisers began to offer different images of women. See Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 140.

particularly amenable to Mussolini's construction of the "Latin athletic woman" as "graceful and strong" as well as "feminine and disciplined," but the same trend had emerged in the democratic United States, where, according to Mark Dyeson, female swimmers had become "representative of their country's superior athleticism and beauty."³¹ A good example of this image is the cover of *Bowen Island: Vancouver's Seaside Resort*, printed in 1930, which features an athletic-looking young woman, with red hair flying in the breeze, racing towards the viewer on water skis.³² (See Figure 12.) Although these illustrations were presumably directed at both genders, handsome young men were depicted as surrounded by attractive young women rather than vice versa.³³ (See Figure 13.) And, by the end of the decade, the female images were becoming increasingly sexualized.³⁴ (See Figure 14.)

Despite the economic downturn, Bowen Park's six picnic grounds were all fully booked on summer weekends. The Union Steamship line carried fifty-seven thousand passengers to the island in 1931, when the population of Vancouver was recorded at only 246,593.³⁵ The excursion trade had become so successful that it spurred competition from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, which opened a resort on Newcastle Island in Nanaimo's harbour that same year. The *Princess Victoria* alone carried 8,683 passengers from Vancouver in the summer of 1939.³⁶ The province's tourist industry paled in comparison to the excursion trade for, in 1934, only four thousand automobiles entered from California,³⁷ which was the principal source of tourists.

While the Depression brought a sharp decline in business on the Union Steamship Company's commercial routes, historians argue that

³¹ Sarah Morgan, "Mussolini's Boys (and Girls): Gender and Sport in Fascist Italy," *History Australia* 3, 1 (2006): 4.8-4.9 (DOI: 10.2104/ha_060004); Mark Dyeson, "Icons of Liberty or Objects of Desire? American Women Olympians and the Politics of Consumption," *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, 3 (2003): 438.

³² *Bowen Island: Vancouver's Seaside Resort*, 1930, CVA, USCBC Fonds. See also the photograph of the three winners of the Ladies Wrigley Cup on Bowen Island in 1935 (Vancouver Public Library, acc. no. 23740).

³³ *Bowen Island: One Hour's Delightful Sail - Vancouver's Seaside Resort via Union Steamships*, 1938, CVA, USCBC Fonds; *Bowen Island: One Hour's Scenic Boat Trip*, 1939, CVA, USCBC Fonds; Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 138-39, 149.

³⁴ For another example, see *Bowen Island, BC's Marine Playground, 1949*, CVA, USCBC Fonds. Having been elevated from manager to president of the company in 1938, it is unlikely that Brown was directly involved in the production of these images. With the onset of the war, they were replaced by brief newspaper ads and promotional articles accompanied by photographs.

³⁵ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 101-2; Rushforth, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 95-97, 101-2, 106, 124-25.

³⁶ Other CPR vessels also served the island. See Mackie, "Newcastle Island Resort Pavilion," 39-42, 60, 98-99.

³⁷ Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 95.



Figure 12. Cover illustration from a Union Steamship Co. brochure, 1931 (reprint from 1930). One of a series of colourful illustrations that focus on athletic and stylish young women. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Add. mss 75-510-B-6, p. 64.



Figure 13. Cover illustration of Union Steamship Co. brochure, 1926. This illustration is transitional in that one of the women remains shielded from the sun. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Add. mss 75-510-B-6, p. 28.



Figure 14. Cover illustration of Union Steamship Co. brochure, 1938. Note that the bathing suit worn by this manicured, tanned, and bleached young woman is not primarily designed for swimming. The shift from the athletic to the strictly sexual female image is already complete by 1938. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Add. mss 75-510-B-6, p. 109.

it launched the mass consumer society, thus it is not entirely surprising that the company's summer excursion fleet carried record crowds.³⁸ The calendar of events for August 1934 included a swimming gala on the 4th, field sports on the 11th, a Highland gathering with dancing and piping contests on the 18th, a canoe race from English Bay on the 19th, and a lawn bowling tournament as well as a masquerade dance on the 25th and 26th. Other events included speedboat trials, band concerts, and a weekly vaudeville show at the band shell. Sabbatarianism had obviously lost its influence, but there was a small chapel for interdenominational services.³⁹

Brown repeatedly attempted to turn the financial depression to his advantage by stating that health was a better investment than stocks. Thus, the second number of the company's *Union Seaway News*, which appeared in 1932, quoted a "local man" as proclaiming: "This financial depression we are going through has taught me that the only investment that offers a man and his family any real security in life today is an investment in health . . . I consider that the money I spend on my summer cottage is a small expenditure measured in terms of the health and vigor I receive in return." The link between the financial Depression and psychological depression was made explicit in the corner of the same issue, with a photo of a memorial stone on which appeared the words: "Old Man Depression Passed Away at Bowen Island Summer Resort, April 1st, 1932."⁴⁰ How Bowen served as an antidote to the Depression was spelled out in *Bowen Island: Vancouver's Seaside Playground*, printed in 1935:

There is a spirit of fun and freedom at Bowen Island. You feel it in the air as soon as the boat ties up at the wharf. You see it in the faces of the holiday-makers and campers who troop down to meet the boat. You see it in their care-free clothes, and in their songs, shouts, and capers. You sense it in the sea breeze, and you can feel it coming down to you

³⁸ Lizabeth Cohen, "The New Deal State and the Making of Citizen Consumers," in *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 111; Gary Cross, *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993), 128-53; Howard, *Bowen Island*, 103; Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 114, 118, 119.

³⁹ Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 124; Howard, *Bowen Island*, 103-4.

⁴⁰ *Union Seaway News*, vol. 1, no. 2 [1932], CVA, Add. MSS, 75-510-B-6, p. 72. In 1935 a headline advised: "Don't 'Spend' Your Holidays - Invest Them at Bowen or Sechelt." *Union Seaway News* no. 1 (April 1935).

from the lovely, quiet hills above the settlement. You want to romp – the thing can't be explained – it's just Bowen Island!⁴¹

The company's workers were apparently less inclined to romp, however, for this was the same summer that an unsuccessful strike by the longshoremen's union brought a decline of nearly 25 percent in Bowen Island traffic compared to the previous year.⁴²

One of the means that corporations used to fend off unionization was welfare capitalism, also known as corporate welfarism, defined as “any service provided for the comfort or improvement of employees which was neither a necessity of the industry nor required by law.”⁴³ Company picnics, which accounted for a substantial proportion of the summer traffic to Bowen, were a relatively inexpensive but highly visible feature of this form of industrial paternalism. Corporate welfarism persisted into the Depression despite the rise of state welfarism,⁴⁴ and company picnics on Bowen Island were no exception. It was presumably no accident that most of the companies involved were in the non-industrial sector and therefore not unionized.⁴⁵ Thus, there were picnics for the employees of BC Telephone, Safeway Stores, Kelly Douglas, the Bay, Woodward's, Henry Birk's, the grain trade, and White Lunch, many of whom were women.

Donica Belisle suggests that the provision of benefits and programs by department stores was a paternalistic means of allaying suspicion that they were mistreating “vulnerable” workers, especially women.⁴⁶ Picnics in particular may have been one way of addressing concerns that the entry of women into the workforce was a threat to their family role.⁴⁷ Some sense of the scale of these excursions is revealed in the *Vancouver Sun's* description of the 25 May 1939 annual moonlight cruise, carnival,

⁴¹ *Bowen Island: Vancouver's Seaside Playground, 1935*, CVA, USCBC Fonds. Almost the same words appeared in *Union Seaway News*, vol. 1, no. 1 [1932], CVA, Add. MSS, 75-510-B-6, p. 72.

⁴² Howard, *Bowen Island*, 108.

⁴³ Quoted in Margaret E. McCallum, “Corporate Welfarism in Canada, 1919-39,” *Canadian Historical Review* 71, 1 (1990): 47.

⁴⁴ See Joan Sangster, “The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers, and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-60,” *Labour/Le Travail* 32 (1993): 167-99; and Sanford M. Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism since the New Deal* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3-5.

⁴⁵ On this point, see Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 3, 11. Small industrial companies that held picnics included Westminster Shook Mills, Jones Tent and Awning, and Vancouver Breweries. See Bowen Island Archives, Company and Organization Picnic Photographs.

⁴⁶ Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 85, 90, 95-97, 107.

⁴⁷ Tone, *Business of Benevolence*, 11, suggests that this concern was the reason that most of the private welfare benefits of the progressive era in the United States were for women.

and dance organized by employees of Spencer's department store, which referred to its workers as a "big family."⁴⁸ The Spencer's Remnants Marching Band piped one thousand people aboard the *Lady Alex*, which, according to the *Sun*, "was jam-packed, but no one noticed the lack of room. A sing-song was started on the top deck, and continued almost the entire trip. A gay dance crowd found the orchestra and floor in the ship's dining room, and the overflow spread throughout the vessel."⁴⁹ (See Figure 15.)

Just as the Third Reich's Strength through Joy Department combated the growth of workers' material consumerism by focusing on collective leisure programs,⁵⁰ so the company picnic fostered a sense of group cohesiveness and company loyalty. But group picnics were also organized by voluntary associations – such as the Happier Old Age Club, the Gaelic Society, the Sons of Norway, the United Scottish Societies, the Seaforth Highlanders, the congregation of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and the Loyal Order of the Moose for the children of the True Blue Orphanage. Even a few unions, such as the Plumbers and Steamfitters' Union and the Carpenters' Union, held annual picnics, but the one organized by the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers' Association (VDWWA) was a clear example of corporate welfarism because it was a company union. The Shipping Federation of British Columbia, which controlled the union until 1935, gave its members the day off, arranged for special transportation rates, and provided free refreshment tickets. (See Figure 16.) The care taken to control the crowd of up to three thousand people is hinted at by the fact that the seventh annual picnic on 9 July 1934 was managed by a prize committee, refreshment committee, entertainment committee, transportation committee, and program committee (which included the chief of police), in addition to the three "clerks of course," two sports supervisors, and two starters. Among the seven judges were Vancouver's mayor, a colonel, and two captains.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 91.

⁴⁹ *Vancouver Sun*, 25 May 1939; Howard, *Bowen Island*, 107; Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 106–7; Carl Ian Walker, *Pipe Bands in British Columbia* (Squamish, BC: Western Academy of Music, 1992), 188.

⁵⁰ Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), 6–8, 143.

⁵¹ Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 106; Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers' Association, 7th Annual Picnic, 9 July 1934, Vancouver Maritime Museum (hereafter VMM), Union Steamship Company Collection (hereafter uscc), box 1, file 11; Andrew Parnaby, *Citizen Docker: Making a New Deal on the Vancouver Waterfront, 1919–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 38–39, 42. See also the flyer for the 1937 "Coronation Picnic" in the same file. There are close parallels with the picnics organized by the CPR's Social and Athletic Club on Newcastle Island. See Mackie, "Newcastle Island Resort Pavilion," 60, 66–73.



Figure 15. Spencer's Department Store sales clerks en route to or from the annual company picnic on Bowen Island. In this undated photo, the young women pose in their summer finery, while the young men are in the shadowy foreground. *Source:* Bowen Island Historians Archives, photograph box no. 2.



Figure 16. Members and families of the Vancouver and District Waterfront Workers Association at the Union dock in Vancouver and aboard the *Lady Alexandra* and *Lady Cecelia*, about to depart for their annual picnic to Bowen Island, 1934. *Source:* Vancouver Public Library, accession no. 2763.

As noted above, radical elements would succeed in gaining control of the VDWWA to wage a bitter but unsuccessful strike the following year, but Shipping Federation members were still participating in the Bowen picnic even after the company union was succeeded by the bona fide International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union in 1945.⁵²

Meanwhile, Bowen was only becoming more popular as the opening of the Lions Gate Bridge in November 1938 made the Lower Mainland's North Shore more accessible from Vancouver. In competition with the small-scale Sannie Transportation Company, which had been operating a foot-passenger ferry service of three boats from Horseshoe Bay to Bowen since 1920, the Union Steamship Company's *Comox* made ten daily trips from Whytecliff Park to the island during the summer, carrying ten thousand passengers in 1939 alone.⁵³ The *Vancouver Herald* reported that Bowen Island attracted a record number of visitors on Dominion Day weekend the following year, which proved that it was "maintaining its reputation as northwestern mecca for Canadian and United States' tourists."⁵⁴ The British Columbia Government Travel Bureau was advertising the province as "The Riviera of Canada" in an attempt to attract those who, due to the war, were unable to travel to the West Indies or other tropical areas;⁵⁵ but most visitors to Bowen were obviously Vancouver residents. In mid-July 1939, for example, the thirty-third annual picnic of Vancouver's grocers, bakers, and meat dealers required three boats to ferry the participants to the island.⁵⁶

The inn and cottages on Bowen were modernized in 1940,⁵⁷ and, with the addition of another small vessel in the summer of 1941 to allow for more crossings, the number of Union passengers jumped to 61,853. The war did not bring a decline in steamer traffic but, rather, the reverse as the city population was swollen by shipbuilding and other defence industries, and gasoline restrictions forced people to holiday close to home. Concerns may have been expressed about the appropriateness of leisure activities in wartime, but, as Rushton notes: "Brief vacations

⁵² Notice concerning the Annual Picnic of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Locals 501 and 502, 8 July 1949, at Bowen Island, VMM, USCC, box 1, file 11; G.E. McKee to all members, Vancouver, 28 June 1949, VMM, USCC, box 1, file 11; Parnaby, *Citizen Docker*, 165. On the 1935 strike, see Parnaby, *Citizen Docker*, chap. 5.

⁵³ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 95-96, 102; Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 134-35. The Sannie Company was purchased by the Union Steamship Company in 1944, but its boats continued to operate under the same name until 1956. See Peter D. Ommundsen, *Bowen Island Passenger Ferries: The Sannie Transportation Company, 1921-1956* (Castlegar: Cape West Publishing, 1997), 22, 24.

⁵⁴ *Vancouver Herald*, 3 July 1940.

⁵⁵ Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 122.

⁵⁶ *Vancouver Province*, 19 July 1940.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 April 1940.

were the order of the day, and it was easy for shift workers and off-duty servicemen and their families to hop aboard a short trip steamer at the Union dock." Nineteen forty-two brought a record-breaking 80,980 visitors to Bowen Island on Union Steamship Company vessels, and the all-time high of 101,000 was reached in 1946, when the population of Vancouver was 365,000.⁵⁸

Some of the cottages were obviously rented on a long-term basis by working-class families at this time for charges that rental increases had become exorbitant were brought to the attention of the New Westminster and District Trades and Labour Council.⁵⁹ This was also the period when, according to Rushton, the behaviour of "war-time rowdies" caused the Saturday night cruise to become known as the "booze cruise," but the "wild bacchanalias" did not end with the war. Because liquor was not allowed in the dance hall (see Figure 17), a favourite Saturday night sport for local boys was hunting for the bottles that were hidden under nearby trees. A press headline from 1947 announced that five youths had been charged after a drinking party on Bowen Island, and on the 24 May 1948 weekend the provincial police seized \$250 worth of liquor and made thirty arrests in what the *Vancouver Sun* called a "drive to rid Bowen Island of unlawful drinking and rowdyism."⁶⁰ They were clearly unsuccessful, for the RCMP arrested ten youths, including a fourteen-year-old girl, for public drinking in August 1950. The police added that an eleventh delinquent had escaped because they were too loaded down with evidence to chase him into the woods.⁶¹

Unreported but more troubling than this negative press attention was the rather precipitous decline in visitors as wartime restrictions on gasoline were removed and motorists took to the highways. Fewer and fewer people were enticed by the promise that "there's no traffic problem when you and your friends 'take a boat to Bowen!'"⁶² Controlled since

⁵⁸ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 109; Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 150; Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 140; Comparative Traffic Statement, 1941, Bowen Island Archives, Union Steamship Company Fonds. Income generated by excursion traffic to the CPR's Newcastle Island, on the other hand, dropped dramatically in 1939, leading to the resort's closure a year later. See Mackie, "Newcastle Island Resort Pavilion," 98-101.

⁵⁹ *Vancouver Province*, 6 June 1945, 20 June 1945; *Vancouver Sun*, 6 June 1945; *Vancouver News Herald*, 20 June 1945. These are press clippings located in scrapbook clippings, 1944-46, VMM, USC, 58-99.

⁶⁰ Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 125, 135; Howard, *Bowen Island*, 107; *Vancouver Sun*, 25 May 1948, 29 May 1948.

⁶¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 21 August 1950. For a colourful account of the return trips from Bowen, see Tom Henry, *The Good Company: An Affectionate History of the Union Steamships* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1994), 107-8.

⁶² *Vancouver Province*, 7 July 1950.



Figure 17. Dance in progress at the Bowen Resort dance pavilion, ca. 1949. Note the long pants worn by most of the women, and the live band in the background. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Union Steamship Co. Collection, CVA 374-373.

1941 by the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company, a subsidiary of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Union line had purchased four minesweepers after the war for the local passenger service, but, due to high shipyard costs and competition from new rivals, the conversion plans were scrapped and the vessels resold.⁶³

Still, judging from press reports, the weekend group picnic remained as popular as ever. (See Figure 18.) There was a distinctly old-fashioned air to the event attended by two hundred members of the Vancouver Pioneer's Association in June 1949 as the *Vancouver Province* reported that the entertainment consisted of "nail-driving contests, cracker-eating contests, a sack race, three-legged race and a novel event known as can-walking. For those who didn't want to race there was bean counting. Almost everybody got a prize from the stack donated by city merchants.

⁶³ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 109-11; Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 151-52, 159, 176, 180; Ommundsen, *Bowen Island Passenger Ferries*, 25. Ommundsen (27-38) states that, due to heavy fuel consumption, the high-speed ferries that replaced the Sannie boats during the later 1940s were not economically viable. Most were sold at the end of the 1950 season.



Figure 18. Neon Products Employees Annual Picnic, 9 July 1949. Company picnics invariably featured a group photograph, and some of those in the possession of the Bowen Island Archives are considerably larger than this one. The clothing of most of the adults is less formal than that of the pre-war picnickers, with some of the men proudly displaying bare chests, but there is still a distinct absence of non-white faces. *Source*: Bowen Island Historians Archives.

It was their day.⁶⁴ Perhaps less restrained was the picnic held the following month by the city's six hundred outside employees who reportedly "declared goodbye to pick and shovel, scavenging trucks, welding machines! Away for a day in the sun at Bowen Island!"⁶⁵ Nineteen fifty-one saw a remarkable forty-nine hundred picnickers invade the island in the nine days between 21 and 29 July. On the Saturday of that week they included 750 United Packinghouse Workers, five hundred members of the City Hall Employees Association, and three hundred members of the Vancouver Motor Employees Club. The following day the "more than 1000 merry makers" included members of "Branch 44, Canadian Legion, Pacific Coast Packers, BC Fir and Cedar Lumber Co., and the United Jewish People's Order."⁶⁶ Clearly, then, the picnic grounds of Bowen Island continued to be important sites for workers' recreation as well as for social mixing between diverse cultural groups, though apparently not including those of non-European origin.

But 1953 would be the end of an era as far as the big company picnic on Bowen was concerned, presumably because catering to a few summer weekends did not generate enough profits to warrant the replacement of the aging fleet. The venerable *Lady Alex* had been withdrawn from service, and there was no vessel to replace it, though the *Lady Cynthia*

⁶⁴ *Vancouver Province*, 22 June 1949. For the staff of the Hudson's Bay Company a year earlier, adult games consisted of pie-eating contests, baby bottle races, and baseball. See *Vancouver News Herald*, 25 June 1948.

⁶⁵ *Vancouver Province*, 9 July 1949.

⁶⁶ Special Operating Circular no. 9/52, VMM, USC, box 1, file 7, *Vancouver Sun*, 10 July 1952.

remained in service for two more years. When the Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union scheduled its annual picnic of fifteen hundred people on Bowen in June 1953, its organizers were informed that the *Lady Cynthia* would be supplemented by vessels secured from the Harbour Navigation Company. Rather than the usual hour-long cruise from Union Pier on the Vancouver waterfront, the four hundred people travelling on those vessels were bussed to Horseshoe Bay, from where they would speed over to Bowen in twenty minutes.⁶⁷

The collection of press clippings in the Union Steamship Company archives provides a revealing glimpse of the subsequent shift in focus towards the more profitable middle-class market. There is no mention of group picnics in 1954, but there is an announcement that the BC Credit Conference was to be held on Bowen Island in June of that year. The women's group of the same association was to have "full charge of the Hawaiian flavoured luncheon," and there would be "a Hawaiian film, hula girls and tropical flavours."⁶⁸ The following month readers of the *Province* were informed that Bowen had "nice, clean, Scottish sand on its beaches," that the general store carried a complete line of island-produced dairy products and fruits and vegetables, and that Bowen Park Estate had "fine facilities for boating and fishing, tennis, lawn-bowling, and attractive woodland trails for its stable of saddle-horses."⁶⁹

As on Toronto Island,⁷⁰ there had always been a certain amount of class segregation on Bowen, with the middle class gravitating towards the hotel and the upscale cottages. The trend towards becoming a more exclusive middle-class resort was accelerated, however, after 1955 when control of the Union Steamship Company changed once again as three Vancouver businessmen purchased eighty thousand of the 158,521 shares from the CPR. Having withdrawn from passenger service, and closed its Sechelt resort as well as selling its Whytecliff property to the municipality of West Vancouver, the United Steamship Company announced a radical new policy for Bowen Island. It would invest a million dollars to create "one of North America's most luxurious resorts" by renovating some of the cottages, re-establishing the riding stables and bridle paths, laying out a golf course and docking facilities for private boats, installing a swimming pool in front of the hotel, converting the dance pavilion into

⁶⁷ Letter to Mr. W. Desmaris [sic], Secretary-Treasurer, Vancouver, 3 June 1953, VMM, USC, box 1, file 11; Sailing Notices (1953-1954), "T. S. 33/53," issued 7 July 1953, VMM, USC, box 1, file 11; *Vancouver Sun*, 18 July 1953; Notice concerning the Annual Picnic of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Locals 501 and 502, 8 July 1949, at Bowen Island, VMM, USC, box 1, file 11.

⁶⁸ *Vancouver Province*, 21 June 1954.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 31 July 1954.

⁷⁰ Jasen, *Wild Things*, 129-31.

a concert hall, and transporting guests from the mainland in a private yacht. According to one of the new owners, Senator S. S. McKeen, the renamed Evergreen Park Resort would have “an important bearing on the flow of tourist dollars to BC.”⁷¹ A correspondent for the *Vancouver Herald* reported approvingly:

Since May of this year Evergreen Park has changed from a booze fighters’ stamping ground into a beautiful quiet resort offering entertainment fit for a millionaire at the price a working man can afford. I stayed in one of the older cabins which will eventually be replaced but it was clean and comfortable and the meals in the main lodge were excellent. Within a stone’s throw of my cabin was a beautiful new swimming pool equipped with flood lights, a kiddies wading pool supervised at all times. (See Figure 19) A kiddies’ supervised playground with the newest and most modern safe equipment and a bowling green second to none. Use of all these facilities and my meals cost only \$8 per day. There was also a nice cocktail lounge and a beverage room operated as a convenience to guests rather than a place to service as much beer in as little time as possible and pour out those guests who could still walk at closing time.⁷²

Once the cabins were replaced, the resort would obviously become less affordable to the “working man,” should he happen to have felt comfortable in the new environment. True, Killarney Lake – which was to be poisoned and restocked with trout – would remain “open to nimrods whether or not they are guests at the hotel,”⁷³ and the Snug Cove picnic ground would be accessible to everyone. But outdoor tables and handles of water taps near the cottages were removed, public toilets were locked, and Evergreen Park Resort itself was restricted to the use of hotel guests. Residents and visitors could still use the facilities by joining the Evergreen Sports Club, but the local population clearly resented the more exclusive policy. Dogs were expressly forbidden on the estate property, and bicycles were banned on estate trails. According to Howard, the chopping down of the monkey tree in 1956 remained a focus of local resentment and indignation as late as 1973 when she published

⁷¹ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 112; Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 161, 171, 185.

⁷² *Vancouver Herald*, 19 July 1956. For two other sympathetic assessments, see Jean Howarth, “Feud Rocks Bowen Island: Is the Poor Man Losing Out?” *Vancouver Province*, 27 July 1956; and Bill Fletcher’s column in the *Vancouver Sun*, 25 October 1962. For more details, see the brochure entitled *Evergreen Park Resort, Snug Cove, Bowen Island*.

⁷³ “Evergreen Park Undergoes Face Lifting as Rowdy Parties Fast Become History,” *Vancouver Herald*, 19 July 1956.



Figure 19. View of adult and children's pools at Bowen Island Inn, ca. 1957. This large pool and patio area illustrates the Union Steamship Company's short-lived attempt to attract a high-paying tourist clientele in the late 1950s. *Source:* City of Vancouver Archives, Union Steamship Co. Collection, cva 374-332.

her history of the island.⁷⁴ It was probably no consolation, however, that the resort was a financial failure and that the golf course was never laid out. The hotel closed permanently in 1957, the same year that car ferry service to the island began, with inaugural speakers expressing the hope that Bowen would soon become a suburb of Vancouver. Although the cottages continued to be fully booked, they were offered for sale at a dollar each to anyone who would move one away in order to allow the company to sell its 120 lots for development.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 112-13; Rushton, *Whistle Up the Inlet*, 161, 171, 185; Pat Donovan, "The Summer Side of Bowen Island," *Vancouver Province BC Magazine*, 31 July 1954, 17.

⁷⁵ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 114-15; Norman Hacking, "Bowen Island Joyful at New Ferry Service," *Vancouver Province*, 8 December 1957, cited in "A History of the Sannie Transportation Company Limited," Epilogue, p. 4, VMM, usc, box 2, file 3. After a protracted struggle to prevent a large new subdivision from being built, much of the land was finally dedicated as a public park in 1983. See *Undercurrent* (Bowen Island), 8 July 1983.

CONCLUSION

Penny Wise's article, "Whatever Happened to Bowen Island?" painted a bleak picture of the situation in 1967 when there were still only 450 permanent residents. She wrote that, as "more and more private homes were built on the scenic slopes overlooking the grandeur of the Bay and Howe Sound," the island's beaches were being shut off from public access and private roads were barred by logs. Intrepid picnickers were not only finding that there were no public recreation facilities but also that there were no public toilets at the playgrounds, the beach, or the dock, causing some of them "to cope with nature's needs" in the nearby woods or even in the swimming pool owned by Bowen Resort. Defending the visitors against the criticism of the local property owners, Wise declared that it was not their fault that there was no ferry waiting room or trash containers for their garbage, or that "the waters of the Cove are referred to as the biggest septic tank in the world, caused by refuse from visiting yachts and the ferry." The obvious culprit, Wise wrote, was the provincial government because it failed to maintain the public park even though it operated the ferry service. However, she added that the public itself was really to blame for abandoning the services provided by the Union Steamship Company in order to embrace the automobile.⁷⁶

Car ownership was certainly growing rapidly during the 1950s, and improved roads were making travel to the interior of the province more enjoyable,⁷⁷ but local inhabitants were inclined to believe that the resort had been destroyed by mismanagement, not changes in holiday habits. Reflecting that opinion, Irene Howard argues: "The fault of the McKeen group was lack of imagination. These people were insensitive to what Captain Cates and Harold Brown genuinely felt and turned into profits – that Bowen Island was mostly an idea surrounded by a body of emotion."⁷⁸ But the fact is that Bowen could not forever remain immune to the forces that doomed popular resorts located close to urban centres elsewhere.

During the more than half century of its history, however, the Bowen Island resort – with its smaller counterparts in Howe Sound – promoted sociability for the rapidly growing population of a young and relatively isolated city. The historian of Britain's seaside resorts, John K. Walton, describes them as places where the working class in particular was

⁷⁶ Wise, "Whatever Happened." Five years earlier Bill Fletcher referred to Bowen as a "ghost resort," with uncut lawns, wild blackberries pushing through the glass of the greenhouses, and weeds growing in the eavestroughs of the hotel. See *Vancouver Sun*, 25 October 1962.

⁷⁷ Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 130–31, 190–94.

⁷⁸ Howard, *Bowen Island*, 114.

able to escape the constraints of modern-day society. He refers to the “liminal nature of the seaside as ‘a place on the margin,’ where land and sea meet, the pleasure principle is given freer rein, the certainties of authority are diluted, and the usual constraints on behaviour are suspended, however provisionally.”⁷⁹ A *Vancouver Sun* columnist evoked some of those images in 1960 when he recalled the “mass picnics and moonlight necking, memory-making for a nostalgic generation and cheap working-man entertainment if someone else bought the booze.” Now, in sad contrast, the only entertainment was Saturday night bingo at the community hall.⁸⁰

But Snug Cove never was a miniature version of Blackpool, or even of Winnipeg Beach or Toronto Island’s Hanlan Point, with its bowling alleys, rides, shooting galleries, dog circus, and “museum of living curiosities.”⁸¹ Saturday nights at the Bowen dance pavilion admittedly became somewhat notorious after the outbreak of the Second World War, but, even then, most of the young partygoers embarked on the *Lady Alex* and were gone by midnight. Social control on the west coast island was facilitated by the fact that the resort was wholly owned by two successive steamship companies. They both targeted the family and group picnic market, promoting Bowen Island as a healthy, invigorating place to escape the pressures and temptations of the city, if only for a day. Vancouver itself was “a place on the margin,” with a large population of relative newcomers, and Bowen Island was a place where the lines between working- and middle-class families were quite relaxed, at least until the 1950s. In short, the social bonds being forged in Vancouver’s schools, shops, and workplaces were further strengthened on Bowen Island. However, once a higher standard of living and highway construction made it easier for Vancouverites to seek their leisure further afield, the promise of autonomous individuality offered by the automobile was too tempting to resist.⁸²

⁷⁹ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 3-4, 15, 18-20.

⁸⁰ Mac Reynolds, “Bowen Island’s Moribund But It Isn’t Lying Down,” *Vancouver Sun*, 6 July 1960, 22.

⁸¹ Jasen, *Wild Things*, 130.

⁸² On this theme, see Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

EPILOGUE

Penny Wise predicted that Bowen would simply become a bedroom suburb of Vancouver, and that is, in fact, largely what has happened, though less than half the adult population commutes off island to work. Furthermore, development has been restricted by the mountainous terrain, the inconvenience and high cost of the car ferry, the high price of land, and the concern about summer water shortages, among other things. As a result, the heavily forested island remains a popular destination for walkers, hikers, and kayakers, and – because accessible green space will become increasingly sought-after as the city of Vancouver continues to grow – Parks Canada is now exploring the possibility of converting the more than 40 percent that remains public land into a national park. Even if the residents of Bowen reject this initiative out of fear that their secluded retreat will be overwhelmed by day-trippers and campers, the readily accessible island will inevitably attract many more visitors in the future. But their attitudes and experiences will be quite different from those of the people who embarked on the steamers and foot-passenger ferries during the first half of the twentieth century, for Bowen will not return to being a highly social summer resort with most activities focused on the beach area of Snug Cove. Steam technology encouraged what social scientists refer to as informal sociability,⁸³ but day-trippers who now arrive on Bowen are hoping to enjoy “nature” in relative solitude by heading to the more secluded coves and taking long walks on the many trails that criss-cross the island.

⁸³ For useful overviews of this concept, see Roger Levasseur, “Présentation,” and Maurice Agulhon, “Exposé de clôture,” in *De la sociabilité: Spécificité et mutations*, ed. Roger Levasseur, 9-15 and 327-45, respectively (Montréal: Boréal, 1990).