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The War on the Squatters, 1920-1940: Hamilton's Boathouse Community and the Re-Creation of Recreation on Burlington Bay

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Article abstract

Working-class Hamiltonians responded to a local housing crisis by creating a boathouse community along the shoreline of Burlington Bay and Dundas Marsh. Leasing or simply squatting the land, they enjoyed access to good fishing and hunting, a clean place to live, and seclusion from the gaze of local police. The notorious reputation of a nearby hotel, the presence of transients in the area, and rough elements of working-class recreation, however, made the community a prime target for urban reformers. They saw it as an unsightly problem, standing in the way of their plans to create an aesthetically-pleasing, moral, and orderly city. The "war on the squatters" shows the ways in which urban planners, conservationists, and moral reformers sought to reshape the human and natural environment of the bay, often at the expense of working people. Residents who had enjoyed resource and recreational advantages of living on the margins of Hamilton society paid the price politically when reformers contested their use of the area's natural resources. Although they won limited sympathy, they did not have the economic, legal, or political resources to fight those who saw their community as an aesthetic and moral blot on Hamilton's waterfront.

ARTICLES

The War on the Squatters, 1920-1940: Hamilton's Boathouse Community and the Re-Creation of Recreation on Burlington Bay

Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank

IN AUGUST 1924 Clyde B. Corrigall, ace reporter for the *Hamilton Herald*, Hamilton's reform-minded daily newspaper, waxed nostalgically about the little colony of boathouses below the high-level bridge along the secluded edges of the Burlington Heights and Dundas Marsh areas of Hamilton's bay waters. The 100-or-so dwellings identified in the newspaper, occupied chiefly by working men and their families, were described by Corrigall as "rough fronts." Other Hamiltonians were less sanguine about the boathouses. Those in polite society derisively called the tar-paper and tin-roofed places *shacks* and *shanties*, and labelled the little colony at the fringe of the city's northwestern limits a *shack town*. To Corrigall, however, the boathouses posed a rustic counterpoint to the city's more affluent neighbourhoods and the industrial skyline across the bay, where many of Hamilton's workers lived in squalid conditions in the shadow of the city's factories. "To the true artist's eye," the reporter mused poetically, "those ramshackle dilapidated frame huts are a natural part of the varied and lovely scenery around the head of the bay and the foot of the marsh, however unlovely they may seem to eyes

Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, "The War on the Squatters, 1920-1940: Hamilton's Boathouse Community and the Re-Creation of Recreation on Burlington Bay," *Labour/Le Travail*, 51 (Spring 2003), 9-46.

that can see no charm in anything save newness, brightness and order. On a city alley they would be an eyesore but not in their natural setting, on the water."[1]

The hideaway places on the waterfront where the boathouse colony was located offered a major resource for Hamilton's workers who fished, hunted, and boated around Burlington Bay and the Dundas Marsh.[2] Hunters revelled in the water's bounty, with its fish, turtles, ducks, and the other wild life of the area. Local inns and taverns catering to the sport hunting fraternity were well known for specialty game dishes like roast duckling and turtle soup. Much more game from the area, however, found its way onto the dinner tables of Hamilton workers who sought to feed their families with cheap, easily accessible foodstuffs. Populist writers such as Corrigall turned this grim reality into a celebration of quaint working-class folk, pothunters for whom fishing and hunting were not merely sport, and whose makeshift and sometimes dilapidated houses could be termed rustic.[3] Other reform-minded citizens of Hamilton took a dimmer view of the boathouse community. For them, the physical appearance of the boathouses reflected presumed moral conditions within. The houses supported what reformers saw as the worst features of working-class culture — drinking, gambling, and blood sports.[4] For city planners and urban reformers the boathouse colony was a problem.[5] It stood in the way

[1]"A Glimpse of Hamilton's Picturesque Old Marshland. Weatherbeaten Shacks form Beautiful Scene at Head," *Hamilton Herald* (hereafter *Herald*) 2 August 1924. This article appeared on the heels of a series of public interest pieces published by the *Herald* focussing on the problems of water quality in the bay and the need for recreational space and programs for Hamilton children. For an overview see Ken Cruikshank and Nancy B. Bouchier, "Dirty Spaces: Environment, the State and Recreational Swimming in Hamilton Harbour, 1870-1946," *Sport History Review* 29 (May 1998), 59-76.

[2]Today the Burlington Bay and Dundas Marsh are known respectively as Hamilton Harbour and Cootes Paradise. The latter was named after a local military man and enthusiastic sportsman about whom a renowned contemporary, Mrs. Simcoe, writes in her 11 September 1796 diary entry. See Mary Quayle Innis, ed. *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary* (Toronto 1983), 83; see also John Howison Esq., *Sketches of Upper Canada* (1821; Toronto 1980), 141-2. On the history of Cootes Paradise see John A. Scott, "A Short History of Cootes Paradise," *The Gardener's Bulletin* V24, (March 1970), 1-8.

[3]Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, "Sportsmen and Pothunters: Environment, Conservation, and Class in the Fishery of Hamilton Harbour, 1858-1914," *Sport History Review* 28 (May 1997), 1-18.

[4]On working-class culture in Hamilton generally see Craig Heron, *All That Our Hands Have Done* (Oakville 1981); Bryan Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal 1979); Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West* (Cambridge MA 1975).

[5]On Hamilton's growth and development see John C. Weaver, *Hamilton* (Toronto 1984); Nicholas Terpstra, "Local Politics and Local Planning: A Case Study of Hamilton, Ontario, 1915-1930," *Urban History Review/Revue d'Histoire Urbaine* (Hereafter *Urban History Review*), 19 (October 1985), 114-128; Michael Doucet and John Weaver, *Housing the North*

of their plans to transform Hamilton into an aesthetically-pleasing, and therefore a moral and orderly, "city beautiful." Their cultural vision had no room for the tar-paper homes of working-class people and they determined that the houses must go.

Historians are beginning to recover the ways in which workers and people on the margins of society shaped the urban landscape. Along Vancouver's False Creek and Burrard Inlet, on Toronto's Island, in Halifax's Africville, and along the shores of Burlington Bay, people struggled creatively to provide food and shelter for themselves and their families and, in the process, build communities.[6] In some cases, marginal houses were built upon land for which people had legal claim, like the shelters constructed by those people whom Richard Harris shows sought to build their own homes in unregulated suburban areas.[7] Others were built upon squatted land or were located on waterways, like boat and float houses that could be moved should the need arise.[8] Some had good plumbing, insulation, and running water. Others barely provided protection from the elements as seasons passed. Regardless of the quality, what Jill Wade says of Vancouver seems true elsewhere: "many residents of this housing developed strong, lasting ties to their homes."[9]

In all of these communities, what some residents saw as homes, other early 20th-century observers saw quite differently. Hamiltonian and other Canadian social and political leaders appear to have shared a vision of the ideal urban landscape, something similar to what geographer Brenda Yeoh has termed the "colonial landscape ideal."[10] They hoped for communities that would be ordered, structured

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American City (Montreal & Kingston 1991). For an overview of environmental changes in the harbour related to development see Mark Sproule Jones, *Governments at Work* (Toronto 1993), 135-42.

[6]See John C. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montreal 1993); Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis William Magill, *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community* (3rd ed., Toronto 1999); James Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto 1985); Robert Sward, *The Toronto Islands* (Toronto 1983); See Jill Wade, "Home or Homelessness? Marginal Housing in Vancouver, 1886-1950," *Urban History Review*, 25 (1997), 19-29; Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver, 1863-1913* (Vancouver 1996). More generally consult Dennis Hardy and Colin Ward, *Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (New York 1984).

[7]For example, Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs: Toronto's American Tragedy 1900 to 1950* (Baltimore 1996); John Saywell, *Housing Canadians: Essays on the History of Residential Construction in Canada* (Ottawa 1975).

[8]Wade, "Home or Homelessness?"

[9]Wade, "Home or Homelessness?" 20.

[10]Brenda S. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (Oxford University Press 1996), 16. See also pp. 6-17 for a fine overview of the contested nature of urban spaces. For Canadian urban housing reformers see Sean Purdy, "Industrial Efficiency, Social Order and Moral Purity: Housing Reform Thought in English Canada, 1900-1950," *Urban History Review*, 25 (1997), 30-40.

to enhance the flow of economic activity, sanitary, and amenable to regulation. Marginal communities challenged these ideals. Having a haphazard sometimes dilapidated physical appearance, they offended planners anxious to make their cities efficient and aesthetically pleasing. Their appearance also suggested uncleanliness, viewed by planners to be a likely and dangerous source of both disease and fire threatening the rest of the city. As significantly, city planners joined with moral reformers in portraying marginal areas as immoral spaces, where gambling, prostitution, and other crimes flourished amongst dangerous transients and outlaws beyond the authority of the city. In Hamilton, as in Vancouver, the location of the boathouse colony along the waterfront encouraged such views, since waterfronts have played a particular, stigmatized role in the sexual and moral history of cities everywhere.[11]

As would happen in other cities, marginal areas therefore became the target of those seeking to reshape the city. In Hamilton, on the eve of the Great Depression, a coalition of social and political leaders including town planners, nature conservationists, and moral reformers, sought to raze the boathouse colony. They wanted to eliminate what they saw as a physically and morally dangerous place, and replace it with a carefully-regulated, aesthetically-pleasing, and morally-clean park along the shoreline of Hamilton's increasingly dirty waters. An extensive bird sanctuary and well-tended flower gardens would offer Hamilton residents opportunities for passive recreation, and would form part of a grand highway entrance to the city. The elaborate entrance and parkland would advertise and boost the cultural and aesthetic attractiveness of the industrial city. That vision, which threatened the homes of boathouse dwellers and would deny working-class Hamiltonians access to sources of fish and game, faced serious resistance. The people living in the boathouses of Hamilton's Cootes Paradise also valued their natural setting, but saw the area as so much more than the recreational space proposed by local city beautifiers and environmentalists.[12] They saw it as a home — part of a neighbourhood — where their families could live and play, and they struggled to defend it. The "war on the squatters" was a cultural war, representing a struggle over the uses of nature, the meaning of home and community, and proper forms of recreation. The struggle

[11]According to Craig Heron, the waterfront areas of the city generally "caused the most consternation in Hamilton's polite society." Craig Heron, "Working Class Hamilton, 1896-1930," PhD dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1981, 61. On working-class waterfront culture in Montreal and Toronto see Peter Delottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal: Working Class Culture and Tavern, 1869-1899," *Labour/Le Travail*, 8/9 (1981-2), 9-40; and Mary Louise Adams, "Almost Anything Can Happen: A Search for Sexual Discourse in the Urban Spaces of 1940s Toronto," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 19 (1994), 218-32.

[12]On the garden cities generally see Stephen V. Ward, ed., *The Garden City: Past, Present, and Future* (London 1992); and William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore 1989). For an example of a working-class project in Canada see Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto 1995).

lasted at least two decades, but ultimately the boathouse colony and residents made way for a bird sanctuary and the creation of Hamilton's Royal Botanical Gardens.

Marginal communities, like other urban areas, represented complex, "multi-coded" spaces, whose value and meaning were — and are — multiple and contested.[13] As geographer Don Mitchell reminds us, however, all meanings and values are not created equal, and the contest over meaning is shaped by profound inequalities in economic, social, and political power. Urban landscapes, Mitchell notes, reflect the relative power of various competing groups, and the extent to which these groups have the power to "instantiate" their image of the world in stone, concrete, bricks, and wood, and — we would add — in flower gardens, parks, and nature preserves.[14] The once vibrant boathouse community is no longer a part of Hamilton's urban landscape. Nothing survives except a few archaeological remains and a recently erected historic plaque. In this paper, we draw on the memories and stories of local old-timers, visual evidence recorded on maps and photographs, scattered newspaper articles, and government records to recreate a community that was lost, in part, in the name of preservation. In Hamilton, the outcome of the "war on the squatters," and the resulting shaping of the urban landscape, offers insights into the process of city-building, and into the meaning of social power in an industrial city. While the boathouse community disappeared and is forgotten, the struggle over its existence represented one struggle over the collective community resource that is Hamilton's waterfront, a struggle that continues to this day.[15]

Creating the Boathouse Community

Hamilton's boathouse colony developed on the geographic, political, economic, and social margins of the city. As indicated on the map of Figure 1, the houses along

[13]On this point, see the work of Jon Goss, for example, "Modernity and Postmodernity in the Retail Built Environment," in K. Anderson and F. Gale, eds., *Inventing Places* (Melbourne 1992), 159-77, and "Disquiet on the Waterfront: Reflections on Nostalgia and Utopia in the Urban Archetypes of Festival Marketplaces," *Urban Geography*, 17 (1996), 221-47.

[14]Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography* (Oxford 2000), 121-22, 109. For another example of the clearing of a shack town for the purposes of building a public park see Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (New York 1992), 59-91.

[15]After the city threatened the Hamilton Harbour Commission with a $100 million lawsuit over the future of recreation and industry in the harbour, an agreement was struck between the city and the Harbour Commission for the handing over of vast tracts of harbour lands in the west for recreation. See "Fresh start for city-harbour co-operation," *Hamilton Spectator* (hereafter *Spectator*) 5 January 2001; "Harbour commission sails off into sunset," 6 March 2001; Fred Vallance-Jones, "Historic Harbour Deal," and "A Harbour's Future Beckons," 26 October 2000. On recent small gains for public access to the waterfront see Andrew Dreschel, "Waterfront Trail Rights a Long-Lasting Fault," 10 July 2000.

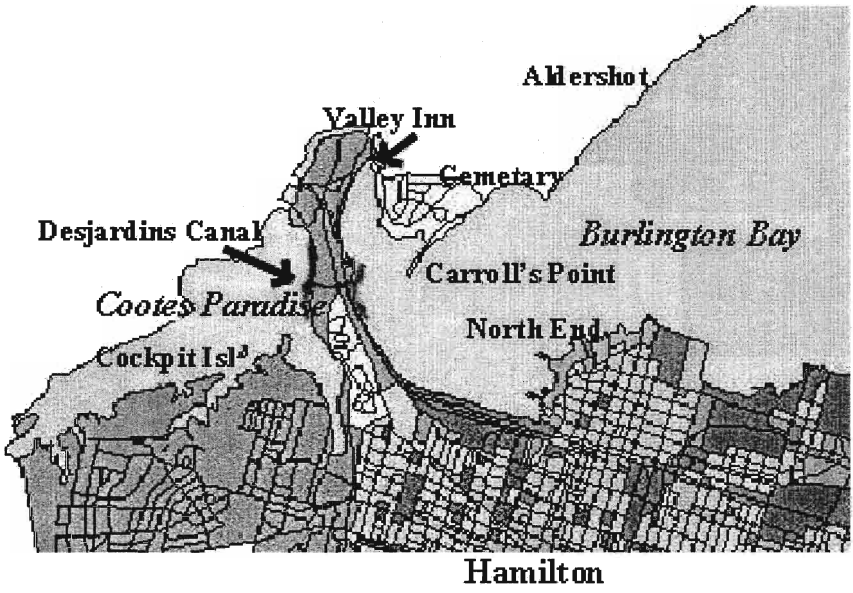

Figure 1. Map showing the location of the boathouse colony alongside the Desjardins Canal in the western section of Burlington Bay and Cootes Paradise, 1923.
Based upon: Canada. Department of National Defense. *Topographic Map. Hamilton Sheet, Ontario*, 1:63, 360. (Sheet number 33 1909; Reprinted with Corrections, 1923).

the Desjardins Canal area appeared on the shoreline of Burlington Bay (Hamilton Harbour) and Cootes Paradise (Dundas Marsh) at the bottom of the steep embankments of the Burlington Heights separating the two bodies of water. Although the heights had been the location of some early settlement around the time of the American Revolution, the port and city of Hamilton had developed further southeast, a couple of miles away. By the 1830s the Heights were far enough from Hamilton's settlement to be considered a suitable location for a cemetery for cholera epidemic victims. Transportation companies looked upon the area as an important gateway to Hamilton and Dundas as well as to inland communities of southwestern Ontario. The political and economic leaders of Dundas convinced the government to dredge a narrow channel through the Dundas Marsh in the 1830s, as part of an ambitious canal project which would improve navigation between their mill town and the great lakes navigational system. Canal builders used existing waterways in the marsh area, widening a natural passage along the northern tip of Burlington Heights. Within twenty years the area changed again as Hamilton's ambitious business and political leaders supported the construction of two Great Western Railway

Figure 2. Aerial shot of Hamilton's boathouse colony showing the houses along the shores of the Burlington Bay, the Desjardins Canal, and Cootes Paradise, 1928. Credit: Jack V. Elliott Air Services Ltd., 1938; Source: Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington, Ontario.

lines across the heights. The natural outlet of the Desjardins Canal was filled in, replaced by a new channel dug through the middle of the landmass.[16]

Some sources suggest that the boathouse colony first developed during these construction projects, as communities of railway navvies and canal workers. If so, the accommodation must have been temporary, for visual sources from the 1850s and 1860s show no dwellings in the area.[17] Although nearly 500 labourers were re-

[16]T.R. Woodhouse, *A History of the Town of Dundas*, pt. 2. (Dundas 1947), Appendix No.7, Desjardins Canal, 39-44; C.R. Johnston, *The Head of the Lake: A History of Wentworth County* (Hamilton 1958), 117-138.

[17]For one account that suggests early settlement see Brian Henley, "Cootes Paradise 'Shacktown' Lasted Almost 100 Years," *Spectator*, 13 August 1994. A number of well-known lithographs of the famous Great Western Railway disaster of 1857 show no dwellings on the shoreline. Two lithographs, from the National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), C-41060 and C-92477 are reproduced in Head of the Lake Historical Society, *Hamilton: Panorama of Our Past* (Hamilton 1994). This book cites them as being based

Figure 3. Boathouse homes on Dundas Marsh (Cootes Paradise) just before their demolition, c. 1936. The first building on the left side of the road has been identified by an old-timer as the Owls club house, a place for boys in the area who hung out there, sneaking smokes and the odd drink of beer. Source: Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections.

quired to construct a third rail line across the heights in the 1890s, photographs from the period still do not show any dwellings along the shore.[18] Instead, the photographic record would suggest that the boathouse community emerged sometime during or after World War I, likely in response to serious housing shortages in the city. The best and most complete visual record of the boathouses comes from a se-

upon photographs of the event done by local photographers R. Milne and D.N. Preston (p.84). Similarly an early photo, circa 1860, of the railway bridge held in the NAC collection (PA 183353) and a painting of the area by Edward Roper (1833-1909) of 10 May 1858 (C-14093) have no visual evidence of shoreline shacks.

[18]Four untitled photographs circa 1900 by the Hamilton photographer Cochrane document turn-of-the-century bridge-building over the canal. They reveal no shacks along the shoreline. Royal Botanical Gardens (hereafter RBG) Library, Burlington, Ontario. See also, Brian Henley, "TH & B Spur Line Forever Altered Cootes," *Spectator*, 6 September 1997. On the bridges over the canal, see "Difficult Engineering Problems Overcome in Highway Entrance," *Spectator*, 17 December 1921, and J. Brian Henley, "High Level Bridges," in *Plaquing Programme for the Designation of the T.B. McQuesten Bridge* (Hamilton 1988), 1-12.

Figure 4. Boathouses in the winter, with people walking on the ice of the bay, 1930. According to stories told by local old-timers, boathouse children would skate across the bay to attend public school in the city's North End during the winter months. Kerosene heaters kept boathouse homes warm in the winter. Credit: John Boyd, 30 January 1930; Source: John Boyd Collection, NAC PA-89484.

ries of aerial photographs taken by the famed local aviator, Jack V. Elliott in 1928, like the one found in Figure 2.[19] Elliott's photographs show a pattern of about 120 contiguous buildings running alongside and into the canal on both its bay and marsh sides. Other photographs taken from land and the water in the 1920s and 1930s show the boathouses as typically two-story buildings, some of which stood atop stilts over the water. As can be seen in Figures 3 and 4, several of them appear to have been fairly substantial, housing boats downstairs and people above. Second-story porches overlooking the waters provided great sunset vistas and a handy diving platform for swimmers. Perhaps because of this design, only occasionally, like during severe storms, did water get into the living quarters.[20] Not all places, however, were so comfortable, as in the case of the shack pictured in Figure 5.

[19]Jack V. Elliott, Air Services Hamilton, Ontario. The six photos are dated 1928. Library, Royal Botanical Gardens. On Elliott, see Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections, *Aviation Scrapbook, Jack V. Elliott Scrapbook.* There are city records for the expropriation of only 50 out of the 120 boathouses pictured on Elliott's photographs of 1928. Precisely what proportion of the remaining 70 homes were squatters' is simply not known.

[20]Nancy Bouchier, *Interview*, 20 April 2000, RBG, Burlington. This source is a 76 year old man who spent much of his youth during the 1920s and 1930s playing with classmates and friends who attended the Strathcona public school with him and who lived in the boathouses.

Figure 5. Shack in Cootes Paradise across from Raspberry House near the railway, nd. This tin shack is an example of the lower end of the scale of makeshift housing found near the Desjardins Canal area. Raspberry Farm, on the north shore of Cootes Paradise now houses the Royal Botanical Gardens Arboretum and Lilac Dell. Source: Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington, Ontario.

The boathouse community, therefore, was a product of Hamilton's rapid industrial growth during the first two decades of the 20th-century, at a time when social and political leaders promoted their city vigorously as the "Birmingham of Canada." They supported the creation of the Hamilton Harbour Commission in 1912 by a Special Act of Parliament to help local industry through a program of land reclamation and port development. Local boosters supported the filling in of swampy inlets and ravines on the harbour's southeastern shoreline for waterfront industrial locations, and built wharves for shipping raw materials and industrial goods. On the eve of the World War I, the city contained more than 100,000 people — nearly twice as many as were there just a decade before. One-half of Hamilton's workers were employed in some 400 factories, located mostly on the waterfront in

the northeast end of the city, some 200 of which had opened within the previous 10 years.[21]

The city's industrial expansion attracted more people to Hamilton, with some 6,000 arriving every year after 1906. Beginning in 1909, the city's Board of Health regularly reported and warned about the consequences of overcrowding to the health of Hamiltonians. In 1912, the local Medical Officer of Health reported that "Every available four walls that under ordinary conditions of city growth would never be accused of being part of a home is eagerly seized upon and occupied, no matter how outrageous the rental."[22] Although there was a housing construction boom before the war, it did not keep pace with the demand. Skilled and semi-skilled workers accompanied the relocation of industry to the northeast of the city, while unskilled labourers remained in the old northwest end. Although the northwest end was more crowded, both areas had mortality rates well above the city's average.[23]

Facing this shortage in the quantity and quality of housing, some Hamilton workers settled in or constructed the boathouses at the western end of the harbour and along the Burlington Heights shoreline of the Dundas Marsh. Some of them leased their land from area farmers, the city, and the Toronto Hamilton & Buffalo (TH&B) railway company for nominal rents of about $1.25 a month.[24] Others were squatters, whose legal claim to the land was tenuous at best.[25] While the identities

[21]*Hamilton, Canada. Its History, Commerce, Industries, Resources* (Hamilton 1913); R.D. Roberts, "The Changing Patterns in Distribution and Composition of Manufacturing Activity in Hamilton between 1861 and 1921," MA thesis, McMaster University, 1964; R. Louis Gentilcore, "The Beginnings: Hamilton in the Nineteenth Century," 99-118; and Harold A. Wood, "Emergence of the Modern City: Hamilton, 1891-1950," 119-37, in M.J. Dear, J.J. Drake, and L.G. Reeds, *Steel City: Hamilton and Region* (Toronto 1987).

[22]*Board of Health Report, 1911-12* (Hamilton), 20.

[23]Presbyterian Church in Canada, Board of Social Service and Evangelism, the Department of Temperance and Moral Reform of the Methodist Church, and the Community Council of Hamilton, *Report of a Preliminary and General Social Survey of Hamilton* (April 1913), Hamilton Public Library (hereafter HPL) Special Collections; Rosemary Gagan, "Mortality Patterns and Public Health in Hamilton, Canada, 1900-1914," *Urban History Review*, 17 (February 1989), 161-75. See also "Say Slum Conditions Exist in Hamilton," *Spectator*, 20 May 1913 and "Sounds Death-Knell of the Slum Districts," 23 July 1913, and also "Social Survey of Hamilton in 1913," *Herald*, 6 January 1914.

[24]*Hamilton City Council Minutes* (hereafter *HCCM*), 1931, 413-4, and 649. It is reported that, "On September 30, 1932, the TH & B railway, which had been given the land by crown grant, assigned all tenancies to the city." See "Would Remove Squatters on Marsh's Edge," *Spectator*, 14 February 1939. How this actual deal transpired is unknown, but clearly it was related to the Dundas Marsh Bird Sanctuary and Royal Botanical Gardens plans gotten up by local conservationists, led by parks promoter T.B. McQuesten.

[25]"Would Remove Squatters on Marsh's Edge," *Spectator*, 14 February 1939. An argument about the rights of one squatter was presented by defence attorney A.L. Shaver, KC, on behalf of his client, Herbert Matthews, a cable man residing in boathouse No.7 in the case of *The City v Herbert Matthews*.

of many of the boathouse residents have been lost generally from the historical record, sources like city directories, telephone books, oral histories, and Hamilton Board of Control reports offer some clues to people's identities, particularly those who had their buildings eventually expropriated by the city for highway construction. At least two of the homes are known to have had telephone service, and some six boathouse residents could be found listing their Dundas Marsh address in local city directories.[26]

Not all boathouse owners were permanent residents however. The secretary of the city's Works Department, who also served as a member of the Board of Parks Management, owned a boathouse, but he lived in a well-to-do neighbourhood not too far from the water. Others, like a fireman whose address is listed in the city directory as 111 Dundas Marsh, may have rented his home from someone who leased the land since his name is not listed with those who received money from the city for the expropriation of the buildings. Given its proximity to the rail lines, it is perhaps not surprising that railway yard workers, not necessarily the most skilled workers within that industry's workforce, were among those living in the community. Other boathouse dwellers held jobs like machinist, teamster, hydro worker, and painter.[27] One individual worked as a parks board caretaker and one African Canadian man worked mortar for the local building industry. Some boathouse dwellers were presumably financially better off than others; one man living on the marsh side, for example, owned a large mahogany inbound motor boat, which, owing to its high cost, would have been a rarity for any worker on the bay.[28] Many, however, may have

[26]The best information about the composition of the boathouse community comes from the list of names used by the Hamilton Board of Control to purchase expropriated properties. *HCCM* 1 March 1921; By-law No 4188, "To Acquire Lands and Boat Houses Necessary for the Establishment and Laying Out of Longwood Road," Schedule A, "Parcels of Land Occupied by Certain Buildings and Boathouses Erected on City Property to the North of Desjardins canal and West of York Street," 31 March 1931; Hamilton Board of Control Report 10, 31 March 1931, 14, 28 April 1931. No records from Canada censuses between 1851 and 1901 specify any people as marsh dwellers. In a list of eleven families known to have resided in the area provided by an Interviewee, only one name — Stanley (Babe) Bennett, a man of African Canadian descent who worked as a masonry mortar man — has been record-linked to both the expropriation records as well as to a city directory as a resident of the marsh. *Vernon's Directory for Hamilton* (Hamilton 1931). Apparently, Bennett was the only Black man in the area. Whether the other families mentioned in the interview were tenants of leaseholders or were squatters is unknown; there is an indication that subleasing went on, as happened in the home burnt in a fire of 1931. See, "War on Squatters," *Spectator*, 17 March 1926.

[27]On such men and their housing in the city, see Michael J. Doucet, "Working Class Housing in a Small Nineteenth Century Canadian City: Hamilton, Ontario 1852-1881," in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working-Class History* (Toronto 1976), 83-105.

[28]*Interview,* 20 April 2000.

been attracted to the area because in this borderland between urban and rural governments, they could live in or construct their own forms of affordable housing.[29]

Although middle-class Hamiltonians might find the outdoor privies, well water, and kerosene heat of the boathouses too primitive for comfort, most of the boathouse dwellers considered their homes comparatively comfortable, offering important resources to help support their families. Some boathouses had small gardens and all provided access to plentiful fish and game. Compared to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions of the North End, the boathouses looked attractive, and had the benefits of their natural setting, well upwind from the stench and grime of the factories. Perhaps not surprisingly then, boathouse dwellers came to take considerable pride in their community, which grew large enough to support its own local grocery store. As one man recalled sentimentally of friends who lived there, "this marsh was not a marsh to them, this was truly paradise to them, these people. Believe me it was, because it had everything there. Out just beyond it, they had a couple of wells that they sank. Fresh water all of the time, you know. Outdoor toilets, but everything kept clean. Everyone took care of everybody's house."[30]

Residents of the boathouse colony appear to have developed a strong sense of community. They looked out for each other's children and participated in social events like summertime picnics and bonfire celebrations, as well as pickup hockey games in the winter.[31] Neighbours organized events that featured and took advantage of their physical prowess. For example, they delighted in an unusual, but hilarious entertainment called "donkey baseball." As one observer described, "they'd have a little donkey, eh, and when you hit the ball, you had to pick the donkey up [over the shoulder] and carry him to the base. And these firemen were all big ... they didn't get them for their brains, they got them for their strength, eh, and that's what they did in donkey baseball."[32]

Boathouse children shared their parents' sense of community identity. Clashes between gangs of kids from the marsh area versus kids from the North End were as sure as changes in the seasons: "Every early summer. We used to have our fight [against the North End kids] ... and we used to meet each other at school in different days, and we'd get along just fine. But every bloody year we'd have a meeting. No one got hurt bad, you know."[33] Generally the boathouse community had more in-

[29]On owner-constructed homes, see Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs*; and Weaver and Doucet, *Housing the North American City*.

[30]*Interview,* 20 April 2000.

[31]J. Brian Henley, "Hamilton History. When the Livin' was Easy in Cootes Paradise," *Hamilton Magazine* (May 1979), 11.

[32]*Interview,* 20 April 2000. Perhaps these games were played across the water near Easterbrook's, where, according to historians of the North End, men would "... indulge themselves in their usual feast, including a keg or two of beer, and generally enjoy themselves." Lawrence Murphy and Philip Murphy, *Tales from the North End* (Hamilton 1981), 14.

[33]*Interview,* 20 April 2000.

Figure 6. Pot Hunters at the Canal basin, Dundas. Using shotguns and homemade fishing poles to bag their catches, working men and their families of the boathouse colony survived on the plentiful game in the area until the designation of Cootes Paradise as a bird and wildlife sanctuary in 1927. Source: Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections, FW HAMAR-025.

nocuous activities for kids of the area. "It seems to simply swarm with children," a reporter from the *Herald* noted approvingly in 1924, at a time when Hamilton, like many other urban places throughout the country, wrestled with the *problem* of determining what sorts of recreations were morally appropriate for the city's youth. Recreational programs sponsored by the parks board aimed to get kids off local street corners and into socially-sanctioned activities on supervised grounds. The area provided "a great natural playground" for them. The *Herald* argued that overall, kids living in the boathouses did not do all that badly by their unsupervised surroundings. For example, they fared quite well when it came to nautical pursuits, and they swam far away from Hamilton's dangerous industrial waterfront and its busy wharves that so concerned city officials.[34] Clad in makeshift bathing suits (though more often *au naturel*), they took to the water at a very young age. Many were said to be experts in swimming back and forth between the canal and Carroll's Point on the north shore. This activity helped certain boys on to victory in Hamilton's annual Playground Association Swimming Championships. Best of all, the high level

[34]On the public debate on children swimming in Hamilton's dangerous waters, see Cruikshank and Bouchier, "Dirty Spaces."

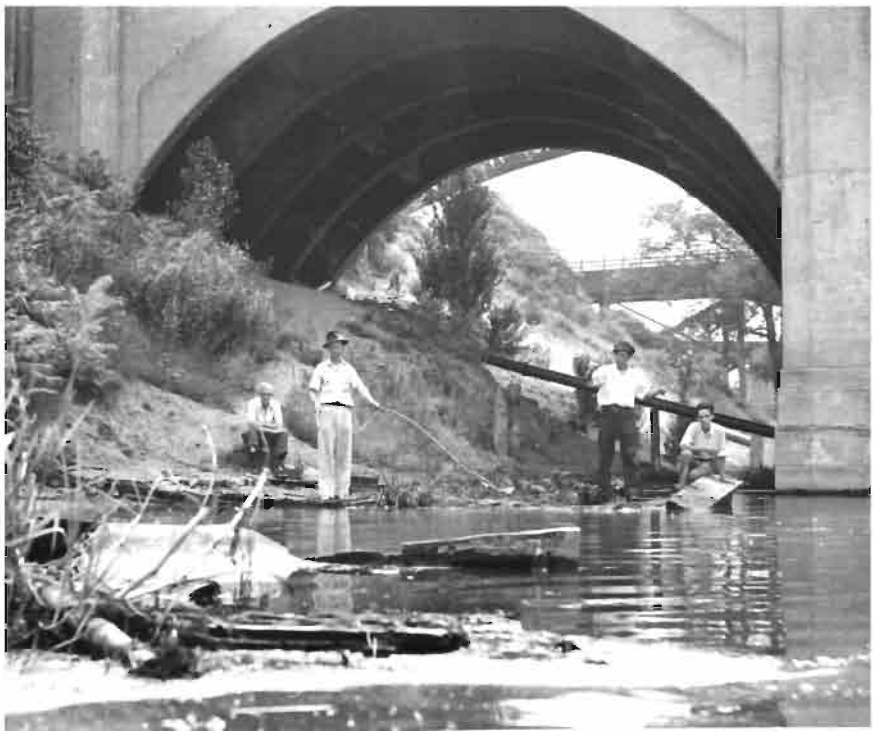

Figure 7. Men fishing under the Longwood Bridge at the Desjardins Canal. These fishers appear to be on the northern shore of the canal under the bridge that eventually made way for the building of the 403 highway in the early 1960s. Today fishers still frequent the area, but they do so typically on the opposite shore, along the city's new waterfront trail near a barrier that prevents carp from entering Cootes Paradise. Source: Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington, Ontario.

bridge provided a superb platform for their well-executed dives and spectacular, wave-crashing cannon balls.[35]

Most boathouse colony boys would cut their teeth on outdoors pursuits at a very early age — something that they would remember for a lifetime. Some used sticks for fishing poles and string for fishing line that was pilfered from the wreaths left at the cemetery on the heights. They would fashion fishing hooks from old nuts, bolts, and scraps of metal that lay along the tracks. Much could be learned about outdoors life simply by observing the sportsmen or pothunters like the ones shown in Figures 6, 7, and 8, who frequented the area. Since game was so abundant one did

[35]Apparently this tradition carried on for decades. See "Sad Drowning at High Level Bridge," *Spectator*, 25 June 1910; "Dangerous Sport," 8 September 1953.

Figure 8. Ice fishing on Burlington Bay with a hand line, 1920. Every winter working-class Hamiltonians fished through the ice on the frozen western portion of the bay between the Desjardins Canal and Carroll's Point near the boathouses to feed their families. This area was typically covered with ice huts during the winter months; however a few souls, like the man pictured above, made do with whatever was at hand. Credit: John Boyd, 11 February 1920; Source: John Boyd Collection, NAC PA-84014.

not need much prowess to hunt successfully and count on a good bag.[36] The area had everything — sunfish, catfish, shiners, bass, carp, ducks, partridges, woodcock, snipe, muskrats, deer, and other plentiful game.

Many middle-class reformers, however, focused on what they saw as the darker side of the boathouse community. Given its close proximity to the waterfront and to railway lines, the boathouse colony would be forever linked in the minds of Hamiltonians to *rough culture*. When, in 1920, the Medical Officer for Health declared that "immorality was being practiced in boathouses and that this did much to spread venereal diseases," no distinction was made between the

[36]*Spectator*, 9 August 1924; *Interview*, 20 April 2000. The newspaper article describes a piece "written so long ago that [Harry Barnard, an old-time sportsman] would only make a guess at the date [the 1850s or 1860s]." Another area man, 'old man Skuce', the proprietor of the Fox and Hounds, was a prominent figure in local sporting culture. He apparently was one of the best shots in the area, which is amazing since he had only one arm. As one area resident recalled of his youth, Skuce was not at all hindered by his disability. He easily took down braces of ducks with few shots by the day's early light. His surname is variously recorded as Skues or Skuce; the Fox and Hounds is also variously recorded as the Foxhounds Inn. See "The Fox and Hounds," *Spectator*, 23 June 1923 and 9 August 1924. See also *Herald*, 13 February 1907, written by one Edward Roper, republished in Brian Henley, *1946: Hamilton, From a Frontier Town to Ambitious City* (Hamilton 1995), 59-63.

boathouses of the busy North End waterfront — where the prostitution trade would be within easy reach of dock workers and sailors — and the family homes of the colony far across the bay. Indeed, even though the paper pointed out "the fact that there was no supervision of those places was because undue supervision would be resented by the respectable owners of boathouses," it became possible to view all boathouses as "retreats of those immorally inclined."[37]

It also did not help that the Burlington Heights was a popular stop for hoboes, something that troubled reformers and members of Hamilton's more stable population. The Canal Bridge, located just before the city's busy railyards, was a convenient place for rail riders to disembark from freight trains, lest they be picked up by vigilant railway police.[38] Even today, the railyards, like the docks on the industrial waterfront, are a most carefully-guarded space in the city. Jail or violent beatings at the hands of railway police could be expected by those who were caught. Despite these harsh realities, workers travelling in search of jobs would take their chances. One Hamiltonian, who spent much of his youth in and around the boathouses in the 1920s and 1930s, recalls that transients would travel between Windsor and Kirkland Lake, between work in the auto factories and the northern mines. They would gather on the heights nearby the boathouse colony, use the resources of the bay, and live off of the land. They would camp in circles and "have tin cans that they heated their water in, and they washed in the streams and they stayed there for days and days and days and days, until all of a sudden, they heard something and they'd catch a freight train and move on."[39]

Readers of Hamilton newspapers were kept well apprised of these hoboes, who were frequently presented by the press as a potentially dangerous and disruptive force to Hamilton's social landscape. While the railway transients were clearly not boathouse dwellers, their presence in the area doubtless coloured many Hamiltonians perceptions of the entire community.[40] The boathouse dwellers and the transients did share some common traits. Both took advantage of the natural resources of the area to hunt and fish, and males in both populations shared an interest

[37]"Immorality Practiced in Boathouses. This Spreads Venereal Disease, Says Inspector Thornley," *Herald*, 12 August 1920.
[38]*Interview*, 20 April 2000.
[39]*Interview*, 20 April 2000. Also, transcript of interview conducted by Andrew Stephenson, Niagara College, for documentary film *No Trespassing: Stories from Hamilton's Waterfront*. Sound Rolls 18/19, 2000. See also "Citizen recalls tramps of the Depression," *Spectator*, 26 March 2001; "Animals can still find High Level home. Art portraying plants and creatures is perfect for highway gateway to city," 2 September 2000. The latter article suggests that the empty spaces on the high level bridge be used as a "tribute to the hoboes who came to town on the tracks below that bridge and took up residence in small caves around it."
[40]"Hoboes like Poor: They are always present and Flock to the Cities," *Hamilton Times*, 12 January 1911, and "Tramps Imposing on the Citizens: Police Trying to Break up a Plan of Professional Hoboes," *Hamilton Herald*, 25 November 1909.

in rough working-class recreations.[41] Of the role of alcohol in the marsh environment, a man who as a child knew many boathouse dwellers recalled, "A lot of heavy drinking went on in the marsh. Because in them days, that's what they did. The men worked hard all day and then they drank. That's the way life was." He was quick to point out, however, "... but that's no different from what we were in the city neither, you know."[42] Drinking took place in people's homes, out-of-doors, or in inns and taverns located on the top of the heights on York Street. Run by sportsmen of no mean repute, such establishments catered to travellers along the Toronto to Hamilton corridor and the sport hunting and fishing fraternity of the area.[43]

The boathouse community had a rough side, for sure. One of its attractions was that it was nicely secluded from the gaze of Harbour Commission and city police authorities that workers on street corners and in busy city taverns often felt.[44] Places like Cockpit Island in the marsh provided a well known, but difficult to get to, landmark for men in the boathouse community.[45] Some of the boathouses in the marsh colony also were home to other working-class diversions that offended middle-class reformers, because they frequently included gambling and drinking. According to one more sympathetic observer, gambling was mostly innocuous, *penny-ante* stuff. It could be found everywhere, "each and everyone [of the boathouses] ... probably had a card game going ... nickel and dime, like that."[46] While this may have raised some eyebrows, it was a well-known secret, like the crap games that were mainstays of North End workers' Sunday afternoon entertainment.[47] Basically, as one man recalled, boathouse dwellers were good, hard-

[41]Interview conducted by Rob Kristofferson, Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Center, April 1995. [Many thanks to Rob and OWAHC for access to this data.]; Rob Kristofferson, *Interview,* November 1999, with a woman from a prominent North End family. For an interesting and lively account of working-class life in the North End of Hamilton by chief players in its history, see, Murphy and Murphy, *Tales from the North End.*

[42]*Interview*, 20 April 2000.

[43]"Ferdinand Morrison. Death Claims One of the City's Oldest Residents," *Spectator*, 28 December 1920. See also "The Fox and Hounds," *Spectator*, 23 June 1923.

[44]*Hamilton Police Department Beat Book*, c. 1930. Microfilm reel #492, Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library.

[45]Cockpit Island, found off the south shore of the marsh, just west of Princess Point is not so named on the *Surtees Map of the County of Wentworth, 1859.* It is listed, however, on maps by the turn of the century. See, Canada Department of Militia and Defense. Topographic Map. Ontario Hamilton Sheet. 1:63, 360 (Geographical Section, General Staff, No. 2197, Sheet No. 33 1909).

[46]*Interview*, 20 April 2000. See also "To Inspect Boathouses," *Spectator*, 28 August 1920, "Boathouse Party Broken up When Police Knocked," 4 May, "Harbour Board is After Offenders," 22 June 1921.

[47]Murphy and Murphy, *Tales from the North End*, 177 ff. See also, "African Golf. Big Game Broken Up When Patrol Appeared," *Spectator*, 10 November 1919; Robert Kristofferson, *The Workers' City: Hamilton's North End* (Hamilton nd).

working people: "I never heard of anyone doing any robbery, no rapes, no killings, no nothing like that; I never heard of nothing like that out there. Of course [there were] fights — lots of fights. But then nothing happened."[48]

The Valley Inn, at the northwestern tip of the bay where the Desjardins Canal had once emptied into it, developed a notorious reputation among reformers, a reputation that tarnished the image of the nearby boathouse colony. In the 1830s it was a way station for grain and other cargo being shipped down the canal on scows and then transferred to lake boats. By the mid-1850s, it would become a favourite watering hole for weary travellers on their long trek to Hamilton from Toronto. It would dominate this traffic flow until 1922, when the Toronto-Hamilton highway redirected motor traffic to a new western entrance to the city along the top of the heights. After that, the Valley Inn would be abandoned until it burnt to the ground in 1928.[49] But until that point, its location just outside the corporate limits of Hamilton, at the junction of Wentworth and Halton Counties as well as the Townships of East and West Flamborough, ensured that with its roulette wheel, the Inn held quite the reputation as a place of rough amusement. Since it lay just beyond the reach of Hamilton police, it easily became "known as a place where beer or liquor could be obtained on sundays [*sic*], or other times that the local liquor laws did not permit."[50] At the first sign of trouble from the law, people would take to the bush-covered hills. No one seemed surprised when the *Hamilton Spectator* reported in 1897 on a raid led by the SPCA and county constables on a cockfighting main held in a secluded area way back behind the Inn. There lay "a nicely-fixed pit covered in sawdust, with raised edges of earth, and all the etceteras of a main."[51] In a rare event, authorities captured 32 birds and 13 rigs. While the names of individuals were recorded by authorities, the SPCA Inspector declined to give them out to the local press, apparently because "a few respectable young Hamilton citizens" — or "fancy men," as the popular pejorative for such types went — were in the crowd.[52]

The notorious reputation of the Valley Inn, the presence of transients, and the rough elements of working-class recreation among boathouse dwellers combined to make the area a prime target for reformers seeking to clean up Hamilton's moral

[48]*Interview*, 20 April 2000.

[49]John Terpstra, "Events Written into the Landscape," *Spectator*, 15 November 1995; Brian Henley, "When an Air of 'Peace and Repose' Enveloped the Valley Inn," *Spectator*, 6 March 1999. It burnt to the ground, reportedly due to sparks from a passing railway car.

[50]Henley, "When an Air of 'Peace and Repose' Enveloped the Valley Inn." According to "Some Boathouses on Waterfront Must Go," *Herald*, 15 December 1928, the Valley Inn was the site of the winter horse races and had a roulette wheel. Horseracing on the frozen bay is described in Murphy and Murphy, *Tales from the North End*, 82.

[51]"Raided a Cocking Main," *Spectator*, 25 May 1897.

[52]On "fancy" men and working-class sports and pastimes, see Tony Joyce, "Canadian Sport and State Control: Toronto 1845-86," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 16 (March 1999), 22-37.

atmosphere. Moral reformers, including some middle-class sportsmen and conservationists, joined with city planners in efforts to remake Burlington Heights. They sought to reshape the human and natural environment of Dundas Marsh, and the west end of Hamilton Harbour, where some working-class Hamiltonians were struggling to build a community on the margins of urban society. In place of what they regarded as the unsightly and immoral boathouse colony, they hoped to develop a bird sanctuary, game preserve, gardens, and a monumental western entrance to the city.

The City Beautiful, Parks, Conservation, and the Boathouse Community

The same industrial and population growth that ravaged the physical landscape of Hamilton and prompted the development of the working-class boathouse colony also stimulated middle-class Hamiltonians to think about creating special spaces that would preserve some of the natural beauty of their city. Town planners, urban reformers, and parks promoters developed a scheme of city beautification that aimed to *elevate* Hamilton's moral tone by changing the *look* of the city. Although factory smoke stacks, busy wharves, and even unsightly slums reflected the success of urban boosters in promoting industrial development, planners sought to create special places that would be more appealing to middle-class aesthetic tastes. As early as 1909, "city beautifiers" pinpointed the waterfront as an area ripe with opportunity for aesthetic planning. Addressing the local horticultural society, one professor from the Ontario Agricultural College commended Hamilton because it "above all cities was favoured by nature."[53] He urged that factories be kept away from the Dundas Marsh, an area which had long been eyed for development by industrialists and engineers.[54] Ironically, planners believed at this time that the filling in of the swamp for industrial use would not be necessary, since, it was argued, "time alone would fill the swamp at a rate of 8 acres per annum."[55] As it turned out, they were wrong: water pollution killed the vegetation of the marsh and transformed it into a shallow, open pond.

By 1917, urban planners and reformers won some important victories in their quest for a "city beautiful." They first convinced Hamilton City Council to appoint a municipal advisory Town Planning Board. This new board proceeded to hire Noulan Cauchon, a pre-eminent Canadian urban planner, to study ways to rationalize Hamilton's transportation system and beautify the city. In his report, Cauchon

[53]"Favoured by Nature. Address by Prof. Hutt on How to Make Hamilton Beautiful," *Herald,* 12 January 1909.

[54]See for example, "Not Encouraging: Cootes Paradise not Suitable for Factories," *Hamilton Times*, 25 March 1914; Brian Henley, "Plan to Develop Cootes Raised a Ruckus," *Spectator*, 25 October 1997.

[55]"Coote's Paradise," *Spectator*, 13 September 1877; "To Develop Marsh Lands on Big Scale," 14 May 1912.

suggested how Hamilton might realize its functional and aesthetic potential. He produced a grandiose urban design that featured garden suburbs, a high-speed electric commuter railway, and a boulevard from the bay to the mountain face. The trees of an elaborate parks system would clean the city's dirty air while providing a "wilder and freer" parkland around the heights and the marsh. This would be an area that "allowed access to the unsullied realm of nature for citizens bound up in the urban realm of culture."[56] Unsullied nature, however, was to be carefully cultivated and framed by the arches, colonnades and balustrades of a proposed new northwestern entrance to the city.[57] Cauchon's plan for Hamilton aimed for social betterment through beauty.[58]

While Cauchon's precise design never was implemented, his overall vision nonetheless influenced the city's aesthetic future. The Town Planning Board, which held only advisory power, proved politically ineffectual and was soon abandoned by urban reformers.[59] Several local political leaders, including Thomas Baker McQuesten, a stalwart ally and friend of Cauchon, found other ways to champion elements of the 1917 urban plan. As a prominent lawyer and staunch Liberal, McQuesten sat as a Hamilton alderman from 1921 to 1930 before taking up a cabinet position in the Hepburn government, where he would mastermind the creation of the Niagara Parks system and the Queen Elizabeth Way from Toronto to Niagara. He used his 1922 appointment to the city's Board of Parks Management to pursue Cauchon's plan.[60] Unlike the advisory Town Planning Board, the parks board enjoyed its own independent source of municipal funding, a guaranteed one mill on the tax levy, giving it relative freedom in the world of fiscally-constrained public works.

[56]Terpstra, "Local Politics and Local Planning," 121; see also John C. Best, "Thomas Baker McQuesten," in T.M. Bailey, ed., *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography IV* (Hamilton 1999), 181.

[57]Noulan Cauchon Papers, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (NAC), MG 30 v.1 f.38 *Reconnaissance Report on Development of Hamilton*, October 1917, 68; "How Hamilton Might Become Beautiful," *Herald*, 4 August 1917; Brian Henley, "Cauchon Had Unique Vision for Hamilton," *Spectator*, 26 April 1997.

[58]Cauchon Papers, NAC. vol.2, 2-16 "The Ethical Basis of Town Planning," 11 December 1920; vol 2, 1920, 21. *Spectator*, 19 June 1920. Part of his vision involved a war memorial honouring the memory of Hamiltonians who fought in World War I. He proposed having the Dundas Marsh lands irrigated and then given to war veterans. This, however, was not to happen.

[59]Terpstra, "Local Politics and Local Planning," 115.

[60]See John C. Best, *Thomas Baker McQuesten: Public Works, Politics, and Imagination* (Hamilton 1991). See especially Chapter 5, "A bachelor ... whose bride is the city parks system," 51-68. McQuesten would also use this position help bring McMaster University to Hamilton from Toronto, and establish the Royal Botanical Gardens. See also Terpstra, "Local Politics and Local Planning."

Cauchon's plans for "wilder and freer" parkland near the city received a boost from nature conservationists, ornithologists, and members of the local social élite who were anxious to protect the Dundas Marsh from development.[61] In May 1919, 60-or-so bird-lovers including Robert Owen Merriman, the wheelchair-bound son of a local wire manufacturer, met in Hamilton's new public library to form a naturalists' club.[62] By the time the Hamilton Bird Protection Society, later renamed the Hamilton Nature Club, sought incorporation in 1920, its membership had risen to 147 bird-lovers and concerned conservationists. The society received the steadfast support from Adam Brown, its honourary president and the city's former postmaster. Thomas McQuesten also heartily supported it, along with his older brother and sister, the Reverend Dr. Calvin and Miss Mary. They, like their mother, Mary Baker McQuesten, the noted matriarch of one of the city's grand homes, Whitehern, believed that "morality was directly related to beautiful surroundings, and to the quality of public spaces."[63] A dozen-or-so other members of the Bird Protection Society were of a similar high social status, from prominent families listed in the city's *Social Register*.[64] Holding solidly-respectable middle-class professional occupations — physicians, lawyers, merchants, bank managers, accountants, and teachers — they were socially worlds apart from the people living in and around the boathouse colony. The society's connections with local teachers would serve its interests well in its efforts to educate the public about the need for nature conservancy while *naturalizing* its authority on matters of conservation and land use. Within a year of the society's creation, some 9,000 Hamilton schoolchildren were Junior Bird Club members, involved in birdhouse building and essay writing on conservation topics.[65]

[61]Hamilton's greatest naturalist was perhaps Thomas McIlwraith who dominated the Canadian ornithological scene, author of *The Birds of Ontario* (Toronto 1894). On his life see "Thomas McIlwraith," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography XIII* (Toronto 1994), 646-7; "Thomas McIlwraith," in T.M. Bailey, ed., *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography* (Hamilton 1981), 132; "Thomas McIlwraith," in Geo. Maclean Rose, ed., *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography* (Toronto 1888), 722-23.

[62]Hamilton Naturalists Club Records, 1919-1978, MU 1285-9, F797, Archives of Ontario, Toronto. On Merriman's life see, "Robert Owen Merriman," in T.M. Bailey, ed., *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography* IV (Hamilton 1999),191-2.

[63]Mary Anderson, "The Life Writings of Mary Baker McQuesten (1849-1934): Victorian Matriarch of Whitehern," PhD dissertation, McMaster University, 2000, 44. All unmarried, the McQuestens lived along with two other siblings with their mother in the family's manor home, Whitehern. See Best, *Thomas Baker McQuesten*, 56 ff.

[64]*The Toronto, Hamilton and London Society Blue Book: A Social Directory, Edition for 1900* (Toronto 1900).

[65]"Robert Owen Merriman," 192. Henry Nunn, a Hamilton businessman and founding member of the society publicized its work during the 1920s through his company's sponsorship of a nature radio program on Station CKOC called *Birdland News*. By 1937 the new curriculum of Ontario's Department of Education would stress natural science and officially

From its outset, the naturalists' organization had an ambitious agenda, one which held grave repercussions for the people of the boathouse colony. It aimed to have Cootes Paradise designated as a bird sanctuary, protecting the marshlands from development and hunters.[66] In a strategic move to garner support from strategic groups, the society sent copies of its plans to Hamilton's Board of Commerce and City Council, the County Council, the dominion and provincial governments, and local MP and MPPs. Hamilton's hunting community responded quickly and decisively to efforts to curtail local hunting. The Hamilton Gun Club, led by a local small-scale entrepreneur Nelson Long, spearheaded a petition bearing 100 signatures.[67] It presented a working-man's perspective of the marsh, contending that, "hundreds of men went up at dawn to shoot ducks before going to work, and when they returned home at night they went out to try to get some more."[68] Unlike wealthier sport hunters, who had the time and money to travel north to hunt, local hunters argued that Hamilton's working families needed access to marsh resources for their food. Further, with the limited time workers had for hunting they could not possibly endanger game stocks. Indeed, they contended that a local sanctuary in Hamilton would only fatten the birds before they would be slaughtered by wealthy American hunters, operating without restriction at the private game preserves maintained at nearby Long Point, on the well-known bird migration path.[69]

At a meeting between city officials, naturalists, and hunters, one proponent of the bird sanctuary underlined the connection between conservationists and local moral reformers. He was a prominent local doctor who championed the value of birdwatching, suggesting that "the histories of many patients showed that no outside interests in childhood and youth had led them to center their thoughts too much on themselves. If given healthful, natural interests ... many of these would not drift into venereal clinics." An outraged gun club leader responded heatedly to the im-

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approve the Audobon Junior Club system as a teaching aid in the classrooms. Merriman adjudicated the school-based birdhouse competition, the society awarded sets of Audobon bird cards to its winners. See, Hamilton Naturalists Club Records, 1919-1978, Archives of Ontario, Toronto, F797. The organization did not affiliate with the Canadian Society for the Protection of Birds, which was associated with the provincial Ministry of Education. While Merriman said that this was an expedient move on the part of the Hamilton society, it did cause some trouble, especially with the secretary of the Canadian society. On this matter see "Robert Owen Merriman."

[66]Hamilton Naturalists Club, *Minute Book*, 26 June 1920. Archives of Ontario, MU 1285.

[67]"Duck Shooters are Opposed to Bird Sanctuary," *Spectator*, 28 September 1920. In 1927, the *Spectator* refers to Long as one of the government's hunting and license inspectors (4 February). He is listed in *Vernon's Directory for the City of Hamilton* (Hamilton 1929) as being a clay pigeon manufacturer.

[68]*Spectator*, 21 April 1925. This article re-stated the case originally made in the 1920 petition.

[69]"Duck Shooters are Opposed to Bird Sanctuary," *Spectator*, 28 September 1920.

plication that an "outside" interest in hunting was both unhealthy and unnatural. "Do you mean," he asked, "that sportsmen are depraved because they kill?"[70]

Advocates of the bird sanctuary generally sought to avoid a direct confrontation with local sportsmen, and even looked for ways to win support from them. The local society marshalled the support and expertise of ornithologists throughout North America like Jack Miner, the famous bird conservationist from Kingsville who oversaw the making of Ontario's first provincial crown game preserve in 1917.[71] Miner praised the idea of having a bird sanctuary in Cootes Paradise as a sound investment in Hamilton's hunting future. He wrote: "for a very small sum of money ... you are only building up the sportsmen's opportunities in other ways, because from a sanctuary like this, there would always be an overflow of birds that are brought there. You cannot do wrong by helping bird lovers, because we take nothing from the shooter, but we increase their opportunities tenfold."[72] Assuming that the hunters speaking out only represented a minority perspective, Miner also tried to turn the tables on their attempts to frame their opposition to the sanctuary by appealing to the interests of working people. He challenged their democratic manliness, claiming: "I don't see how any delegation of real men could object to it as there are only about 7 per cent of people who want to shoot. Why should these few deprive the other 93 per cent of their enjoyment?" He claimed, "What we Canadians want is the most good for the most people."[73] Miner thus helped local reformers to frame their arguments in a manner that did not directly challenge sport hunters.

Buoyed by the publicity surrounding Jack Miner's involvement with the cause, and by the resulting donations of money and bird food from the Ontario Fish and Game Association, Hamilton's naturalists sought to cultivate wider support for their proposal, including from the local Trades and Labor Congress.[74] In January

[70]"Duck Shooters are Opposed to Bird Sanctuary."

[71]Jack Miner was involved in the Hamilton case throughout the dispute and his work at the sanctuary in Kingsville was often cited in support of the Hamilton Bird Protection Society's (HBPS) efforts. For example, "Dundas Marsh Natural Place for Sanctuary. So Jack Miner, Bird Lover Assures Adam Brown," *Spectator*, 30 September 1920; "Coote's Paradise," 24 January 1921; "Bird Sanctuary will be Created in Dundas Marsh," 1 May 1925; "Miner Praises Dundas Marsh," 30 November 1926. To situate the activities of the HBPS within context of the larger Canadian movement, see Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginnings of Preservation in Canada* (Toronto 1978), especially Chapter 6, "Protecting an International Resource," 120-154.

[72]As reported in "Dundas Marsh. Natural Place for Sanctuary. So Jack Miner, Bird Lover Assures Adam Brown."

[73]"Dundas Marsh. Natural Place for Sanctuary. So Jack Miner, Bird Lover Assures Adam Brown."

[74]*Minutes*, 5 April 1923. According to their own records, and apart from their affiliation with the Audobon Society of the USA, the HBPS had good connections with Jack Miner, of the Kingsville Bird Sanctuary, C.W. Nash, Provincial Ornithologist, the Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds, the McIlwraith Society of London Ontario, the Ontario Fish and Game

1922, one member of the Bird Protection Society reported that interviews had been conducted with the property owners whose lands were in question, and he confidently predicted that "the matter would soon be settled."[75] Proponents of the bird sanctuary, however, soon learned that settling the matter would not be so simple. No one was certain about who had jurisdiction over Cootes Paradise itself, or some of its surrounding lands. Those with potential claims to the area included several railway companies, the Hamilton Cemetery Board, various departments within the dominion and provincial governments, a dominion-appointed but locally-representative harbour commission, and the local governments of two counties, three townships, the City of Hamilton, and the Town of Dundas.

Into this jurisdictional confusion tread George Midford, a local entrepreneur interested in taking advantage of the situation by developing local tourism through a hunting business on the marsh. Just a year after the bird society lobbied the Dominion government's Minister of the Interior to designate the area a bird sanctuary, Midford leased portions of Cootes Paradise from the Dominion Department of Marine and Fisheries, for the purposes of developing a private duck farm for hunters.[76] He had developed a similar operation in New Jersey, and was supported in his plan by "an old-style politician who looked after his constituents," Hamilton Tory backbencher and former mayor, T.J. Stewart.[77] With Stewart's assistance, Midford struck a deal with the Department of Marine, agreeing to spend $5,000 developing Cootes Paradise, in exchange for a lease of the property at the nominal cost of one dollar![78]

Association, the Hamilton and District Angling and Casting Association (who on the occasion of the sanctuary designation sent the HBPS an oak gavel to commemorate the event), and the Hamilton Board of Parks Management. When lobbying the city to enforce its existing anti-pollution bylaws, the Society appealed to support from other city organizations, including: the Trades and Labor Congress, the Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, the Burlington Beach Commission, the Social Council of Women, the local Humane Society, the Angling Club, Gyro Club, and the Board of Parks Management. *Minute Book*, 1919-1932.

[75]*Minutes*, 16 January 1922.

[76]*Minutes*, 29 April 1924.

[77]"Thomas Joseph Steward," in *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography*, vol.3 (Hamilton 1992), 199. According to "Certain Marsh Lands Will be Safeguarded," *Spectator*, 13 May 1925, Stewart approached the Honourable P.J.A. Cardin, Minister of Marine and Fisheries on numerous occasions, and, in doing so "actively forwarded Midford's application." He also apparently had "written at least two score letters to the department, and had waited upon [the Minister] many times in the interests of Captain Midford." See also "T.J. Steward Has Fought His Last Battle," *Herald*, 8 November 1926.

[78]"Revives Plan to Create Haven for Wild Birds. Capt. Midford Explains Sanctuary Proposal," *Spectator*, 20 January 1927; Brian Henley, "Duck Farm Proposal Sparked Local Furore," 29 March 1997.

Incredibly, Midford and Stewart appear to have sidestepped the city, the Board of Parks Management, and the Hamilton Harbour Commission, all of which had been carefully cultivated as allies to their cause by the advocates of the bird sanctuary. The Midford deal also alienated potential supporters among Hamilton hunters. Having already argued that a bird sanctuary would threaten the hunting rights of Hamilton workers, gun club leader Nelson Long opposed the Midford plan for the very same reasons. Although Stewart claimed that no shooting would be allowed at the duck farm, Long worried that Midford was simply creating a private hunting preserve for rich sportsmen. A commercial duck-farm that outlawed hunting, or worse, made hunting available only to those who could afford the price of admission, was no better than a bird sanctuary, from the perspective of working-class hunters.[79]

The ensuing political controversy undid the Midford deal. Stewart actively distanced himself from the agreement claiming that he had acted out of ignorance. "If I had known that anyone in Hamilton wanted the property, I would have not been in favour of it," he claimed, appealing to local sensibilities, "I did not know what the parks board wanted."[80] With emotions running high, and with Stewart accusing Long of threatening him over his support of the Midford deal, Stewart got into it with him. The *Spectator* recorded their heated interchange at a lively parks board meeting: "Did I threaten you?" asked Mr Long. Stewart replied, "You fight me and I will give it to you back." To this, Long taunted the MP, "I can take all you can give me." Whether the machismo expressed in the verbal sparring ever turned physical is not known. However, in response to the query of T.B. McQuesten, "Now that your eyes are open Mr. Stewart, will you reconsider your position?" Stewart replied obliquely, "I don't want to make a double-shuffle. I will think the matter over." Then, in the next breath, the MP backbencher added, "... but I won't support Capt. Midford."[81] Within a week, harbour commissioners were in Ottawa getting Midford's lease laid over indefinitely.[82]

[79]This point about accountability was also made by the Hamilton Bird Protection Society. "Paradise Lands Bird Sanctuary," *Spectator*, 11 February 1925.

[80]"Lease of Marsh Lands for Bird Preserve Fought," *Spectator*, 21 April 1925.

[81]"Lease of Marsh Lands for Bird Preserve Fought."

[82]"Get Assurance. No Permit for Marsh Lands Until Board is Heard From," *Spectator*, 27 April 1925. A Hamilton Controller and Alderman joined a deputation led by the Parks Board, the Hamilton Harbour Commission, and the Angler's Club to the Minister of Marine and Fisheries in Ottawa. *Hamilton City Council Minutes*, 1925, 382, and 1926, 144. It took years, however, for the deal to come to closure and the paper was premature in its reporting of the imminent designation of the sanctuary by the Ontario government. See "Bird Sanctuary will be Created in Dundas Marsh," *Spectator*, 1 May 1925; "Bird Sanctuary," 9 May 1925; "Certain Marsh Lands Will be Safeguarded. Cordin Rules Harbour Commission Has Authority," 13 May 1925; "Coote's Paradise. Plan for Development Likely to be Announced Shortly," 26 May 1925. Midford, however, was not to let the issue die an easy death. According to "Wants Midford to Control the Bird Sanctuary. A McMullen Would

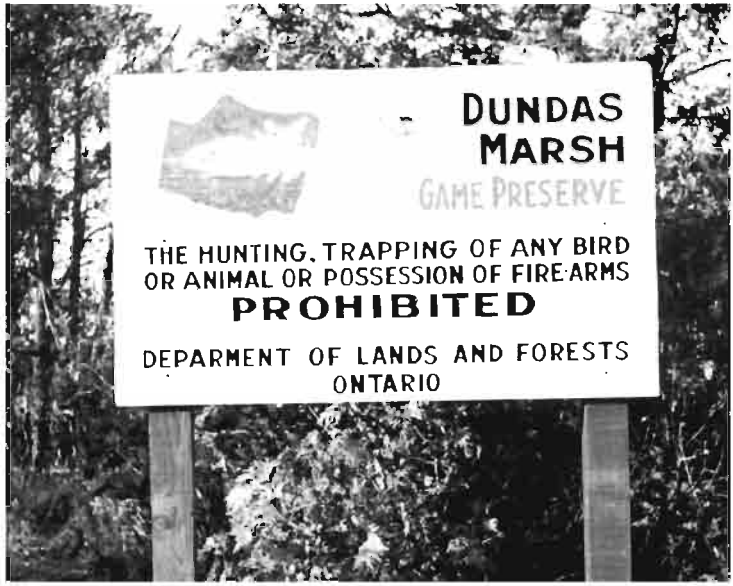

Figure 9. Dundas Marsh Game Preserve - No Hunting. The designation of Cootes paradise as a sanctuary for birds and animals in 1927 threatened to deprive boathouse colony families of one of the main attractions of their community – access to the abundant fish and game of the area. Source: Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington, Ontario.

While Midford's scheme was being derailed, the Board of Parks Management, led by McQuesten, quietly orchestrated a land deal that helped secure the creation of the bird sanctuary, and ultimately would seal the fate of the boathouse colony. The McKittrick Properties Company, developer of the Westdale suburb at the west end of the city, was in financial distress, and needed cash to pay a large sum of money owed to the city. The ailing company also owned property adjoining the south shore of the marsh, an area identified in an internal report as having "no value from a residential standpoint," and thus had been earmarked as parkland by the company.[83] Under McQuesten's direction, the Parks Board arranged for the trans-

Place Captain in Charge," (*Spectator*, 1 April 1926), he tried another tack when addressing the Board of Control to state his case. Through his representative, Alex. McMullen, Midford requested that he be appointed the head of the newly-designated bird sanctuary. By January 1927, when he again tried to resurrect his tourist scheme, Midford was characterized in the local press as a bit of a pest: "a bonnie fechter who refuses to admit himself licked," "Revives Plan to Create Haven for Wild Birds," 20 January 1927; "City Determined to Prevent Loss of Marsh Lands," 10 March 1927; "Coote's Paradise," 11 March 1927.

[83]William Lyle Sommerville, Robert Anderson Pope, and Desmond McDonough, Hamilton Real Estate Board Collection, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library, Hamilton Ontario. *Report of Survey and Recommenda-*

fer of 400 acres of this property to the city of Hamilton, in lieu of the taxes owed. By the spring of 1927, local provincial politicians, supported by the Parks Board, City Council and conservationists successfully petitioned to have this land designated as a sanctuary for animals and birds. Within days of the provincial decision, the city turned control of the area over to the parks board, who would supervise this "wilder and freer" part of its parks system.[84] In designating the land as a game sanctuary, politicians carefully protected the hunting rights of other *bona fide* owners of the land adjoining the marsh. They could continue to hunt, although they needed "a special permit, free of charge, to trap on their own lands, in accordance with gun regulations."[85] No thought was given to the boathouse squatters, who traditionally had hunted and fished in the marsh, but would not be considered legitimate property owners. With "No Hunting" signs like the one pictured in Figure 9 posted everywhere, the bird and game sanctuary scheme threatened to deprive the working-class families of the boathouse colony of one of the main attractions of their community, easy access to the fish and game of the Dundas Marsh. That is, if they were to obey the signs.

The residents at the boathouse colony faced a second and even more serious challenge as the Parks Board began to develop plans for the marsh area. McQuesten and his colleagues sought to realize a portion of Noulan Cauchon's city beautiful vision, by developing plans for a monumental entrance atop the Burlington Heights at the northwestern end of the city to replace the existing entrance along Cootes Paradise pictured in Figure 10. This area where boathouses lined the waterfront — a longtime bane of city planners and moral reformers — became in 1928 the focus

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tions. McKittrick Properties of Hamilton, Canada, 1 February 1919, 6. McKittrick Properties had long been involved in developing water lots along the southern shore of Cootes. "Division of Water Lots Agreed Upon," *Spectator*, 24 April 1916; "Coote's Paradise," 1 December 1921; "My Take Over Bridge Costs," 28 October 1926; "Application of McKittrick Co., is Dismissed," 17 December 1926; "Will Appeal," 14 January 1927; "McKittrick Lands. Syndicate Has Rights to Coote's Paradise," 31 January 1927, "McKittrick Deal," 1 March 1927; "In Westdale," 14 October 1927. For an overview see John C. Weaver, "From Land Assembly to Social Mobility: The Suburban Life of Westdale (Hamilton) Ontario, 1911-1951," in Michael J. Piva, ed. *A History of Ontario: Selected Readings* (Toronto 1989), 219-221; and Best, *Thomas Baker McQuesten*, 56-7.

[84]"Dundas Marsh to be Saved as Bird Sanctuary," *Spectator*, 22 January 1927; "Marsh Sanctuary Given Approval," 25 January 1927; "Marsh Declared Bird Sanctuary," 1 February 1927; "Marsh Will Be Sanctuary for Wildflowers,"3 March 1927; "Government Sanction for Preserve Pleases City,"*Herald*, 11 February 1927; "Dundas Marsh is Designated a Crown Game Reserve. Unlawful to Carry Arms on the Property," 12 February 1927.

[85]"Bird Sanctuary Law in Force," *Spectator*, 1 March 1927; "Dundas Marsh is Designated a Crown Game Reserve. Unlawful to Carry Arms on the Property," *Herald*, 12 February 1927. Hunters apparently had to obtain these licenses from provincial authorities in Toronto, rather than local authorities as was normally the case.

Figure 10. The view of Cootes Paradise boathouses from the highway, c. 1931. The cars in the foreground are travelling out of the city on Longwood Road along the shoreline of Cootes Paradise. In 1928 the Parks Board created a design contest for architects to develop a beautiful new north western entrance to the city. Source: Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections.

of a grand design competition sponsored by the parks board.[86] While the harbour commission already had declared a "war upon the squatters" in the boathouses, the parks board initiative proved even more ambitious and ominous.[87] The competition attracted the work of famous Canadian, American, and Swedish architects, including former Hamiltonian John Lyle, a graduate of the Ecole des Beaux Arts school of design in Paris, and a sometime member of the Toronto Civic Improvement Committee.[88] Three cash prizes, ranging from $500 to $2,000 were to be awarded; however, it was the prospect of the winner carrying out the construction of the design that attracted the twelve meticulously laid out entries. Among them were visions of fantastic proportions, with colonnades, obelisks, and a shoreline developed for aesthetic beauty and grace. The Parks Board awarded the first place prize to a Toronto

[86]Leslie Laking, "Early Days at RBG," *PAPPUS*, 11 (1992), 9-11; Best, *Thomas Baker McQuesten*, 59-60. This competition was the recent subject of an Art Gallery of Hamilton Exhibit presented by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Hamilton Region Branch, *Hamilton, the City Beautiful: Visions of Civic Beauty in the 1920s*, 5-31 October 1999. See also Doug Foley, "Hamilton the Beautiful," *Spectator*, 16 October 1999; Karen Mills, "Gallery Design Reflects Hamilton's Earliest Visionaries," *Spectator*, 9 December 1999.

[87]See for example "Clean Waterfront Ainslie's Order," *Hamilton Times*, 11 July 1924; "War on Squatters. Harbour Board to Clean up 'Boathouses' on the Bay," *Spectator*, 17 March 1926.

[88]Geoffrey Hunt, *John M. Lyle: Toward a Canadian Architecture* (Kingston 1982); D. Hamilton, "John Lyle," in T. Melville Bailey, ed., *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography IV* (Hamilton 1999), 161-2.

firm, led by the noted Swedish-trained architect, Carl Borgstrom. The Parks Board estimated that it would take a staggering $1.3 million and twenty years to complete the monumental entrance.[89]

In 1928, the Parks Board successfully sought the approval of Hamilton rate payers for a $50,000 debenture to support the construction of the bridge and entrance. The board cleverly linked the vote on the debenture to another more popular recreational plan, the construction of a public indoor swimming pool in the center of the city.[90] To help overcome continuing opposition to the project, Parks Board chairman McQuesten invited a Toronto journalist to tour the area and view the plans, in an effort to appeal to the urban pride of Hamiltonians. In November 1929, *Toronto Star Weekly* columnist R.C. Reade extolled the vision of Hamilton's city beautifiers. In his, "Hamilton Shows Toronto How" (Figure 11), which itself must have been something that piqued many a Torontonian, Reade outlined the Hamilton parks plan as it had been presented to him by McQuesten. Clearly he was impressed:

> Hamiltonians have been long conspiring secretly to show Toronto how to construct stately portals and thresholds that will compel the speeding tourist to jam on his brakes and pause and look about him in awe and wonder. Toronto thinks it has done that in garish Sunnyside, which is only a bottleneck entrance to a glorified midway. The soul of the city reveals itself at first glance as the soul of a merry-go-round and a hot dog stand. But far different is the soul of Hamilton, if one can judge from the introductory vistas it is in process of developing.[91]

Praising Hamilton for its approach to city beautification, Reade's comparison continued, "Toronto may desire to sell the tourist something as soon as he crosses the welcome sign. But you will go a half a mile into Hamilton without the least taint of commercialism, as the plush carpet that leads guests to a wedding at a fashionable church."[92] The proposed plan would offer a variety of sedate and morally-acceptable recreational spaces, including a picnic park, model yacht pond, botanical and rock gardens, zoo and art museum. Hamilton was to gain cultural mileage on its larger neighbour by eliminating those vestiges of working-class leisure that shaped "garish Sunnyside." "Do not think that Hamilton is going in for pure austere landscape, with no admixture of amusements," Reade was quick to note, "Hamilton ... will have this advantage over Toronto. It will be able to make whoopee without making a public exhibition of itself."[93]

The working-class families who inhabited the boathouses that lined the shoreline of the harbour and the marsh had no place in these city beautiful designs. Their

[89]Best, *Thomas Baker McQuesten*, 60.
[90]Best, *Thomas Baker McQuesten*, 60.
[91]R.C. Reade, "Hamilton Shows Toronto How," *Toronto Star Weekly*, 16 November 1929.
[92]R.C. Reade, "Hamilton Shows Toronto How."
[93]R.C. Reade, "Hamilton Shows Toronto How."

"whoopee contrivances" — working-class pleasures considered unsightly and offending to middle-class moral sensibilities — were unsanctioned by those in power locally. Although the Harbour Commission had declared "a war on squatters" as early as 1926, the creation of the bird sanctuary and the plans for some version of a monumental entrance to the city prompted city officials to move in and remove the boathouses with the full force of the law.[94] Life in the borderlands of the city had provided working-class families with some real advantages as a family survival strategy, and as a means to escape the surveillance of city police and moral reformers. Now they were to learn the disadvantage of life there: they were in a weak position to defend their homes against planners and reformers eager to create aesthetically and morally clean spaces alongside Hamilton's dirty waters. The "war on the squatters" had truly begun.

The War on the Squatters

The Depression struck just as city officials and the Parks Board determined that they should evict the people of the boathouse community from their homes. The collapse of the international economy complicated the lives of those people in the working-class boathouse community, but it also provided them with some room to resist the city's plans. Both the City and the Parks Board now had little money to invest in their enormous beautification project on the Burlington Heights which justified the removal of the boathouses. The Depression, however, did make some money available from the dominion and provincial governments for public works projects, which allowed for some scaled-back construction to begin. The grand park design was reduced to a sedate rock garden constructed by relief workers out of an abandoned gravel pit. This garden would form the basis of the Royal Botanical Gardens. After a stormy local debate, which pitted "city beautifiers" against local politicians, in 1931 city council approved the construction of a much more modest bridge than that found in any of the design competition plans. Created by John Lyle, it featured four 40-foot limestone pylons with spaces left for statues to be erected later, when better financial times permitted.[95] Importantly, neither of these more limited projects on the Burlington Heights required the wholesale removal of the boathouses.

At the same time, the Depression generated greater public sympathy for the working-class families who lived in the boathouses, as more and more citizens of Hamilton themselves had trouble making ends meet. While the local Trades and Labour Council appears to have been silent on the matter, at least two city officials

[94]"War on Squatters. Harbour Board to Clean up 'Boathouses' on the Bay," *Spectator*, 17 March 1926.

[95]They remain empty today. *Thomas B. McQuesten High Level Bridge Scrapbook, vol. 1.* Special Collections, HPL.

publicly supported the boathouse community.[96] The chairman of the Public Works Committee, Alderman Sherring, while admitting that the shacks were not beautiful, argued that, "We must remember that these are exceptionally hard times."[97] Similarly, Controller Nora-Frances Henderson, who a decade later would be publicly castigated by workers for having crossed the picket line in the Stelco strike of 1946, declared that "it was going a little too far in beautification when we have to turn people out of their homes in these times. It isn't common sense."[98] Given the strain on the city's relief system as it stood, some sympathizers — who rightly or wrongly assumed that evicted boathouse dwellers meant a greater strain on the public purse — argued that it was best to leave well enough alone for the time being.[99]

Those still anxious to wage the war on the squatters looked for opportunities to turn public sympathy against them. In January 1931, a fire swept through six boathouses, resulting in the deaths of two children in homes that were closest to and most visible to the city. The tragedy attracted considerable public attention.[100] Although a coroner's jury deemed the incident to be an accident, it noted that the boathouse community, near but not within city limits, was not protected by the city fire department. The jury recommended that "adequate fire protection be supplied or that these boathouses on the bay shore be condemned," a set of alternatives that one local newspaper conveniently reversed in its headline.[101] City officials were reluctant to extend fire services to people whose marginal status meant they did not pay taxes and whose homes did not necessarily conform to building or fire safety standards. The use of kerosene light and heat, and the presence of gasoline in some of t

[96]Nothing has been found in the local newspapers of the day about local Trades and Labour Council discussion of the matter. Nor have any records been uncovered about it in the Hamilton and District Labour Council papers held in the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Library.

[97]"Beautification of Marsh is Proposed," and "Champion of the Boathouses in the Field," *Spectator*, 21 June 1932.

[98]"Eviction of Squatters Will Throw Many on Relief," *Spectator*, 14 May 1936; *Nora Frances Henderson Scrapbook of Clippings, 1924*, HPL Special Collections. On her picket-line crossing during the Stelco Strike of 1946, see Molly Pulver Ungar, "Nora-Frances Henderson," in *Dictionary of Hamilton IV*, 127.

[99]Russell Geddes, "Hamilton: A Case Study in Local Relief and Public Welfare during the Depression," Unpublished manuscript, 1982. HPL Special Collections, "Champion of the Boathouses in the Field. Alderman Sherring Prepared to Tilt For Owners," *Spectator*, 21 June 1932. See also "Where Little Colony Has Grown," 4 April 1934; "Settlers on Bay Front to be Dispossessed," 3 November 1934; "Eviction of Squatters Will Throw Many on Relief," 14 May 1936.

[100]"Fire Destroys Six Boathouses," *Spectator*, 9 January 1931.

[101]"Coroner's Jury Urges Removal of Boathouses. Either This or Fire Protection Jurors Say," *Spectator*, 10 March 1931. Unfortunately neither the records of this jury nor the Fire Marshall's report have been located in the Hamilton Public Library Special Collections or in the Archives of Ontario.

he boathouses, increased the likelihood of fires in the boathouse community. For those anxious to do so, the boathouse fire provided a reason to remove the boathouses, now in the name of protecting the families who lived there from their own homes.[102]

Some members of the boathouse community — particularly those who had formally leased the land upon which their homes sat — accepted their fate stoically. By the end of April 1931, those who dwelled in roughly one-half of the 107 boathouses officially counted by the city council had agreed to leave, in return for compensation.[103] They took the small sums that they received from the city in remuneration for their homes and began their lives anew elsewhere. The amounts that they received, typically from $100 to $250, could get them some form of housing, perhaps even to purchase one of the homes held by the city for back taxes during the Depression. Using a strategy employed also by members of Vancouver's waterfront community of the day, some boathouse dwellers literally moved on, floating their makeshift homes to other areas of the bay, such as the north shore which was just being developed into a residential area.[104] One journalist from the *Spectator* joked about the futility of the situation for local authorities: "that game of squat tag — authorities *v* bayside — may be entering another phase ... 'Squat, you can't catch me!' say harried harbour dwellers from their new Flamborough fastness."[105]

[102]For one example of a previous fire, see "Boathouse Fire Was Spectacular," *Spectator*, 13 December 1921. The boathouses of North End boatbuilders fared no better, see "Boathouse Blaze Does $1000 Damage," *Spectator*, 13 November 1924. When asked about the boathouses on the southeastern portion of the Burlington Heights, one Interviewee responded with, "quite a few bad things happened on this side, because a lot of the houses burnt with children in them." Since he was a young lad of 6 or 7 when the 1931 fire occurred, it is not known whether he was remembering that actual event, referring to another fire, or simply voicing what was a commonly-held perception of the general area. What is clear, however, is that the area identified was that which was the most visible to city dwellers across the bay and likely the dominant image in people's minds of the boathouse colony since so much of it was hidden from general view from the North End docks.

[103]*HCCM*, 1 March 1921; By-law No 4188, Schedule A, 31 March 1931; Board of Control Report; BOCR 10, 31 March 1931 14, 28 April 1931. There is a discrepancy between the number of buildings shown on the 1928 air survey of the Desjardins Canal area done by Elliott, which showed a total of some 120 buildings, and the number of buildings identified by Hamilton city council minutes in 1931. After considerable searching in the City Hall, the Special Collections of the Hamilton Public Library, and in the Lloyd Reed Map Collection at McMaster University, no map showing these boathouse numbers was found to correspond with the city list. Whether the list recorded all types of buildings (including sheds, outhouses, etc.), or just boathouses in which people dwelt is not known.

[104]Wade, "Home or Homelessness?"

[105]"Aldershot," *Spectator*, 28 February 1935. See also, "Last of Squatters Hurled from Land Boathouses," and "Made to Move, Say Squatters Not Gone Far," 27 May 1936; "Harbour Board Plans Ejecting Shore Dwellers," 12 June 1936.

Still other squatters resisted eviction by arguing their case in the courts under the *Limitation Act*, which stipulated that squatters living in a place for some ten years had some legal rights.[106] Yet trying to win the battle through the courts provided little respite for boathouse dwellers. It was a costly and time-consuming venture, one which did very little to alter the outcome. Workers and other people who lived hand-to-mouth could ill afford court costs and lawyer fees if they were to lose their battle. One man who resisted eviction was fined $30 for non-compliance. In fact, city authorities strategically wore their opponents down through expensive litigation. This led many boathouse dwellers to the breaking point.[107]

After five years, final eviction notices were served to those who remained, and city officials moved in to clean up the area. A *Spectator* reporter observed with some relief that four women from boathouse families had visited the Sheriff's office to indicate they would comply with their eviction order — one even had a place in town already rented. "The belief was expressed," the reporter noted, "that a couple of men served with notices of eviction may be less easily handled."[108] As this reporter implied, the expropriation was not always so peaceful. One resident, for example, threatened to burn his boathouse rather than let anyone take it. In another case, an old man returning from a trip to town found that the bailiff had thrown out all of his possessions and boarded up his home to prevent him from re-entering it. Dumbstruck, he didn't know which way to turn, claiming, "I've been there twenty-six years now ... I'm expecting the pension next December and I don't know where to go."[109] As a newspaper reporter observed, many of the tenants had been in their homes anywhere from ten to fifteen years and "felt rather bitter about the whole affair."[110]

While most of the boathouses were destroyed by the late 1930s in a manner suggested in Figure 12, some were to linger for years — a few apparently as late as 1958.[111] A letter to the editor published in the *Spectator* in May 1940 signed by "A

[106] "Marsh Dwellers Taking Legal Action to Retain Homes," *Spectator*, 19 May 1936; "City May Be Restrained from Evicting Family," *Spectator*, 19 May 1936; "Would Remove Squatters on Marsh's Edge," *Spectator*, 14 February 1939.

[107] "Final Notices are Served on Dundas Marsh Dwellers," *Spectator*, 16 June 1936; "Would Remove Squatters on Marsh's Edge," *Spectator*, 14 February 1939.

[108] "Marsh Dwellers to Vacate Homes, Move into City," *Spectator*, 21 May 1936.

[109] "Made to Move, Say Squatters Not Gone Far," *Spectator*, 27 May 1936. The city contemplated using this tactic again some years later, although whether they carried the plan out remains to be seen. "Board Taking Means to Oust Shack Dwellers. Parks Officials May put up Fences to Stop Access to marsh Homes," *Spectator*, 7 May 1940.

[110] "Marsh Tenants Told to Vacate Property," *Spectator*, 11 May 1936.

[111] *An Archeological Assessment of Part of the East Shoreline of Coote's Paradise, Hamilton Ontario* (Hamilton 1994), 94-9. Apparently two shacks remained almost to the early 1960s, when the 403 highway was built along the water's edge in Cootes over the old Longwood Street path. Whether they were boathouse homes is unknown. See Brian Henley "Cootes Paradise 'Shacktown' Lasted Almost 100 Years," *Spectator*, 13 August 1994.

Figure 12. Demolishing a Boathouse. Source: Royal Botanical Gardens, Burlington, Ontario.

boathouse dweller," commented that the cleanup of the boathouses was like a sport that the Board of Parks Management engaged in annually. It was a battle of wills and wits. With an air of righteous defiance, its author stated, "We are not Germans, or Austrians, or Czechs, that we will stand for any of this concentration camp stuff. Through an attorney we have fought the city and the parks board for 15 years, and will do so for another 50 years."[112] Yet just days earlier, a local Girl Guides Camp leader had lodged a complaint to the parks board about the few boathouses that remained in the marsh. She argued that, "organizations . . . would not countenance having young people spend their time in undesirable surroundings."[113] Clearly, she, like so many city planners and moral reformers before her, equated the makeshift exteriors of the boathouses to a dubious morality that was attributed to the workers and their families who dwelt within. Such sentiments had justified and prompted the "war on the squatters," which largely eliminated a small working-class community that had developed on the margins of the industrial city.

The "war on the squatters" offers one example of the ways in which urban planners, conservationists, and moral reformers sought to re-create recreation on Burlington Bay. As we have shown elsewhere, during the 19th and 20th centuries, working-class families in Hamilton struggled with somewhat more success to ensure that the visions of nature and recreation held by such reformers did not deprive them of the right to use the harbour for fishing or swimming. As Craig Heron argues, "Hamilton's working people never thought of the bay as just a glistening body of water to appreciate from a distance. They made it theirs. And anything that threatened their access to it could raise their dander."[114] The boathouse community, however, remained on the margins of local society and was of little interest even to local politicians who cultivated working-class support. Residents who had enjoyed the resource and recreational advantages of living on the margins of Hamilton society paid the price politically when reformers contested the community's use of the area's natural resources. Although they won limited sympathy, they did not have the economic, legal, or political resources to fight those who saw their community as an aesthetic and moral blot on Hamilton's waterfront.

By World War II, the "war on the squatters" was largely over. By the end of the 20th century, all that remained of the boathouse community were stories told by local old-timers, a handful of photographs in local archives and in people's attics, the occasional obituary of a former resident, and the scattered records used in this article.[115] Recently the archaeological remains of a boathouse were uncovered as an-

[112]"Boathouse Dwellers," *Spectator*, 11 May 1940.

[113]"Board Taking Means to Oust Dwellers," *Spectator*, 7 May 1940.

[114]Craig Heron, "Introduction," in Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, *The People and the Bay: A Popular History of Hamilton Harbour* (Hamilton 1998), np.

[115]"Clifford Edmond (Kippi) Hazell," [Obituary] *Hamilton Spectator*, 12 September 2001. Hazell's family, with its eleven children, lived in one of the boathouses in Cootes Paradise and was well remembered by people interviewed for the writing of this paper. His obituary

other generation of urban planners and conservationists sought to re-create the area, constructing a carp barrier to help restore vegetation in the marsh and a waterfront trail for hikers and bikers along shoreline where working-class families once worked and played.[116] The boathouse community has been commemorated in a historic plaque on that trail, a trail whose construction has disrupted the lives of a few homeless people — whom past generations called hoboes — who still congregate in the area. They do so in the shadow of Hamilton's historic Western Bridge, renamed in 1988 in honour of the man who wanted so much more than a bridge. The true monument to Thomas B. McQuesten and the city beautiful movement is neither the bridge nor the waterfront trail, but Hamilton's famous Royal Botanical Gardens.[117] There, the boisterous sounds of a game of donkey baseball or a cockfight have given way to the quiet contemplation of birds and flowers, in cultivated gardens or in the "wilder" setting of Cootes Paradise.

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notes that the 81-year-old retired tool and dye maker had carried throughout his life fond memories of his boyhood days growing up on the shores of the Dundas Marsh. Apparently his ashes were scattered over Hamilton Bay and a plaque was to be erected to his memory at the Bayview Cemetary overlooking the water.

[116] *An Archeological Assessment of Part of the East Shoreline of Coote's Paradise, Hamilton Ontario* (Hamilton 1994). Prepared for the Fish and Wildlife Habitat Restoration Project, the report recommended a rescue excavation be done on the remains of one of the boathouses which had apparently been razed by fire in light of the lack of material culture remaining from the historically important community.

[117] "The Royal Botanic Gardens," *Spectator*, 20 May 1930; "Royal Botanical Gardens," 29 March 1941; Province of Ontario, *An Act Respecting the Royal Botanical Gardens* 5 Geo. VI ch 75 (9 April 1941).