

“THAT TOUCH OF PATERNALISM”:

*Cultivating Community in the
Company Town of Britannia Beach, 1920–58*

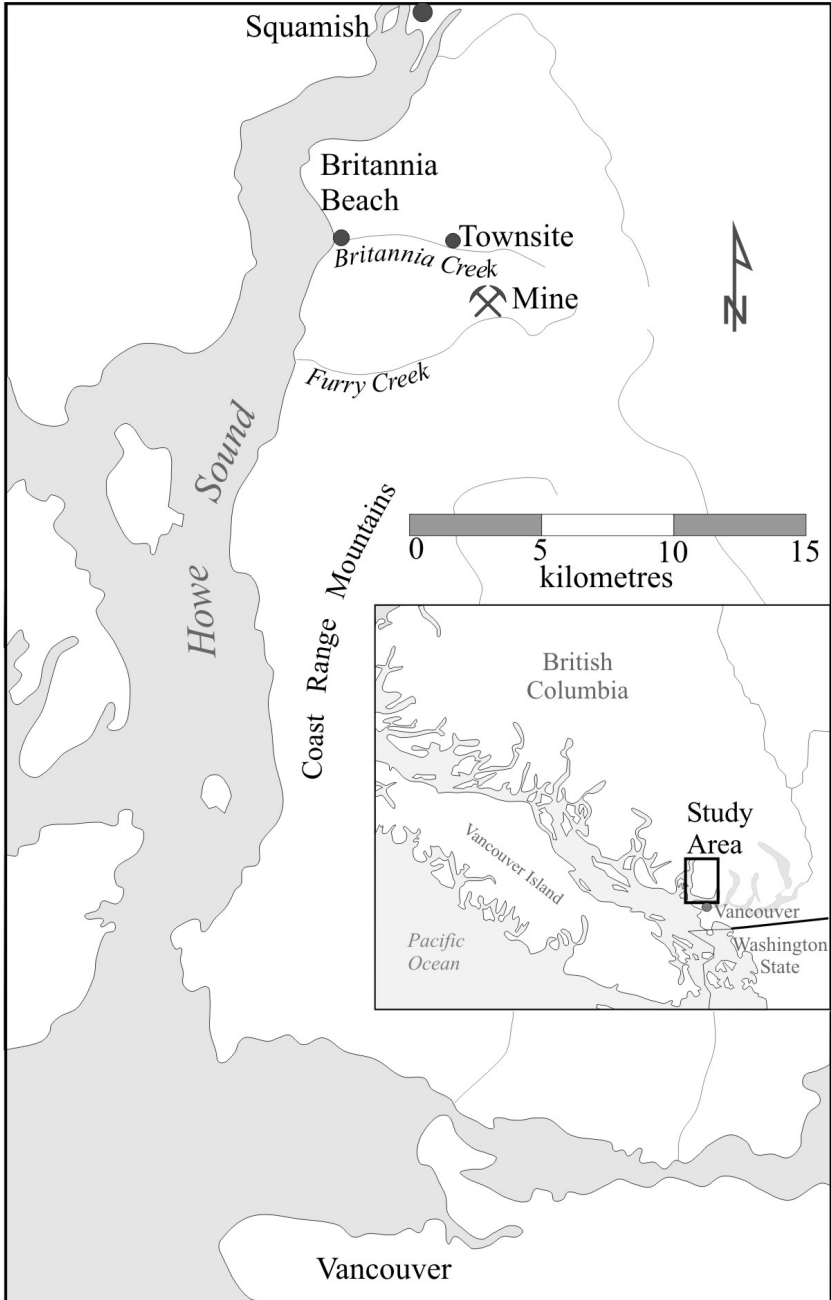
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IN 1925, CARLETON PERKINS BROWNING, general manager of the Britannia Mining and Smelting Company, Limited (hereafter BM&S), wrote a report to the Department of Overseas Trade in Ottawa, detailing the living conditions at the company’s copper-mining property at Britannia Beach. Located thirty miles north of Vancouver, the property was composed of two settlements – Britannia Beach itself, located near the mill at sea level, and an area called the Townsite, located near the mine in the mountains above (see map). Britannia was the quintessential company town, completely owned and operated by one employer, and – until the 1950s – accessible only by boat from Vancouver. In his report, Browning boasted about the town’s gymnasiums, reading rooms, and dance floors. There was a well-equipped hospital, he noted, where most services were free, and a co-operative store, where residents received dividends based on their purchases. Workers lived in well-appointed cottages, played basketball and baseball, and enjoyed educational lectures, films, and safety displays. “It is the desire and policy of this Company,” Browning wrote, “to foster general community spirit, and welfare work, without that touch of paternalism which is detrimental to the general success of such movements.”²

Britannia employee Roy McLaren took a different view of this company town. His poem, published in the community newsletter, described his job bearing a “muckstick cross” in the mine, compared the food in the company bunkhouses to “parboiled owl,” and longed for the end of his workweek, when he could escape to Vancouver for his

¹ The author thanks the research group at the University of Ottawa and the anonymous reviewers at *BC Studies* for their support and criticism. This research was conducted with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the University of Victoria.

² Letter from Browning to Department of Overseas Trade, May 1925, file 57, box 20, MS1221, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA).



Map shows location of Britannia Beach, the Townsite, and the mine in relation to Squamish and Vancouver.

“weekend bender.”³ It is hard to believe that McLaren and Browning were describing the same place. While Browning’s list of amenities and denunciation of paternalism paints an image of a model community, McLaren’s poem describes tedious work and poor living conditions. Was Browning’s report just a public relations ruse? Was McLaren merely a disgruntled employee?

The answer is “no” on both counts; rather, these two images of Britannia expose the difference between the company town BM&S imagined and the one many of its residents experienced. Between 1920 and 1958, BM&S provided amenities and implemented family-friendly policies at Britannia in an attempt to curb consistently high turnover rates among its workers and, thus, to lower its labour costs. While the bottom line was always its first priority, the company believed that fostering a stable, cohesive, and loyal community at Britannia would increase its profits. Convinced that a contented workforce was in its interests, the company implemented schemes that favoured married workers, encouraged families to settle in the townsites, and promoted unity among residents. However, evidence from oral interviews suggests that many company policies left workers and residents feeling indifferent in some cases, and alienated in others. In Britannia, paternalism and welfare capitalism operated simultaneously during this period as company officials such as Browning sought to improve efficiency and minimize worker discontent while maintaining a selective, yet tenacious, control over company town residents.

The statements in Browning’s letter reveal an approach to managing company towns that contradicts some of our current historical understandings of these places. Generally, scholars have described the role and influence of company town employers in one of two ways. Some have argued that companies invested few resources in their towns and cared little for their employees. These were “ramshackle communities” with few amenities, where conditions were “tantamount to lesser forms of serfdom.”⁴ Gilbert Stelter and Alan Artibise argue that houses in many early company towns appeared “as something of an afterthought,” built immediately adjacent to mine or mill workings.⁵ Conditions only improved noticeably after the Second World War, they argue, when

³ McLaren’s poem is entitled “Rang-utang Tear.” See *Beachcomber* 1, 8 (1951): n.p., Archie Smith Papers, 2687, British Columbia Mining Museum (hereafter BCM).

⁴ Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F. J. Artibise, “Canadian Resource Towns in Historical Perspective,” in *Little Communities and Big Industries: Studies in the Social Impact of Canadian Resource Extraction*, ed. Roy T. Bowles (Toronto: Butterworth and Co., 1982), 49; Edmund Bradwin, 1928, *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of Work and Pay in the Camps of Canada, 1903-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 8.

⁵ Stelter and Artibise, “Canadian Resource Towns,” 53.

governments became more involved in company town planning and contributed funds to ensure employees had the facilities and services they needed despite their often remote locations.⁶ According to these scholars, profit-driven companies could not be relied upon to provide satisfactory living conditions for their employees.

Others have argued the opposite – that companies took too much interest in planning and operating company towns, often exerting oppressive, paternalistic control over all who lived there. Historians have noted how companies quashed unionization attempts, encouraged class and ethnic divisions through housing assignments, and policed behaviour – for example, by prohibiting drinking and gambling in their towns.⁷ The result was often a discontented, and not always obedient, populace. In some cases, an employer’s attempt to control his employees was clear. Among those who ruled with an iron fist, Vancouver Island coal baron James Dunsmuir prohibited employees from living near the mine head at Extension, forcing them to rent houses owned by the company in nearby Ladysmith.⁸ Company officials were the highest authorities in most towns. Refusal to obey their orders often meant simultaneous unemployment and homelessness.

These approaches have often oversimplified the complex and ever-changing relationships between the residents of company towns and their employers. The notion that companies were either wholly negligent or oppressive to the detriment of seemingly powerless residents creates an entirely negative – and often erroneous – impression of company town life in the first half of the twentieth century. In Britannia, both employer and employees shaped social dynamics to varying degrees. Opinions differed among residents and managers about whether Britannia was a community, what kind of community it was, and who belonged to it. Notions of community – both shared and conflicting – were often at the heart of social relations in Britannia. Residents’s identities were multiple, and their shifting and conflicting notions of gender, ethnicity,

⁶ Ibid. Rex Lucas and J.D. Porteous make similar arguments about government’s beneficial influence in company town planning. See Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); and Porteous, “Gold River: An Instant Town in British Columbia,” *Geography* 55 (1970): 317–22.

⁷ Jean Barman, “The Dynamics of Control in a Model Company Town: Powell River, Canada, 1910–1955,” paper presented at the American Historical Association, 28 December 1988; Eileen Goltz, “The Image and the Reality of Life in a Northern Ontario Company-Owned Town,” in *At the End of the Shift: Mines and Single-Industry Towns in Northern Ontario*, ed. Matt Bray and Ashley Thomson, 62–91. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992); Linda Carlson, *Company Towns of the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 10–1.

⁸ John Hinde, *When Coal Was King: Ladysmith and the Coal-Mining Industry on Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 26–34.

and marital status belied the company's persistent attempts to create a single community identity.⁹

Before exploring the company's approach to community, however, it is important to understand how other scholars have defined the term. John Walsh and Steven High argue that, to date, historians have adopted a common sense approach to the concept of community. We tend to assume that readers know what community means and do not bother to define it, or we limit its scope to "the ideas of a shared place and a static, self-contained entity."¹⁰ Local histories of company towns, for example, have offered the sheer number of sports teams and social clubs present in many company towns as proof that residents identified in some unspecified way with their fellow residents.¹¹ Other essentialist arguments have attributed a company town's apparent close-knit character to its isolated location or, in some cases, to the homogenous composition of its population.¹² These arguments reduce notions of community to a singular static entity that relies on certain conditions for its existence.

But community, as a concept, is neither static nor self-contained. As Walsh and High assert, it has varied, co-existing, and sometimes conflicting meanings for people who may or may not occupy the same geographic space.¹³ Community "can be defined better as an experience than as a place," as something understood through relationships with others.¹⁴ These relationships are always imbued with power, including some people in "the community" while necessarily excluding others.¹⁵ Community is a socio-cultural construct produced when disparate individuals imagine themselves to share certain characteristics.¹⁶ It is also

⁹ Katharine Rollwagen, "Bunkhouse and Home: Company, Community, and Crisis in Britannia Beach, British Columbia" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2005), chap. 3.

¹⁰ John C. Walsh and Steven High, "Rethinking the Concept of Community," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 32, 64 (1999): 255. Thomas Bender similarly criticized American historians for their stilted approach to community in his monograph, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1978).

¹¹ Bruce Ramsey, *Britannia: The Story of a Mine* (Britannia Beach: Britannia Beach Community Club, 1967); Carlson, *Company Towns of the Pacific Northwest*, 79.

¹² *Ibid.*, 49; Barman, "The Dynamics of Control," 18-9.

¹³ Walsh and High, "Rethinking the Concept of Community," 257. See also George S. Wood, Jr. and Juan C. Judikis, *Conversations on Community Theory* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2002), 8-12, 168-9.

¹⁴ Bender, *Community and Social Change in America*, 6.

¹⁵ Iris Young notes: "Any move to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure," in "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Social Theory and Practice* 12, 1 (1986): 3.

¹⁶ "Imagining" does not imply fabrication or falsehood in this case; Anderson uses the word to emphasize the socio-cultural process of constructing meaning. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983), 15.

an ongoing process, changing over time.¹⁷ In Britannia, the Beach and Townsite were physical sites where the imagined realities of residents and company officials intersected and conflicted. Mill workers and muckers, married and single residents, men and women – each defined community and understood their position within that community differently. The company equated community with cohesion and consensus, harmonious employer–employee relations, and a stable workforce. It believed this kind of community would make it profitable. The company wrote and implemented its policies accordingly. However, by privileging the more stable, married workers in its employ, BM&S largely excluded the single employees who lived in the bunkhouses – an action that only hindered the company’s goal of a cohesive and loyal workforce.

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From 1922 to 1948, general manager Carleton Browning influenced and implemented the company’s idea of community. Most of the programs put into practice during his lengthy term remained in effect until the company’s bankruptcy in 1958. Browning was a graduate of the Columbia School of Mines, a student of management theory who brought notions of both engineered efficiency and welfare capitalism to his job at Britannia mine.¹⁸ His tenure as general manager marked a change in relations between the company and its employees. His predecessor, John Dunbar Moodie, was a notorious authoritarian who had strictly enforced a litany of company rules. Refusing to tolerate alcohol, sexual promiscuity, or union activity on company property, Moodie reportedly fired many malcontents and offenders simply by telling them to “pack up and get back to town.”¹⁹ While Browning shared Moodie’s dislike of unions and desire for workplace discipline, he believed a heavy-handed management style would only fuel workers’s discontent. He encouraged more equitable relations between company officials, workers, and residents.

Browning was not alone in this belief. In the 1920s, employers across Canada and the United States were trying to limit workers’s wage demands and avoid strikes by implementing welfare schemes in their factories and mines. Browning’s attempts to improve employee–employer

¹⁷ Walsh and High, “Rethinking the Concept of Community,” 257.

¹⁸ Brandes defines welfare capitalism as “any service provided for the comfort or improvement of employees which was neither a necessity of the industry nor required by law.” See Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism: 1880–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 5–6. On C.P. Browning’s education, see Logan Hovis, “Technological Change and Mining Labour: Copper Mining and Milling Operations at the Britannia Mines, British Columbia, 1898–1937” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1986), 94.

¹⁹ Ramsey, *Britannia*, 37.

relations at Britannia resemble similar efforts at companies such as Imperial Oil, Westclox, and the Powell River Company.²⁰ These employers created employee councils, offered their workers accident, sickness, and life insurance benefits, and sponsored sports teams or recreation clubs.²¹ Historians have argued that these changes began around the turn of the twentieth century, becoming more systematic after the “labour revolt” that followed the First World War.²² Eager to prevent the unionization of their workforces, employers co-opted workers’s mutual aid programs and devised plans to increase wages and benefits. The relatively strong economy permitted companies to be, at least from their perspective, generous.²³ Margaret McCallum notes that, while not all employees benefited from corporate welfare, the existence of some benefit schemes stalled the legal recognition of workers’s rights to social security and democratic representation in the workplace.²⁴ Employers were generally more amenable to welfare capitalism than were their employees.

While changes at Britannia developed within this broader context, local and political conditions also affected the shifting relationship between the company and its town. First, company towns such as Britannia were subject to consistent (albeit not close) political scrutiny in British Columbia. Between the end of the First World War and the mid-1960s, labour supporters and politicians brought several motions calling for legislation to “open up” company towns. Opponents argued that companies’s absolute authority made these communities disgraceful, repressive “relics of a bygone age.”²⁵ In 1923, shortly after Browning became general manager at Britannia, members of the federal Parliament argued that company town employers were disregarding workers’s rights, and British Columbia’s labour press denounced the towns as “nothing but slave encampments.”²⁶ Periodically in the 1930s and 1940s, left-leaning members of the province’s Legislative Assembly complained about

²⁰ These are three of the more closely studied examples.

²¹ See Joan Sangster, “The Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-1960,” *Labour/Le Travail* 32 (1993): 167-99; Hugh Grant, “Solving the Labour Problem at Imperial Oil: Welfare Capitalism in the Canadian Petroleum Industry, 1919-1929,” *Labour/Le Travail* 41 (Spring 1998): 69-95; Barman, “Dynamics of Control.”

²² J. Naylor, quoted in Grant, “Solving the Labour Problem,” 94, n.8.

²³ Grant, “Solving the Labour Problem”; Katherine G. Aiken, *Idaho’s Bunker Hill: The Rise and Fall of a Great Mining Company, 1885-1981* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 86; Alan Derickson, *Workers’ Heath, Workers’ Democracy: The Western Miners’ Struggle, 1891-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Margaret E. McCallum, “Corporate Welfarism in Canada, 1919-1939,” *Canadian Historical Review* 61, 1 (1990): 46-79.

²⁴ McCallum, “Corporate Welfarism in Canada,” 55.

²⁵ *Victoria Daily Times*, 11 March 1919, 4; *Vancouver Sun*, 13 February 1934, 16; *Victoria Daily Times*, 13 February 1943, 2; *Victoria Daily Times*, 29 February 1944, 8.

²⁶ Quoted in Barman, “Dynamics of Control.”

company town conditions, arguing that residents should have the right to own their homes, open private businesses, and elect local political representatives.²⁷ Although the government did not act upon these requests until 1965,²⁸ attention paid to company town conditions likely increased BM&S's desire for positive public relations and strengthened its will to foster amicable relations with its employees.

Second, the isolated and closed character of company towns influenced the adoption and operation of welfare capitalism in Britannia. At remote resource extraction sites such as Britannia, companies were compelled to provide living quarters for their employees. As a result, they were involved in the daily lives of their employees far beyond the worksite, providing schools, stores, transportation networks, and recreation spaces. While companies admitted that they wanted to create towns that would "attract and hold the best class of men," this kind of social planning made them much more vulnerable to charges of good old-fashioned paternalism than were their industrial counterparts operating in more urban areas.²⁹ Sensitive to these charges in an era of scientific management, BM&S strove to make its townsites stable, cohesive communities without seeming to interfere with residents's autonomy. However, as we shall see, the company continued to be involved in some of the more private aspects of daily life at the mine. Thus, BM&S relied on both paternalist and welfare capitalist management strategies, partly out of the necessities of managing a remote resource extraction site and partly because it believed it could benefit from keeping a close eye on its employees.³⁰

Finally, welfare schemes at Britannia were less systematic, but longer lasting, than were those implemented at other work places. Unlike companies such as Imperial Oil, BM&S did not develop a coherent and well-articulated welfare policy.³¹ References to incentives and social programs are scattered throughout the company's records, suggesting

²⁷ *Victoria Daily Times*, 26 February 1944, 5.

²⁸ In 1965, the provincial legislature passed the Instant Towns Act, which allowed newly built resource towns to be incorporated immediately. The government hoped the creation of municipal councils would give residents more control in local affairs and that the taxation power of the councils would lessen the communities's dependence upon resource companies.

²⁹ Larry McCann, "Canadian Resource Towns: A Heartland-Hinterland Perspective," in *Essays on Canadian Urban Process and Forms II*, ed. Richard Preston and Lorne Russwurm (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, Department of Geography, Faculty of Environmental Studies, 1977), 236.

³⁰ Joan Sangster notes that management strategies were rarely developed or deployed in a singular or straightforward manner; paternalism and welfare capitalism could – and did – co-exists. Sangster, "The Softball Solution," 170-1.

³¹ For example, Grant discusses Imperial Oil's "Industrial Representation Plan," a carefully devised program to prevent unionization by creating worker councils. See Grant, "Solving the Labour Problem."

that, while the company knew what kind of community it wanted to foster, it often approached welfare on an issue-by-issue basis. Nevertheless, once implemented, BM&S's management style was surprisingly consistent, continuing virtually unchanged until the company's bankruptcy in 1958. The Depression, seen by many historians as the end of the welfare capitalism era, had little effect on the company's approach.³² And while other companies abandoned welfare initiatives when their workforces organized (according to scholars such as Stuart Brandes, unionization meant that welfare capitalism had failed), BM&S continued to provide houses, hospitals, and recreation facilities even after its waged employees unionized in 1943.³³ While Browning's initiatives as general manager resembled those adopted by other industrial and resource companies at the time, the persistent political scrutiny from the left in British Columbia, the need for corporate-built infrastructure in isolated places such as Britannia, and the pragmatic and persistent character of Browning's schemes set Britannia apart.

* * *

Company officials perceived two threats to stable operations at Britannia mine: high turnover rates and unionization. The company saw stability and cohesion as desirable characteristics for its townsites because Britannia's workforce was decidedly unstable. The majority of its employees were mobile labourers, unmarried men who moved between various resource-sector jobs. As a result, the company's payroll fluctuated constantly. Between 1940 and 1956, for example, annual labour turnover rates averaged 64 percent to 145 percent of the total workforce – the equivalent of replacing the entire workforce in some years.³⁴ The company often had to hire hundreds of workers annually to maintain production levels.

Turnover rates fluctuated with labour conditions. For example, in 1947 the company predicted that a recent scarcity of jobs in Vancouver would be "reflected in the attitude of the men drifting around from one job to another."³⁵ When fewer jobs were available in Vancouver, company officials expected transience to decrease. Conversely, when labour was in demand, as it was during the Second World War, the company was

³² Sangster, "Softball Solution," 171.

³³ Indeed, Brandes claims that, in the American context, once the "struggle against unions had been lost, there was little reason for continuing welfare programs." Clearly, this was not the case in Britannia. See Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*, 145.

³⁴ Compiled from BM&S Annual Reports, 1940-56, boxes 4-6, MS1221, BCA, 39.

³⁵ See 1947 Annual Report, file 2, box 5, MS1221, BCA.

more likely to lose workers who anticipated higher wages elsewhere.³⁶ Turnover rates also changed with the seasons. Many men worked at Britannia during the winter seasons and spent the summers fishing or logging. As a result, turnover was particularly high in the spring and fall months, as employees left for seasonal jobs and then returned when the weather turned colder. Not all workers hired were new employees: 66 percent of workers hired in the fall of 1948, and half of those hired in 1949, had worked at Britannia before.³⁷ Indeed, many worked at the mine repeatedly. Data from a sample of employee cards reveals that 29 percent worked at Britannia for at least two different periods. Some returned five or six times in different capacities, working as muckers underground or as general labourers in the mill.³⁸ Thus, the community's population was never stable. People were constantly leaving and arriving in – or returning to – Britannia.

The company disliked high turnover because it was costly, time-consuming, and inefficient. New employees had to be deemed physically fit by the company doctor, given a tour of the property, and trained, all of which cost staff members time and cost the company money. Britannia was a low-grade copper mine that used non-selective techniques to remove large amounts of ore and technological methods to process it. To remain profitable, the company had to extract as much copper from the ore as efficiently as possible. To achieve this efficiency, employees worked in teams under the supervision of foremen who were directed by one of the company's engineers.³⁹ The majority of workers in the operation were not skilled miners but, rather, non- and semi-skilled workers employed as muckers, hoistmen, timbermen, and trammers. Unlike the miners of previous generations, who were skilled in all aspects of the mining process, these men were only trained for specific tasks. They were "machine tender[s] concerned more with the quantity rather than the quality of production."⁴⁰ Basically, they removed as much ore from the ground as possible. While they were not as skilled as miners, they were considered "more obedient and industrious" and, when part of a larger operating system, cheaper to employ.⁴¹ However,

³⁶ See Annual Reports, particularly 1941 and 1942, files 3 and 7, box 3, MS1221, BCA.

³⁷ See 1948 Annual Report, 49; 1949 Annual Report, files 5 and 9, box 5, MS1221, BCA.

³⁸ Data taken from a small, random sample of 384 employment cards from 1950 to 1958, tray 9, Howe Sound Company Records, University of British Columbia Special Collections.

³⁹ Hovis, "Technological Change and Mining Labour," 28.

⁴⁰ Logan Hovis and Jeremy Mouat, "Miners, Engineers, and the Transformation of Work in the Western Mining Industry, 1880-1930," *Technology and Culture* 37:3 (July 1996): 434, 455.

⁴¹ From the definition of "miner" included in the *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 1913. Quoted in Hovis, "Technological Change and Mining Labour," 25.

when turnover rates were high, mining teams staffed by inexperienced employees worked more slowly, were more likely to have accidents, and were therefore less likely than experienced employees to achieve the efficiency the company desired.

Employing a large number of single, transient men benefited the company when copper prices were low because management could shrink its payroll simply by not hiring new employees to replace those who left. A large transient element added what VM&S believed was desirable flexibility to an operation exposed to the whims of world commodity prices. For this reason, management did not want to eliminate labour turnover altogether – nor did it believe it could. While employing a group of transient single men allowed the company to control the size of the payroll without laying off its more experienced employees, most of the time the company saw transience as an expensive and “pressing problem” – one it hoped to fix by fostering a stable community in Britannia.⁴²

The company instituted several employee benefit schemes in an attempt to lower labour turnover. To encourage stability, these benefits were contingent on employee loyalty. For example, the company carried a group life insurance plan, as reported in one trade magazine, “at no expense to the employee.”⁴³ However, only employees with at least three years of continuous employment were eligible for the \$1,500 coverage.⁴⁴ The plan rewarded dedicated employees and encouraged transient and seasonal workers to consider remaining in Britannia permanently.

The copper bonus was another company incentive system. Initiated in 1929, the copper bonus tied workers’s wages to the selling price of copper. When copper prices increased by a predetermined amount in any six-month period, employees earned an additional 25 cents per shift. Conversely, when prices fell, bonuses were rescinded and daily earnings decreased until they reached a base rate. Since both salaried and waged employees lost their bonuses when prices fell, the company believed the copper bonus would encourage feelings of unity and shared purpose to mute occupational differences. Bonuses affected the mine superintendent and engineer as much as the timberman and mucker; there was no deferential treatment of managers to spark resentment among mine and mill workers. By exposing employees to the variability of the world market, historians Logan Hovis and Jeremy Mouat note that workers “assumed a portion of the entrepreneurial risk, tying their

⁴² Letter to G.C. Lipsey from George Hurley, 20 March 1956, file 52, box 74, MS1221, BCA.

⁴³ “A Visit to Britannia,” *Western Miner* (1948): 76.

⁴⁴ The Group Life Insurance Plan was instituted in 1926. See 1925 Annual Report, 15, file 1, box 3, MS1221, BCA; “Visit to Britannia,” 76.

fortunes to those of their employer.⁴⁵ Employees could watch the price rise and fall, taking a personal interest in the company's development and success. In 1937, company vice-president J. Quigly cited years of strike- and union-free operations at Britannia as proof that the copper bonus had successfully "obviate[d] any dissatisfaction among employees."⁴⁶

Using incentives such as life insurance and wage bonuses, BM&S hoped to attract long-term workers, decrease transience, and cultivate satisfaction and cohesion among employees. While labour turnover rates decreased after the implementation of these policies, the collapse of the job market with the onset of the Great Depression likely affected workers's mobility more than did company benefit schemes. Britannia's workers needed less incentive to remain at the mine amid the rapid and sustained increases in unemployment that began in 1930. Nevertheless, the company maintained insurance payments and copper bonuses despite the economic downturn.⁴⁷

The company's ardent anti-union policy also reflected its desire for harmonious employer-employee relations in its communities. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there was no place for worker solidarity in management's imagined, stable community of loyal employees. The company believed a union would only organize waged workers against their employer, dividing the community and removing employees from company control. It resisted all unionization attempts. The Industrial Workers of the World tried unsuccessfully to organize Britannia's workforce in 1913, as did the Western Federation of Miners in 1906 and 1917. Then-manager John Moodie had only to fire the organizers and order them off the property to quell any union drive.⁴⁸ Although the company opposed unionization, it did not turn a completely deaf ear to workers's grievances. When most of the underground crews walked off the job in March 1922 to protest low wages and poor living conditions, general manager Browning acknowledged their complaints. The workers received a fifty-cent raise, and bunkhouse and cookhouse conditions were apparently improved.⁴⁹ However, Browning refused to rehire the walkout participants, preferring to operate short-handed for a few months "in order to keep out undesirables."⁵⁰ Again, in 1939, employees

⁴⁵ Hovis and Mouat, "Miners, Engineers, and the Transformation of Work," 452.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The cancellation of the company's newspaper, *Britco News*, in July 1930 was one of the few exceptions. Since the copper bonus was tied to the price of copper, maintaining it when copper prices were low was not particularly difficult.

⁴⁸ Ramsey, *Britannia*, 97-8.

⁴⁹ Florida Town, *The Lively Ghost of Howe Sound* (Port Coquitlam: Bookus Press, 2000), 59-60.

⁵⁰ See 1920 Annual Report, 16-7, file 7, box 1, MS1221, BCA.

circulating a petition to create a union were fired or marked for dismissal at the earliest opportunity.⁵¹ The company viewed outspoken employees as dangerous agitators who lacked the loyalty and unity management was trying to promote. It did not believe protestors represented the majority of the workforce.

Workers finally succeeded in forming a union in 1943, when they joined the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW). BM&S was suffering from wartime labour shortages and was in no position to stop its employees from organizing. Furthermore, the enactment of Privy Council Order 1003 by Mackenzie King's government, recognizing the right of employees to elect representatives and bargain with employers, gave the company no choice but to accept the union's presence.⁵² Browning reportedly responded magnanimously to the union's formation, paternalistically claiming that the union was now "one of the family of Britannia."⁵³

Yet Browning's apparent magnanimity was short-lived. The company may have been legally bound to recognize its workers's bargaining rights, but it still did not believe the union would encourage stability and cohesion in Britannia. If, before 1943, the company had encouraged residents to be united without the union, it now promoted cohesion despite the union. This attitude was evident during the union's first strike in 1946. That year, workers at twelve IUMMSW mines in British Columbia struck for industry-wide bargaining rights.⁵⁴ Shortly before the strike began, Browning addressed workers personally in a posted notice to all residents. He called the strike illegal and appealed nostalgically to the imagined employer-employee harmony of the pre-union era. The strike would jeopardize "the labor [sic] traditions of this property built up over many years," he argued, "with resulting misunderstandings and unhappiness for all that would take years to erase."⁵⁵ Leaders of the international union,

⁵¹ Ramsey, *Britannia*, 98.

⁵² Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 279-80.

⁵³ See 1943 Annual Report, file II, box 4, MS1221, BCA; Browning, quoted in Ramsey, *Britannia*, 103.

⁵⁴ Mine-Mill was trying to implement common objectives for collective bargaining nation-wide. The union had eight objectives: the forty-hour week; \$1.10 an hour minimum rate for miners; time-and-a-half pay after forty hours; six paid holidays with double-time if worked; shift differentials; one week vacation pay for two years or less of service, two weeks for two years or more; sick leave pay of up to two weeks per year; severance pay equal to one month's wage for each year worked; and guaranteed annual work or wage equivalent. For more details about the strikes, see Mike Solski and John Smaller, *Mine Mill: The History of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Canada Since 1895* (Ottawa: Steel Rail Publishing, 1984), 39-40.

⁵⁵ Notice to all employees from C.P. Browning, 27 June 1946, 2687, ASP, BCMM.

he asserted, could not be familiar with the favourable living conditions the company offered at Britannia. The company branded union leaders as outsiders, encouraging residents to reject union arguments and band together to exclude the union from the community.

After the strike began, another notice was posted. In it, Browning implied that most workers were against the strike and implored them to register their “real attitude” to the bargaining committee. He accused the union of engineering the strike and called for co-operation. “Only by such cooperation [sic] in contrast to disunity can this property operate successfully,” he argued. “Why not try to make it work now as it has in the past?”⁵⁶ The company was trying to convince employees that the union had unnecessarily soured labour relations. It appealed to community unity and loyalty to end the strike. Throughout the postwar years management continued, as assistant manager Tim Waterland wrote to general manager George Lipsey in a 1956 letter, to try to “break down the anti-company policy of the Union,”⁵⁷ claiming the union’s demands were dividing what the company considered an otherwise united community.

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While the company used employee benefit schemes to help quell union demands and encourage workers to stay on the job, it used stores, houses, and recreation programs to persuade employees to settle permanently at Britannia. For company officials, family was synonymous with stability, and if more married workers could be convinced to bring their wives and children to Britannia, management believed labour turnover rates would decrease. “A married man cannot move around as easily as a single man,” Secretary-Treasurer J.E. Nelson noted, and other staff members agreed.⁵⁸ Hotel Supervisor T.D. McClellan observed that “the married man who has his family here seems to be more content, works more steadily and on the whole is a more desirable citizen.”⁵⁹ This was the kind of worker the company wanted: a family man, devoted to his work and employer, and less likely to find grievance with the company or seek employment elsewhere.

While company managers saw a clear relationship between marital status and employee stability, the actual effects of marriage on labour turnover are difficult to measure. The majority of Britannia’s salaried

⁵⁶ Bulletin to all employees from C.P. Browning, 2 October 1946, 2687, ASP, BCM. M.

⁵⁷ Letter to G.C. Lipsey from T.M. Waterland, 29 March 1956, file 52, box 74, MS1221, BCA.

⁵⁸ Letter to G.C. Lipsey from J.E. Nelson, 17 March 1956, file 52, box 74, MS1221, BCA.

⁵⁹ Letter to G.C. Lipsey from T.D. McClelland, 21 March 1956, file 52, box 74, MS1221, BCA.

employees were married, while a large percentage of its waged workers were single men.⁶⁰ The company knew that salaried men, who comprised approximately 10 percent of the total workforce, were more likely to remain in Britannia for many years than were non-salaried men.⁶¹ Was this because they were married? Or, did they remain longer because they were paid a steady salary and occupied privileged positions in the workforce? While a married man might be less willing to uproot his family by leaving Britannia, a salary might also provide a single man with the financial stability to consider getting married and settling down. Turnover was much higher among the more numerous waged mine and mill workers who were, for the most part, unmarried.⁶² However, a 1951 report revealed that married waged employees had been working for the company an average of one-third longer than had those who were single, and this reinforced the company's belief that married men were more stable workers than were unmarried men.⁶³ Whether the relationship between marital status and stability was real or imagined, company officials such as G.C. Lipsey believed that "any consideration which can be given to increasing the proportion of suitably housed married employees will be consideration [sic] towards decreasing the rate of turnover."⁶⁴ To that end, management tried to make its policies family-friendly in order to attract more married workers, while trying to avoid appearing overly paternalistic.

BM&S's company store policy provides one example of this approach. Historically, the company store has been a potent symbol of employer control in company towns. Memoirs, novels, films, and songs have often claimed miners "owed their souls to the company store." In many remote resource towns, the local store offered little selection and high prices.⁶⁵ Companies deducted purchases from workers's paycheques, and, more commonly in American than in Canadian company towns, employers paid workers in their own currency, or scrip, which could be used

⁶⁰ The exception occurred during the Depression, when the company attempted to maintain as many married employees as possible. It stockpiled copper, extended store credit, operated on reduced shifts, and laid off only single men whenever possible. Interview with Lucille Gillingham, 1878-18, Britannia Mine Oral History Project (hereafter BMOHP), University of British Columbia Archives (hereafter UBCAR).

⁶¹ Between 1920 and 1940, there were never more than 147 salaried employees at Britannia, while the average number of waged employees was 1,385.

⁶² During the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, waged workers constituted approximately 90 percent of the total workforce.

⁶³ Compiled from data in a company report. Mining and Milling Employee Information, 1951, file 4, box 72, MS1221, BCA.

⁶⁴ Letter to G.C. Lipsey from L. Allan, 17 March 1956, file 52, box 74, MS1221, BCA.

⁶⁵ Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*, 45-7.

only at the company store.⁶⁶ Although some scholars have argued that relatively few miners were in debt at company stores, and that stores' monopolies were limited, the company store continues to be a potent symbol of oppressive employer policies.⁶⁷

Britannia's management tried to avoid the negative image of the company store. In response to residents's complaints about store prices, stock, and management, the company announced in 1922 that it would convert its two stores into consumer co-operatives.⁶⁸ While BM&S was trying to please residents by giving them greater control of store management, the move was largely symbolic. Store ownership remained in the hands of the company, and store managers were still company employees – accountable to management, not residents. Instead of handing store ownership to employees, the company created two Stores Committees, each comprised of four elected community representatives. These representatives met regularly with store managers “for the purpose of making suggestions for the betterment of service and to present complaints.”⁶⁹

The company also instituted a dividend, returning the store's profits to residents. The more employees bought, the greater their biannual dividend.⁷⁰ The dividend effectively curbed residents's complaints about store prices: from management's perspective, residents could not accuse the company of gouging them because employees and their families received store surpluses. Those who disliked the merchandise could have their say by running for the Stores Committee. Company officials liked the plan because, as management told the *Mining and Engineering Record* in 1923, it would “enlist the interest of the employees in the operation of the store” and promised “to work out to the benefit and mutual satisfaction of all parties concerned.”⁷¹ The company believed it was addressing residents's grievances while maintaining ultimate control of the stores.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Price V. Fishback, “Did Coal Miners ‘Owe Their Souls to the Company Store’? Theory and Evidence from the Early 1900s,” *Journal of Economic History* 46, 4 (1986): 1011–29.

⁶⁸ Co-operatives are collectively owned organizations in which any profit earned is divided among its members according to their patronage of the co-op. Common across Canada by the 1920s, co-operatives were often formed in response to traditional capitalism; as economically democratic organizations, they rejected the privilege of invested capital, allowing each member a single, and equal, vote at annual general meetings. See Ian MacPherson, *Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900–1945* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979), 2.

⁶⁹ “Britannia Stores – Rules for Operation Under Co-operative Plan,” file 20, box 64, MS1221, BCA.

⁷⁰ Town, *Lively Ghost*, 69.

⁷¹ *Mining and Engineering Record* (February 1923), file 41, box 120, MS1221, BCA.

The scheme was also beneficial for the company's image. Nearly every article published about Britannia in newspapers, magazines, and trade journals mentioned the co-operative store and the company's magnanimous dividend program, which was considered much more fair and satisfactory than was the traditional company store.⁷² Articles usually also mentioned the extent to which residents had benefited from the scheme: one 1948 article noted that "rebates have totalled over half a million dollars since the inauguration of the plan."⁷³ The article did not indicate how much an average family could expect to receive each year. The figure was meant to impress readers – how could any employer that was so generous ever treat its employees unfairly? Company officials wanted readers to envision Britannia as a desirable place to work and live, a place where the employer treated residents equitably by seemingly giving them control of an important community institution. The co-operative stores were part of this image.

Beyond trying to placate current residents and to attract new ones, the co-operative stores's policy also allowed the company to reward certain employees for their loyalty and service. The stores's "Rules for Operation under Co-operative Plan" stipulated that only those continuously employed for three months prior to the rebate would receive a dividend. In addition, the rules declared that workers employed sporadically during a six-month period would only be rebated for purchases made during the most recent period of employment. Thus, seasonal and transient employees were less likely to benefit from the co-operative stores scheme than were their more stable, usually married, co-workers. Like the Group Insurance Plan, the dividend was an incentive to settle permanently in Britannia. The company also limited membership on the Stores Committee to married employees with resident families because they were more likely than were unmarried employees to be permanently settled residents, and thus able to serve on the committee for a full term.⁷⁴ Consequently, only those the company identified as stable and dedicated employees were given a voice in store management, while bunkhouse inhabitants were excluded. While the company gave residents more control of community institutions such as the store, this was done in a way that encouraged the stability and loyalty the company desired.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ "Visit to Britannia," 76.

⁷⁴ "Britannia Stores – Rules for Operation Under Co-operative Plan," file 20, box 62, MS1221, BCA.

The company's approach to housing exerted an even more paternalistic influence over community development. As historian Eileen Goltz argues in her examination of Copper Cliff, a mining town outside of Sudbury, Ontario, "house rentals [and] land leases ... provided the company with powerful weapons of social control over the workforce."⁷⁵ Companies used these "weapons" differently. For example, before the Second World War in Copper Cliff, the company only allowed Anglo-Saxons to rent houses and gave preference to skilled workers, professional, and managerial staff.⁷⁶ Conversely, sociologist Rex Lucas found that, in several postwar resource communities, companies based housing allocations on family size rather than on class or racial distinctions.⁷⁷ In Britannia, the company considered both the worker's occupation and family size when allocating housing. Although the general manager and superintendents lived in larger residences, the majority of employees were assigned houses based on family size. Single workers and employees without resident families lived in the company's bunkhouses. Bunkhouses and family homes were built at opposite ends of the townsites. By physically separating married and unmarried employees's living quarters, BM&S contained its more transient workforce in one area. Perhaps it hoped, as historian Kathryn Oberdeck has argued in the case of the company-controlled manufacturing town of Kohler, Wisconsin, to "obscure and allay" class divisions by emphasizing the somewhat less contentious category of marital status.⁷⁸

Housing policies, like employee incentives and the co-operative stores scheme, favoured married workers. Because they were seen as more long-term residents, married employees were privileged with home occupancy, while unmarried workers shared noisy bunkhouse rooms and ate unsavoury, repetitive meals.⁷⁹ The housing policy allowed the company to control the size and composition of Britannia's population. It also acted as a check on residents's behaviour. Former resident Kay Pickard remembered a particular family that was asked to leave because of their daughter's alleged promiscuity.⁸⁰ By maintaining ownership

⁷⁵ Goltz, "The Image and the Reality," 65. McCann also argues that the "residential pattern of the modern resource town is differentiated principally by social class." See McCann, "Canadian Resource Towns," 252.

⁷⁶ Goltz, "The Image and the Reality," 68.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 85; Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*, 63.

⁷⁸ Kathryn Oberdeck, "Class, Place, and Gender: Contested Industrial and Domestic Space in Kohler, Wisconsin, USA, 1920-1960," *Gender and History* 13, 1 (2001): 98.

⁷⁹ Letter to G.C. Lipsey from George Hurley, 20 March 1956, file 52, box 74, MS1221, BCA.

⁸⁰ Interview with Kay Pickard, 24 September 2004.

of all houses, the company was in a better position to shape the communities – both physically and morally.

The company also used its low-rent houses to attract employees. While Lucas and others have argued that officials in many company towns began divesting themselves of the costly responsibility of housing workers as soon as enough employees were recruited, there is no evidence to indicate that BM&S wanted to sell its houses to employees;⁸¹ instead, it continued to rent houses for one dollar per room per month throughout the postwar years – a rate significantly cheaper than the cost of similar lodgings in nearby Vancouver.⁸² While the company earned consistent, if modest, profits from its houses and bunkhouses during the 1920s and 1930s, expenses rose sharply in the 1940s and 1950s as older buildings needed repair and new buildings had to be constructed. Although the company spent nearly half a million dollars on housing between 1941 and 1956, it did not raise rental prices.⁸³

The company hoped low rents would act as an incentive, discouraging workers already living in company houses from seeking employment elsewhere, and encouraging bunkhouse men with wives and children in Vancouver to continue working at Britannia in the hope of soon receiving houses for their families. Several employees waited more than six months to be assigned a house.⁸⁴ After the Second World War, a housing shortage meant that there were more married men living in the bunkhouses.⁸⁵ The company knew these workers were less likely to remain in Britannia for long, and it began constructing several new apartment blocks to house their families. “Married men find it very onerous to live [in the bunkhouses] and support a family in Vancouver or district,” assistant mine superintendent A.T. Smith noted. These men stayed only until “they can get something better – which usually means a job in Vancouver.”⁸⁶ Management recognized that insufficient housing

⁸¹ See Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown*, 72; Stelter and Artibise, “Canadian Resource Towns,” 52. Similarly, Robert Robson argues that company involvement in the community of Flin Flon was directly related to labour supply: when a stable group of employees was achieved, the company began withdrawing from community affairs. See Robson, “Flin Flon: A Study of Company-Community Relations in a Single-Enterprise Community,” *Urban History Review* 7, 3 (1984): 29.

⁸² Similar sized homes in Vancouver during the 1940s and 1950s rented for between \$40 and \$140 per month. See *Province*, February 1945–January 1957.

⁸³ From Annual Reports, 1941–56, boxes 3–6, MS1221, BCA.

⁸⁴ Miner Al McNair was one such employee; he lived in the bunkhouse for six months before being assigned a house. Interview with Al McNair, 1878–29, BMOHP, UBCAR.

⁸⁵ There was housing for 270 families in Britannia in 1945. See C.P. Browning, “Britannia, Past and Present,” presentation to the Central Lions Club of Vancouver, 1 May 1945, Archie Smith Papers, 2687, BCM. M.

⁸⁶ Letter from A.T. Smith to G.C. Lipsey, 20 March 1956, file 52, box 74, MS1221, BCA.

was one of the main causes of labour turnover, and it was willing to incur some financial loss in order to secure a more loyal and long-term workforce of married men. Allowing workers to own their homes might have encouraged greater stability by creating a more permanent community where workers could continue living after retirement and their children could build homes nearby. However, the company's housing policy suggests that BM&S wanted to retain control to ensure that only loyal, married employees received houses, and to attract married workers with low rents.

The company's approach to its employees's leisure time demonstrates the same fostering of stability and cohesion as its housing and company store policies. Historically, recreation programs have often been "legitimizing instruments," used to instill specific values in, or convey certain messages to, the populace.⁸⁷ Indeed, BM&S management believed recreational facilities and social activities would keep workers occupied and content, less likely to complain about their work or to look for jobs elsewhere. The company believed recreation programs could help "regulate popular values," a common desire among Canadian recreation providers, according to historian Shirley Tillotson.⁸⁸ At the same time, company officials wanted to avoid making extensive financial investments or provoking complaints of company interference from town residents.

A 1948 article in the *Western Miner* magazine reveals the image the company hoped to convey about its involvement in community life. Describing Britannia to readers, its authors list a number of local organizations, from the Royal Canadian Legion to the Ladies's Aid. Most of the associations included were branches of well-known national organizations or variations on the community groups that existed in many small Canadian towns. The list demonstrated the diversity of activities available to Britannia residents, while the article emphasized local organizations's independence from the company. Company officials wrote the article themselves, and their language implies that they did not want to be perceived as controlling their employees's leisure pursuits.

However, the company was more involved in fostering recreation than *Western Miner* readers were led to believe - and in several ways. To begin with, Britannia's associations had to meet with company approval. Management was not officially involved in running these organizations, but it maintained the right to decide which clubs and groups would be

⁸⁷ See, for example, historian Shirley Tillotson's examination of public recreation programs in postwar Ontario. Tillotson, *The Public at Play: Gender and the Politics of Recreation in Post-War Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

allowed to form. In 1927, a member of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes wrote to general manager Browning requesting permission to open a lodge at Britannia for the approximately one hundred workers who belonged to the order.⁸⁹ Browning denied the appeal, claiming the company had “had similar requests from one or two other contemporary organisations, and in each case we have had to advise them that we could not grant this privilege.” The company disapproved of secret fraternities such as the Buffaloes because they excluded certain members of the community and did not foster the cohesiveness and unity of purpose the company desired. Browning told the Buffaloes that if the members wished, they could host a dance in town. The company approved of “such an affair” because, in the past, “it has been the custom for all of the community to attend.”⁹⁰

While it discouraged exclusive associations, the company eagerly supported sports leagues and team competition. Teams of engineers, miners, office staff, and mill workers frequently vied for bragging rights on the baseball field and basketball court. Several historians have demonstrated that companies often used sports competition to alleviate tensions between workers and management, and to turn employees’s attention away from the workplace.⁹¹ Though there is no concrete evidence to suggest BM&S consciously promoted sports for these reasons, it is clear the company wanted to encourage organizations and activities that included all residents and would promote a “common identity of participant to replace divisive ones of status.”⁹²

Furthermore, company officials often used their own moral judgment to influence recreation and social events. In 1925, the Canadian National Theatre Company wrote to Browning requesting permission to perform *The Rose of the Camerons* in town. Browning solicited information about the play from BM&S’s lawyer, D.N. Hossie. Hossie responded that he personally believed the show “would not be very attractive” and claimed the script had “little if any merit.”⁹³ Based on this judgment, Browning refused the company permission to perform. Management took an equally cautious attitude when hiring recreational directors, requesting that applicants recommended by the Young Men’s Christian Association

⁸⁹ Letter from F. Richards to C.P. Browning, 3 November 1927, file 14, box 26, MS1221, BCA.

⁹⁰ Letter from C.P. Browning to F. Richards, 19 November 1927, file 14, box 26, MS1221, BCA.

⁹¹ See, for example, Lisa M. Fine, “‘Our Big Factory Family’: Masculinity and Paternalism at the Reo Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan,” *Labor History* 34, 2-3 (1993): 274-91; Laurie Mercier, *Anaconda: Labour, Community, and Culture in Montana’s Smelter City* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 20.

⁹² Tillotson, *Public at Play*, 82.

⁹³ Letter from D.H. Hossie to C.P. Browning, 9 March 1925, file 56, box 14, MS1221, BCA.

be young, single individuals “whose morals are sound.”⁹⁴ When members of the Britannia Mines Social Club proposed opening a beer parlour in 1951, the company only agreed on the condition that no women be allowed and that several staff members be given permanent places on the parlour’s organizing committee.⁹⁵ These actions suggest that company officials felt it was their job to protect residents by ensuring that their entertainment, and those who provided it, met certain standards. They saw themselves as purveyors of morality, and they believed they had to set an example for employees.

Management also made families and children a priority when planning recreational events. If Britannia was seen as a good place to raise children, company officials believed more workers would make it their permanent home. The company donated money to the Boy Scouts and built playgrounds for resident children.⁹⁶ The annual Victoria Day and Dominion Day celebrations were clearly planned with families in mind; they were alcohol-free events, characterized by children’s races and baseball games. The highlight of the Victoria Day holiday was the crowning of the Copper Queen, a resident adolescent girl chosen by her classmates. After an elaborate pageant, in which many local children acted as princesses and pageboys to the incumbent queen, the girl was “fittingly crowned” with a copper tiara.⁹⁷ This ceremony not only visually reminded residents of the metal (and the company) to which they owed their livelihood, but it also demonstrated the company’s pride in its families by parading the community’s children in a public ceremony. Children were a symbol of the stable community the company imagined – physical proof of a permanent and dedicated workforce. Halloween and Christmas parties were similarly organized with children in mind. Although all employees were invited to these events, fewer single men attended, likely preferring a card game with friends to an egg-toss with a ten-year-old.

The company also consistently invested money in recreation and social facilities in Britannia. The company built two gymnasiums in 1925 at a cost of more than \$10,000.⁹⁸ The following year it built a bowling alley.⁹⁹ Between 1924 and 1956, the company contributed an average of \$1,700 annually to maintain and expand the gymnasiums and clubrooms, pay

⁹⁴ Letter from mine superintendent to YMCA General Secretary, 6 May 1925, file 56, box 14, MS1221, BCA.

⁹⁵ Notice, 10 May 1951, file 57, box 53, MS1221, BCA.

⁹⁶ Analyses of Employee Welfare Spending, Annual Reports, 1924–56, boxes 1–6, MS1221, BCA.

⁹⁷ See 1926 Annual Report, 143, file 10, box 1, MS1221, BCA.

⁹⁸ See 1925 Annual Report, 8, file 7, box 1, MS1221, BCA.

⁹⁹ See 1926 Annual Report, 127, file 10, box 1, MS1221, BCA.

for a recreation director, and provide a movie hall.¹⁰⁰ While this was a small portion of the company's overall operating budget – usually amounting to a cost of 10 cents per ton of ore milled – it demonstrates management's continuous commitment to fostering recreation and social interaction at Britannia.¹⁰¹ When Browning's successor, E.C. Roper, suggested the company save money by discontinuing the annual distribution of a free Christmas turkey to each resident family, company president H.H. Sharp disagreed: "While [it] is a lot of money to us now," he told Roper, "we should probably lose more in good will than we could save if we do not make the distribution."¹⁰² BM&S recognized social activities as "factor[s] for good in the communities," and thus wanted to encourage them as much as possible within the company's financial means.¹⁰³

Finally, the company created two social clubs – the Britannia Beach Community Club and the Britannia Mines Social Club. Employees elected by their peers ran these organizations, allowing the company to avoid accusations of interference in workers's leisure activities. All employees contributed to the social clubs through a monthly sum deducted from their paycheques. In turn, the clubs organized dances, card games, and beer nights; published the community newsletter; and sponsored sports events and theatrical performances. Like the co-operative stores, the social clubs separated the company from direct control of, and responsibility for, entertainment and leisure activities in Britannia. While salaried employees and office workers who lived in town often held positions on the social clubs's executives, the company was not officially involved in social club activities beyond maintaining and repairing the clubrooms and ensuring that club events met its moral standards. In an effort to balance paternalism with employee autonomy, the company left the planning of community events and activities to the residents.

BM&S was least willing to get involved in the affairs of the community's schools and churches. On the one hand, as historian Linda Carlson argues, these institutions helped to attract stable workers and their families.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, Britannia's management did not want to appear to be influencing its employees's religious views or educational choices. As such, the company maintained an arm's-length

¹⁰⁰ Analysis of Employee Welfare Spending, Annual Reports, 1924–56, boxes 1–6, MS1221, BCA.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Letter from H.H. Sharp to E.C. Roper, 30 November 1954, file 18, box 64, MS1221, BCA.

¹⁰³ See 1926 Annual Report, 8, file 10, box 1, MS1221, BCA.

¹⁰⁴ Carlson, *Company Towns*, 56, 70.

policy towards these institutions. Although originally the company hired all schoolteachers, by the late 1920s Britannia's schools belonged to the Britannia School District, part of the provincial education system, and school operations were left to the school board. This did not mean the company had no influence in school matters; indeed, general manager Browning himself sat on the school board at least once.¹⁰⁵ However, it did mean that complaints about school buildings, teachers, or curriculum were directed towards the board instead of the company. Company officials avoided doling out funding or setting school curriculum – potentially sensitive issues that might interfere with their primary task of operating a profitable copper mine.

Elected boards also managed Britannia's churches. Each settlement had one church building, shared by United Church and Roman Catholic congregations. Each denomination had its sanctuary on a separate floor. While the company contributed to maintaining and repairing the church buildings, it played no part in hiring ministers or directing services.¹⁰⁶ In matters of education and religion, the company was willing to let residents take greater initiative. It did not want to control these institutions, but it ensured that churches and schools were maintained in order to help attract families to the townsites.

* * *

Plagued by persistent high rates of labour turnover and transience, BM&S used its publicity and policies to inspire stability and loyalty in its employees and resident families. The promise of benefit schemes, co-operative store dividends, and a place in family housing was meant to entice transient workers and encourage them to remain at the mine. The provision of low-rent housing, schools, churches, and recreational facilities was designed to persuade married workers to settle permanently at Britannia. The company used copper bonuses and anti-union policies to downplay occupational differences between waged and salaried employees, and to promote company loyalty. These practices underlined, and were informed by, the company's notion of community as a stable and cohesive entity characterized by families and harmonious employer-employee relations. While several of the company's initiatives (its housing and anti-union policies in particular) were paternalistic attempts to control the workforce, other programs, such as the copper

¹⁰⁵ Box 27, file 28, MS1221, BCA.

¹⁰⁶ For example, when residents built a new church in 1952, the company paid one-third of the costs. See 1952 Annual Report, file 1, box 6, MS1221, BCA.

bonus, co-operative stores, and employee-controlled social clubs, resembled traditional welfare capitalist schemes.

The question remains: did the policies work? Was the company able to cultivate the community it desired? The available evidence suggests the company's efforts had limited results. To begin with, their initiatives failed to significantly lower labour turnover rates. Transient workers were as much a problem for company officials in the 1950s as they had been in the 1920s. While annual turnover decreased slightly in the postwar years, it remained high, averaging between 60 percent and 130 percent annually.¹⁰⁷ In 1956, company officials were still debating new strategies to attract more stable workers. Furthermore, the employees's decision to form a union in 1943, after several previous failed attempts, implies that at least part of the workforce did not believe it was benefiting from the company's welfare schemes. The majority of union members were single bunkhouse dwellers, unmarried workers who profited less than did their married co-workers from the BM&S community-building initiatives. Indeed, their marital status made them ineligible for house occupancy and co-operative store committee membership, among other benefits. Their desire for union representation suggests they did not see themselves as belonging to a cohesive employer-employee community.

Former Britannia residents voiced their own mixed opinions about the company's initiatives in interviews conducted during my own research and as part of the Britannia Mines Oral History Project.¹⁰⁸ Their recollections provide further evidence that the company's welfare schemes did not always have the desired effect. For example, while the company believed its co-operative store scheme would quell employee complaints, encourage interest in store operations, and generate good will through dividends, few interviewees remembered the stores as being co-operatives. While mechanical foreman John Dickinson said some people appreciated receiving store dividends, claiming "everybody always looked for the rebate cheque every year," other residents considered the store a company store because it operated on the credit system, and purchases were always deducted from workers's paycheques.¹⁰⁹ Some were suspicious of the rebate. "You thought you were really getting something back," said Betty Manson, wife of a surface worker, "but in the long

¹⁰⁷ See 1940-56 Annual Reports, boxes 3-6, MS1221, BCA.

¹⁰⁸ Dr. Dianne Newell, University of British Columbia, initiated the project with the help of the British Columbia Museum of Mines. Dr. Newell's undergraduate classes interviewed sixty-five former Britannia residents during 1987 and 1988. The project is currently housed at the UBC Archives, Vancouver.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with John Dickinson, 1878-14, BMOHP, UBCAR; Interview with Betty Manson, 1878-56, BMOHP, UBCAR; Interview with Elsie Anderson, 23 September 2004.

run ... [prices] were a lot more expensive than in Vancouver.”¹¹⁰ Others claimed that, while the stores were adequate for “everyday things,” they ordered most food and clothing items from catalogues.¹¹¹ While few complained outright about store prices or selection, the number of outside orders and the indifferent attitude towards store dividends suggests residents were not particularly grateful to the company for converting the stores into so-called co-operatives. Residents did not see the store as a means to a cohesive community but, rather, as a part of the company infrastructure.

The company’s recreation policy received similarly mixed reactions. In this case, the company may have succeeded too well in convincing residents of its hands-off approach. Most of the former residents interviewed emphasized that recreation at Britannia was a do-it-yourself affair. “You had to do your own thing,” bookkeeper’s daughter Claire Bennet said when asked how people spent their leisure hours.¹¹² While this attitude ensured the company was not accused of interfering in community events, it also led some to comment that the company did not do enough to foster recreation. “They could have had a curling rink and things like that, but they didn’t,” complained Astrid Wolthers, a miner’s daughter: “You had to make your own fun.”¹¹³ Former bunkhouse residents were more likely than house occupants to complain about the company’s approach to recreation. According to miner Jack Ross, “There was not too much for the single men to do.” In contrast, he believed “the married people really had a good time up there.”¹¹⁴ The company’s focus on family-oriented activities resulted in some unmarried employees feeling left out. Ross claimed many of the single employees went to Vancouver rather than stay in town during special events such as the Victoria Day celebration because “it usually meant an extra day off.”¹¹⁵ Instead of promoting stability and cohesion, the company’s recreation policy alienated bunkhouse dwellers and left married residents fending for themselves.

Feelings towards the company in general were varied. While many residents spoke positively about BM&S, bunkhouse inhabitants were more likely to find fault with the company than were house occupants.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Betty Manson, 1878-56, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹¹¹ Interview with Will Trythall, 23 September 2004; Interview with Astrid Korwatski, 23 September 2004.

¹¹² Interview with Claire Bennet, 1878-4, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹¹³ Interview with Astrid Wolthers, 1878-45, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹¹⁴ Interview with John (Jack) Ross, 1878-37, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Most former married residents interviewed emphasized that, although the company's influence was palpable, their lives at Britannia were satisfactory enough to counter any negative feelings towards their employer. Some remembered with gratitude how the company tried to help employees during the lean 1930s by extending store credit, stockpiling copper, and retaining as many married workers as possible on a reduced work schedule.¹¹⁶ While Kay Pickard, whose husband was a miner and later a surface worker, complained that "the wages were not good," she added that "there were so many other things that compensated for that," including low rent, scenic surroundings, and social events.¹¹⁷ Miner Al McNair had a similarly practical approach to his experience. "I never got rich," he said, "but I educated my family and we've never gone hungry."¹¹⁸

However, some families did not feel they had the luxury of criticizing the company. Astrid Korwatski believed few people complained "because [they] had a job ... people accepted what they had to do, and [that] was make a living."¹¹⁹ Employees with families were more willing to live within the company's rules because they believed the mine was a secure place to work and raise their children. When a married worker brings his family to the mine, Al McNair emphasized, "he marries the job ... You've got to take a bit of flack, because you can't just say 'I quit!' There's your family – you don't know what to do with them."¹²⁰ Married residents seeking economic stability and a place to raise their children were more willing to tolerate a certain level of paternalism and control than were unmarried residents.

Conversely, former single employees claimed "management pretty well ran the show as they wanted to."¹²¹ Former miner Thomas Howard called BM&S "muck hungry," a derisive term that implied the company would do anything – including endanger its workers – in order to make a profit.¹²² Bunkhouse inhabitants were less likely to benefit from the company's welfare schemes and were thus more likely to harbour resentment towards their employer than were house occupants. These "tramp miners," as McNair called them, could afford to express their opinions because they could easily find work elsewhere: "The boss looks at him the wrong way, he says 'kiss my ass, I'm gone,' and he's gone."¹²³

¹¹⁶ Interview with Lucille Gillingham, 1878-18, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Kay Pickard, 24 September 2004.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Al McNair, 1878-29, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Astrid Korwatski, 23 September 2004.

¹²⁰ Interview with Al McNair, 1878-29, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹²¹ Interview with John (Jack) Ross, 1878-27, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹²² Interview with Thomas Howard, 1878-22, BMOHP, UBCAR.

¹²³ Interview with Al McNair, 1878-29, BMOHP, UBCAR.

Unmarried workers were more critical of the company, likely because they had cause for discontent and freedom to express themselves.

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The company's attempt to create a community based on loyalty, stability, and cohesion clearly provoked varied reactions from Britannia's residents. Married employees who benefited from house occupancy and company incentive schemes had a much different experience in Britannia than did unmarried workers living in the bunkhouses. BM&S's housing and recreation policies imagined a community of loyal employees and their families working and playing together, but in reality not everyone saw themselves as part of a cohesive entity. In trying to obviate workforce differences, the company's incentive schemes and anti-union position actually underlined and sharpened divisions between unionized and salaried employees, and between married and single workers. By favouring families, company policies segregated married and unmarried workers both physically and socially, determining where they lived and shaping the recreational activities in which they participated. Some married residents were oblivious to the company's incentives, being more concerned about maintaining steady employment. Many more unmarried employees disliked the way the company treated them. Some likely voiced their displeasure by finding jobs elsewhere, further raising the turnover rates the company was endeavouring to lower.

In Britannia, fostering community was a continuous process that engaged the company's time and effort and did not always have the desired effect. The company's constant preoccupation with community affairs certainly belies Browning's desire to operate "without that touch of paternalism" mentioned in his 1925 letter to the Department of Overseas Trade.¹²⁴ Yet BM&S tried to be a model and fair employer – or at least to seem to be one – to its workers. Its policies reflected its belief that both employer and employee could benefit from the creation of a well-built, stable, and harmonious company town; ideally, the company could lower labour costs and avoid strikes, and workers would have stable employment, housing, recreation opportunities, and schools for their children. While some might see the company's actions as purely selfish attempts to control its employees and increase profits, the fact that the company maintained its initiatives over such a long period and avoided interfering in certain areas of community life suggests that

¹²⁴ Letter from C.P. Browning to Department of Overseas Trade, May 1925, file 57, box 20, MS1221, BCA.

employer-employee relations at the copper mine were never that simple. While profit was always the company's goal, its managers believed that more harmonious employer-employee relations would help them achieve that goal. B&S initiatives were based on the idea that, in the long run, sustained investment in a stable community would benefit both the company and its workers. However, in the end the company was not able to realize its ideal: with or without that touch of paternalism, the community B&S imagined was not the community its employees experienced.