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**WALTER DEAN AND SUNNYSIDE:  
A STUDY OF WATERFRONT RECREATION IN TORONTO,  
1880 - 1930**

**by**

**Diane Beasley**

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
Graduate Department of History  
University of Toronto.**

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

### WALTER DEAN AND SUNNSIDE: A STUDY OF WATERFRONT RECREATION IN TORONTO, 1880-1930

by Diane Beasley

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, Graduate Department of History, University of Toronto, 1995.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, thousands of residents of Toronto looked to the waterfront for recreational activities. The beaches, amusement rides, parks and harbour area were crowded with people playing. Yet the bay has been almost completely ignored by historians. This thesis concentrates on Walter Dean and his sons who invented, designed, built and rented various popular canoe types in the area of Sunnyside from 1888 until 1931. While Dean's business was just one of the many small companies that profited from recreational activities on the harbour, his history can illustrate the heyday and decline of small craft boating on the bay.

Loosely based on Cultural Studies, this thesis will investigate both Dean's business and his customers. By considering such issues as class, gender, groupings (families, couples, etc.), age and ethnic background, a picture of who enjoyed canoeing as a form of waterfront recreation should emerge. Dean's business in the environment of Sunnyside presents an interesting dichotomy from the point of view of leisure theories which speculate about why people select particular recreational activities. While the popularity of canoeing as a sport would seem to suggest a public adherence to the doctrine of "Muscular Christianity" and a desire for more contact with nature, Sunnyside as an amusement park (opened in 1922) seems to evidence a desire for the carnivalesque, an exaggeration of the noise and crowds normal in city life.

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# WALTER DEAN AND SUNNYSIDE : A STUDY OF WATERFRONT RECREATION IN TORONTO, 1880 - 1930

## INTRODUCTION

Toronto's waterfront has been the scene of changing activities since the city's founding in 1793. Originally, the bay was viewed strategically as a sheltered harbour defensible in the event of an American invasion. For many years the western end of the bay was used by garrisoned troops, and later residents, for shooting practice. However, when the city began to grow, more citizens began recreational boating on the bay. When yachtsmen returned from an afternoon of boating to find their sails sporting bullet holes, it became apparent that a rifle range and boating were not compatible activities in the bay. In July of 1887 John Perry Macdonald, the son of a prominent citizen, was killed by a bullet from the rifle range while aboard a yacht. This event changed public opinion and the rifle range was forced to move.

The trend in waterfront recreation shifted from sport shooting to boating and amusement parks. These events illustrate that changes in recreation reflect the changing values and character of a society. Shooting within the city's limits lost favour because of an increasingly prosperous upper class who could afford the luxury of yachting and had the influence to force the rifle range out. The further development of recreation on the Bay and shoreline in the era following the loss of the shooting range also reveals the changing aspects of Toronto's character.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, thousands of residents of Toronto looked to the waterfront for recreational activities. The beaches, amusement rides, parks and harbour area were crowded with people playing. One of the most popular areas for recreation was Sunnyside at the west end of Toronto Harbour, and one of the best loved activities was canoeing on the bay.

Walter Dean was among the many builders who profited from the popularity of boating in Toronto. From 1888 until 1930 Walter Dean and his sons, invented, built and rented various canoes at Sunnyside Beach. His business success and later failure exemplified the trend of both waterfront recreation and canoeing at Sunnyside. By the late 1920's the popularity of recreational canoeing was beginning to decline as conditions changed within the city and within the sport of canoeing.

Dean's business was directly linked to the area of Sunnyside where the Toronto Harbour Commission developed a major amusement park in the 1920's. The park offered a wide variety of activities and entertainments that reflected the changing tastes in recreation of the city's population. These twin recreational pursuits of canoeing and electrical amusements represent conflicting desires for natural and artificial entertainment. The way in which both these activities co-existed reflects the Victorian character of Toronto in the early twentieth century.

## CHAPTER 1

### CONTEXT: THE CITY OF TORONTO, 1880 - 1920

In the late nineteenth century, Toronto was a growing city struggling with issues of modern planning, while its population expanded rapidly in the face of immigration. The management of clean water, sewage disposal, public transportation and parkland were the topics of lively discussions in the local papers. But most commentators were in agreement on one point: the harbour was a definite asset. Toronto Bay was an advantage to the city both as a prosperous industrial and commercial development as well as for the opportunities presented for recreational pursuits. This thesis will concentrate on the waterfront facilities and activities developed to meet the demands for recreation.

### THE PEOPLE OF TORONTO

Toronto's population expanded rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The population grew from 86,415 in 1881 to 521,893 in 1921.<sup>1</sup> Much of this phenomenal growth was concentrated in the first 20 years of this century when Toronto grew by 313,853.<sup>2</sup> This kind of expansion obviously changed the shape of Toronto.

The immigration into Toronto was largely anglophone. In 1881, 93.4% of Toronto's

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<sup>1</sup>. J.M. S. Careless, Toronto to 1918. (Toronto: James Loriman & Company Publishers, 1984) p. 200.

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid.

population were British in ethnic origin. Even with the huge population expansion in the next 40 years, Toronto was still 85.3% British by 1921. The next largest ethnic group was Jewish at just 6.6% of the population, while both Italian and French ethnic groups each accounted for 1.6% of the population.<sup>3</sup> There were a smattering of other ethnic groups but it is clear that Toronto was largely a British city well into the twentieth century.

In noting their place of origin, rather than ethnicity, most resident were Canadian-born. In 1881 60% of Toronto's population was born in Canada; by 1921 that statistic had only changed to 62%.<sup>4</sup> While the percentage of Canadian births remained fairly consistent, the absolute numbers of immigrants changed. In 1881 Toronto's population was made up of 4,457 people born in foreign countries with a further 30,469 people born in Britain, leaving only 51,489 people born in Canada. By 1921 these figures had changed to 47,941 people born in foreign countries, 149,184 people born in Britain and 324,768 people born in Canada.<sup>5</sup> Although the overwhelming majority remained British-Canadian, the growing immigrant element would have an impact on Toronto. This was reflected in the sports enjoyed by the populace which were largely, but not completely, imported from Britain. Indeed a specific image of the waterfront or seaside as a recreational oasis was imported from Britain. Images of the great seaside resorts like Brighton and Blackpool were reflected in the development of various waterside resorts on Toronto Island, on the eastern beaches, and finally at Sunnyside.

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<sup>3</sup>. Ibid. p. 202.

<sup>4</sup>. Ibid. p. 201.

<sup>5</sup>. Ibid.

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In keeping with this ethnic make-up, the majority of Toronto's citizens were Christian. By 1921 31% of the population was Church of England while a further 20% were Church of Scotland. Methodists accounted for 14% while Roman Catholics accounted for 15% of the population.<sup>6</sup> This overriding Christian community had strong ideas about recreational activities on Sundays. They supported the Lord's Day Act, which prohibited the playing of noisy games on Sundays. In the 1890's an attempt was made under this act to stop the playing of golf on the seventh day. Fortunately for the golfers, Sir Allan Aylesworth, a prominent lawyer, carried the case to appeal courts, winning the right to play golf on Sundays. Baseball, soccer, and rugby (clearly noisy games) continued to be outlawed on the Lord's Day. Like these sports, amusement parks were closed on Sundays, however, quieter waterfront activities such as canoeing were allowed. In 1921 the issue of Sunday bathing came under discussion when it was found to be legal under the Act.<sup>7</sup>

The male/female ratio remained relatively constant throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Between 1881 and 1921 the population of Toronto had between 51% and 52% females. In general there were slightly more females than males.<sup>8</sup>

While Toronto was a very homogeneous place in ethnic background, religious affiliation and male-female ratio, it did have distinct and separate classes. As C. S. Clark wrote in 1898:

Strangers coming into the city are struck with the existence of the extremes of rich and poor. Living in the city is very expensive, the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Toronto Star, July 6, 1921.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 200.

poor are obliged to live in the shaky, tumble-down houses of Centre, Elizabeth, south Jarvis and Lombard and Bathurst and some other streets, while the middle classes and those of only moderate means, reside in the suburbs, or a considerable distance from the business part of the city.<sup>9</sup>

The upper classes, on the other hand, could afford to live well in the city. The years between 1895 and 1913 witnessed a boom for the city which saw the elite accumulate more money. For the "more distinguished men of the community"<sup>10</sup> cricket, thoroughbred racing at Woodbine track, joining the Toronto Hunt, yachting with the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, or (for the younger members) playing lacrosse were popular activities. The elite also supported cultural development in the city, including the Art Gallery of Ontario, opened in 1900, and the Royal Ontario Museum, opened in 1912. However this wealthy and cultured elite was a very small part of the city's population. Henry Pellat in his Casa Loma and James Austin at Spadina were part of a tiny wealthy class.

There was a middle class evident in Toronto by the late nineteenth century that tended to reside in the suburbs while working downtown. This class ranged from the almost-elite manager to the near-poor store keeper and as such they are a difficult class to define. They would include professionals, managers and many government, office and banking positions. While they were not the largest class by population they were influential in the city. According to historian J.M.S. Careless, members of the middle class largely

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<sup>9</sup>. C. S. Clark, Of Toronto The Good. A Social Study. The Queen City of Canada as it is. (Montreal: The Toronto Publishing Company, 1898) p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>. Jesse Edgar Middleton, The Municipality of Toronto. A History. (Toronto: The Dominion Publishing Company, 1923) p. 747.

controlled Municipal Affairs, and ran many of the churches in the city.<sup>11</sup> Both participation in church affairs and various other family activities would have been important recreational activities for this group.

Despite the social influence of the middle class, the majority of the work force, 66.3% by 1911, were blue collar workers. By 1921, this figure had dropped to 58.9%, while the white collar work force had expanded. Their expectations and standard of living was nowhere near that of the elite. According to Michael Piva: "In the first decades of the twentieth century workers in Toronto earned marginal subsistence wages."<sup>12</sup> They earned enough for necessities like food, shelter, and heat, but they had little left over for recreational pursuits. Because of this large working class, affordable sports like baseball and hockey, swimming and canoeing expanded in the first twenty years of this century.

## PARKS IN TORONTO

As the population grew the citizens of Toronto started demanding better infrastructure. Compared with issues of sewage, water supply, or industrial and commercial concerns, the development of a park system for Toronto was a low priority for city planners and municipal government.<sup>13</sup> However park lands had more significance to the average citizen, especially those with little money who were seeking some recreation away from the

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<sup>11</sup>. Ibid. p. 163 and 166.

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>13</sup>. Wayne Reeves, Visions for the Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront. I: Towards Comprehensive Planning, 1852-1935. (Toronto: Department of Geography, University of Toronto, Major Report No. 27, 1992), p. 44.



factory.

The natural beauty in Toronto, a common feature celebrated in various publications which described the city, made it a good place for parks. In 1884, C. Pelham Mulvany wrote in his handbook of the city: "No city in the Dominion of Canada had been more favoured by nature than Toronto..."<sup>14</sup> There were various parks established in the city by 1881, including Queen's Park, High Park (1873), Exhibition Park (1878) and Island Park (1880). Other small parks dotted the city in piecemeal fashion. In character, the majority of the city parks were staid, quiet places with many restrictions on the kinds of recreational activities allowed. Sports were not allowed in the city parks and even more restrictive, "the children are not permitted as in American cities, to play in the park."<sup>15</sup> The only area that really allowed for some free movement in play was the bay. As Clark wrote in 1898:

The bay seems to be the only place belonging to the city that is not consecrated. The parks are for walking in, not for athletic sports, the streets for traffic, and woe to the boy who is caught desecrating them by playing upon them.<sup>16</sup>

This restrictive approach to parks began to change in the early twentieth century, when people recognized a connection between health, happiness, good behaviour and outdoor exercise. The doctrine of Muscular Christianity that developed in Britain began to be felt within Toronto. Complimenting this philosophy, the widespread "City Beautiful" movement affected Toronto and its planners in their desire for more park land. As a result,

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<sup>14</sup>. C. Pelham Mulvany, Toronto, Past and Present. A Handbook of the City. (Toronto: W.E. Caiger Publisher, 1884) p. 97.

<sup>15</sup>. Clark. p. 77.

<sup>16</sup>. Ibid. p. 5.

various government bodies were prepared to address the park issue. In 1914, the Mayor of Toronto, Horatio C. Hocken discussed the parks in the city:

The council of any big city must give attention to the recreation of the people (something that is going to grow very rapidly)...In 1909 there was not a supervised playground in Toronto. Our parks had the usual sign, "Keep off the grass"....We have changed that. We have nine supervised playgrounds now....Today our parks are used by the whole of the people. There is no game that a man can play outdoors which is not provided for in the parks of the city of Toronto.<sup>17</sup>

As parks began to be developed for purposes of recreation, more attention was given to a systematic network of park land in various schemes designed to make Toronto a more beautiful place.

Many of these plans saw the harbour as an area where natural beauty could be improved upon. From the early days of Toronto the harbour was depicted as a place for fun. Writing in 1898, C. S. Clark, expounded this view.

...Toronto is a delightful place to live in. It's boating is unsurpassed. The bay on a summer night, is one mass of skiffs and sailboats, and there is scarcely a youth in the city who has not experienced the delights of rowing, and a large number are owners or part owners of boats....Aquatic sports comprise very largely the principal diversion of Toronto's men and boys, and there is scarcely a boy in the city whose sympathies are not enlisted in some of the great summer events.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to boating, swimming (or bathing) was a common summer activity. In the late nineteenth century, bathing on the sandbar near the Queen's Wharf became so popular that city council felt it was necessary to enact a by-law, requiring all bathers to be clothed, in at

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<sup>17</sup>. Horatio C. Hocken, *Canadian Club of Ottawa Addresses*, Dec. 19, 1914, in Paul Rutherford, *Saving the Canadian City: the first phase 1880-1920*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974. p. 197, 198.

<sup>18</sup>. Clark, p. 4, 5.

least swimming trunks. On warm, sunny days, Torontonians could be found at any of the common beaches from Woodbine to Sunnyside, and on the island, walking and splashing in the waves.

Beyond Toronto various areas offered outdoor recreational activities to those with the means and inclination to take advantage of them. Niagara Falls was well established as a tourist location by 1887, when the area was officially declared a Provincial Park. Rail excursions could be taken to the new park which provided trails, and various prime views of the falls. During the 1890's the Muskokas and Algonquin Park were also developing as tourist attractions. The southern portions of the Muskokas were a popular location for summer resorts and summer homes. Shortly after, in the early twentieth century, the northern areas were developed, and various steamboat companies did a fine business in bringing tourist to lodges or just taking them on a tour of the area. Large sections of Toronto's weekend newspapers regularly discussed the regattas and activities at Lake Rousseau and other areas; many of these articles commented on the activities and appearances of various well known members of Toronto's elite. While inexpensive accommodation was available in the Muskokas, the area had a certain class image. Algonquin Park, on the other hand, catered to those who wanted to enjoy a more rustic holiday. The park was established in 1893 but did not attract many tourists until the Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway was built in 1894-6. Various tourist lodges were opened along the railway where guides and canoes could be rented. As a result, this area became a popular location for wilderness canoeing.

At the same time, within Toronto, there were a number of enterprising individuals

who developed recreational activities for commercial profit in the hopes of attracting residents who had not travelled farther afield. They often chose the waterfront as an ideal location for recreation, particularly for amusement parks. As early as 1843, the Privat Brothers opened a small amusement park on Toronto Island. Later, in the 1880's a much larger amusement park, called Hanlan's Point, was also developed on the island. It included a carousel, a scenic railway, various games of chance, a tea room, dance pavilion and a grandstand for baseball and lacrosse. Another popular attraction at the park was W.T. Gorman's diving horses which actually jumped off a platform into the lake to the enthusiastic applause of crowds at the turn of the century. This park was closed in the late 1920's while Sunnyside was in its prime.

Farther east, Scarborough Beach Park opened in 1907 with a small amusement area. A few years later the Toronto Railway Company bought the site and developed it into a successful park at the end of their trolley line. The purpose of this and many other parks like it throughout North America was to increase ridership on the Trolley cars into the evenings and on weekends. The park boasted a Scenic Railway and a Shoot-the-Chutes, sideshows, staged disasters and a stadium where professional lacrosse was played.<sup>19</sup> Scarborough Beach Park was closed in 1925, shortly after the Toronto Transportation Commission refused to purchase the grounds from the Toronto Railway Company.

Another popular lakeside amusement park was the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) which was only open for a short period each year. Along with the midway, the CNE

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<sup>19</sup>. Wayne Reeves, Regional Heritage Features on the Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront. (Report to the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Department, 1992.) p. 127.

offered a wide variety of displays and contests ranging from sporting events to cooking. Other smaller lakefront parks included Long Branch, Lorne Park and Victoria Park. These amusement parks were both small scale and relatively short lived.

While the amusement parks to the east and on the island were closing, Sunnyside Amusement Park was booming throughout the 1920's. It was the last of the great waterside amusement parks in Toronto. The popularity of both canoeing and Sunnyside represent a recreational focus on the lakefront that has long since declined.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONTEXT - CANOEING

Because of Toronto's large anglophone population a number of sports, such as the Toronto Hunt and cricket were imported from Britain. Surprisingly, this is also true of canoeing. Although the canoe as a means of transportation was indigenous to Canada, the sport of recreational canoeing was first developed and popularized in Britain. European travellers had carried home as souvenirs or curios various kinds of native canoes and kayaks from an early time. John MacGregor, a Scottish gentleman, was introduced to canoes in 1859 on the Ottawa River, and he was so enthused with this type of boat that on his return to Britain he built his own canoe called the *Rob Roy*. In 1865 MacGregor in his *Rob Roy* cruised the rivers and lakes in Germany, France and Switzerland for nearly three months. His extremely popular account of this voyage, A Thousand Miles in the Rob Roy, set off a trend of cruising by canoe on both sides of the Atlantic. MacGregor was also instrumental in establishing the Royal Canoe Club in 1866, with the patronage of the Prince of Wales. Other canoe clubs, on both sides of the Atlantic, soon followed. "The widespread popularity of canoeing in the United States in the final quarter of the century did not spring from a home-grown enthusiasm for the watercraft of the Indians."<sup>1</sup> Instead, canoeing as an American or Canadian sport was imported from Britain, and quickly caught on as a popular sport.

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<sup>1</sup>. Kenneth G. Roberts and Philip Shackleton, The Canoe. A History of the Craft from Panama to the Arctic. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1983.) p. 241.

Simply described, "a canoe is a boat, sharp at both ends, propelled by a paddle."<sup>2</sup> However within this description there was a wide range of boats. While the *Rob Roy* was a covered canoe either propelled with a double-bladed paddle or sailed, a variety of canoes for different purposes began to be developed. There were cruising canoes for longer voyages with space for gear and a wide range of distinct canoe equipment. There were canoes for racing either by sail, single blade paddle, or double blade paddle. There were small one man canoes, tandem canoes and large war canoes that raced with crews of 15 paddling. Each canoe variation had its strong advocates who debated their favourite canoe's best features in print and in discussions at numerous canoe clubs. As C. Bowyer Vaux wrote in 1901, "Much has been said and written about the "perfect canoe". The only perfect canoe is the one you happen to own and want to sell."<sup>3</sup> Still the debates raged on and led to spirited arguments in the growing canoe fraternity.

Of all the variations, there was one type that was distinctly Canadian: "the open canoe and single blade being a national institution."<sup>4</sup> In design it was a wooden canoe developed in Ontario in the 1870's and based on the native model. In one of their many articles on canoeing, the American sports publication, Forest and Stream praised the Canadian canoe:

For cruising as it is done in Canada, mainly river work with frequent

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<sup>2</sup>. American Canoe Association, Canoes and Canoeing. (New York: American Sports Publications, 1907) p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>. C. Bowyer Vaux, Canoe Handling. Third edition. (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing Company, 1901) p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>. The American Canoeist, Year Book No. XII, American Canoe Association, 1893. (Kingston: Daily News Printing House, 1893. p.7.

portages, and especially as the most important part of a hunting outfit, the open canoe is as near perfection as can be. Also for afternoon paddling, especially with one or two companions, and for a ladies' canoe, it answers better than the decked craft, being cheaper, lighter, simpler and in every way more convenient to handle. It is also used by many canoeists in the States for this work and for short river cruises, a decked sailing canoe being kept for racing.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to this sentiment, an open canoe was shown to be a successful racing vessel: at the very first American Canoe Association regatta in 1881, Thomas Henry Wallace from Rice Lake won two paddling races in a Canadian canoe. The sport of canoeing thrived in Canada throughout the 1880's and the 1890's, culminating in the establishment of the Canadian Canoe Association in 1900. By the early twentieth century there was even a name for canoe-fever: "canoesia".<sup>6</sup>

The Toronto Canoe Club (TCC) is just one example of the many canoeing clubs that were active in Canada in the late nineteenth century. First founded in 1880, by nine gentlemen, the membership quickly expanded to 109 in 1889, 530 in 1906, and 608 in 1909.<sup>7</sup> Club activities included weekend canoe cruises, regatta and racing meets as well as dinners, social events, snowshoeing tramps, tug of wars, and baseball games. The following illustration from the menu of the 1890 annual dinner reveals a lively and humorous approach to canoeing (see illustration #1). The various characters represent club members in their individually named canoes. Clearly the owner of *Ireland* had suffered a dunking; *Clytie's*

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<sup>5</sup>. Forest and Stream, December 4, 1890.

<sup>6</sup>. Vaux. p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>. Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club, The Red Ringers. (Toronto: Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club, 1980.) pp. 5,8,13.



TORONTO CANOE CLUB, ANNUAL DINNER MENU, 1890.  
Jacques Collection, Toronto Historical Board (74.78.37) 1890.



owner had gone wilderness canoeing; and *Hyla's* owner was a bit of a ladies man.

The newspaper accounts of club activities confirm the intense but lighthearted nature of TCC events. Regattas at summer camps or on Toronto Bay were a combination of hard fought races and entertaining spectacles. A journalist in 1889 gave the following account of a regatta:

The tandem and fours paddling races will bring out the best paddlers in the country, but the most interesting and amusing events will undoubtedly be the hurry-scurry race and the tournament. In the first named the canoes are moored 25 yards from the shore and the competitors have to run 50 yards, plunge into the water and swim to the canoes, climb in, and paddle 50 yards. In the tournament there will be two men in each canoe -- one attending to the steering while the other will be armed with a long lance, and with it attempt to knock his opponent into the water. There is lots of fun in it, and the spectators will be highly amused while it lasts.<sup>8</sup>

Laughter and good fellowship are common elements in many of the first hand accounts of canoe meets.

According to historian Alan Metcalfe, organized amateur sport was developed by the "anglophone mercantile, commercial and professional middle class of Montreal and Toronto..."<sup>9</sup> Canoeing certainly attempted to appeal to this class of men. Phrases like: "All gentlemen are not canoeists, but all canoeists are gentlemen"<sup>10</sup> were common in sporting publications. Vaux, in his manual on canoeing, described who was a canoeist:

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<sup>8</sup>. Jacques Collection, Toronto Historical Board, June 26, 1889. (74.78.46I)

<sup>9</sup>. Alan Metcalfe, Canada Learns to Play. The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1987. p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>. Dominion Illustrated Monthly, 5, no. 111, Aug. 9, 1890, p. 87, in Jamie Benidickson's "Recreational Canoeing in Ontario Before the First World War." in Canadian Journal of the History of Sport and Physical Education, Vol. IX, no. 2, Dec. 1978.

The real canoeist is a good fellow and one whose acquaintance will do you good. He is healthy, body and mind; and is the result of (old Darwin's theory) the survival of the fittest; and also remember that only the fittest do survive, as canoeists.<sup>11</sup>

Canoeing was a sport for the gentlemen who believed in the ideals of "Muscular Christianity". This philosophy claimed that sports and physical activity could teach all the best of Christian beliefs and British culture. Good Christian gentlemen would come from boys who were taught to play sports energetically, courageously, and with a sense of fair play. A canoeist who is healthy "in mind and body" is therefore not only a "good fellow" but also strong enough to survive.

While canoeing attracted the patronage of such upper class gentleman as the Prince of Wales, it was not as expensive or as readily associated with the elite as the sport of yachting. The large and often luxurious yachts of the late nineteenth century were the possessions of the upper classes. In 1889 one sportsman who enjoyed canoeing, wrote: "someone has well called it [the canoe] the poor's man's yacht, for more amusement can be got from a canoe than the rich man finds in his forty tonner."<sup>12</sup> The canoe was not for the poor man living in a slum who could barely afford food let only a recreational boat, but rather the less than elite -- the middle class. This class could acquire some of the trappings and signs of the upper class by acquiring certain material goods associated with being a gentlemen. In the late Victorian period, new ideas on recreation began to define class by

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<sup>11</sup>. Vaux p. 32.

<sup>12</sup>. Jacques Collection, Toronto Historical Board (74.78.46AJ) Dec. 26, 1889.

certain qualities and conduct rather than strictly by inheritance.<sup>13</sup> Canoeing was one of a number of sports that was associated with being a "gentleman", and therefore enticing for the middle class.

Beyond the ideas of good sporting activity, canoeing also appealed to those who were looking for the healing and healthy presence of nature. As urban populations increased, cities began to be viewed as artificial and unhealthy centres. In reaction, the restorative effects of nature were sought. As a healing agent, nature had many success stories including: "Mr Fred Mason, of the Toronto Canoe Club, who has been for the past four month cruising in Muskoka, returning to the city last week, and has almost entirely recovered his health."<sup>14</sup> The canoeist would be removed from the problems, stresses and unhealthy environment of the city, and placed in the quiet and calm of nature. An early catalogue for the Old Town Canoe Company in Maine expounded on this idea:

An afternoon's paddle can take one far from the toils and turmoil of the town, and affords association with nature than which nothing is more conducive to quiet thoughts, a happy mind, a good appetite, and resultant red corpuscles.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly the attraction of canoeing was closely linked with the appeal of nature. This theme was repeated by the American Canoe Association in 1882: "At slight cost the sport [canoeing] enables busy people to paddle out from the artificial into the natural world which

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<sup>13</sup>. Peter Bailey, Leisure and Class in Victorian England. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). p. 74.

<sup>14</sup>. Jacques Collection, Toronto Historical Board (74.78.46.4C) August 1886.

<sup>15</sup>. Old Town Canoe Company, Canvas Covered Water Craft and Their Equipments. Reprinted by Wooden Canoe Heritage Association, Madison, Wisconsin, 1981.

was before us and is to outlive and outlast our civilization."<sup>16</sup> To be out canoeing was to be in a different world, surrounded by nature. One commentator suggested that, of all water craft, only canoeing could truly put one in harmony with nature:

Boats are for work; canoes are for pleasure. Boats are artificial; canoes are natural. In a boat you are always an oar's length and gunwale's height away from Nature. In a canoe you can steal up to her bower and peep into her very bosom.<sup>17</sup>

Canadians had a particularly strong desire to commune with nature. Historian Carl Berger has suggested that our northern climate and land became symbols of racial strength and hardiness. Due to its outdoor elements, canoeing was associated with these symbols. The canoe had the added romance of images of Voyageurs paddling wilderness rivers and noble savages at peace with nature as they meander down streams. Many of the earliest examples of canoe racing in Canada were races between native groups. While the sport did not "catch on" among European settlers until it was popularized in Britain, the clubs in the late nineteenth century did evoke some native images. In 1889 the Toronto Canoe Club gave their new war canoe the native name *Unk-ta-Hee* meaning "God of the Waters", while the ladies associated with the club were often referred to as "the squaws of our tribe."<sup>18</sup>

Canoeing was an appealing sport for a number of other reasons. Similar to rowing, sailing, walking and bicycling it was open to both men and women. Although most of the sporting publications appealed to men, women did take part in both the recreational and

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<sup>16</sup>. American Canoe Association, "The American Canoeist", November 1882.

<sup>17</sup>. John B. O'Reilly, Ethics of Boxing and Manly Sport, (Boston, 1888), Page 244. in Benidickson, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup>. Jacques Collection, Toronto Historical Board, (74.78.46Q), 1889.

racing aspects of canoeing. Ladies often attended the summer meets of the national canoe organizations supplying flags and trophies for the events, and they also competed in local races. As one reporter wrote in 1890:

The ladies, by the way are not always forgotten. Lady and gentlemen paddling races often find a place on the bill-of-fare of the committee. [Toronto Canoe Club] The frailty of the swift shells is not enough to make the gentler sex forego the accompanying excitement.<sup>19</sup>

Women raced on their own and also paddled in tandem with men. The following photograph of a meet of the Toronto Canoe Club in the 1890's clearly shows women paddling a war canoe. (see illustration #2) As early as 1893 women were admitted as members to the Carleton Canoe Club. While the sport of canoeing remained male dominated, there was a significant amount of female participation.

Canoeing could be a social as well as a competitive sport. In its non-competitive form canoeing was good exercise as well as being a form of relaxation. A leisurely canoe ride offered couples brief but precious moments of privacy. In 1893 Annie Rothwell, a member of the American Canoe Association, published a poem entitled "The Lover's Best Friend is the Little Canoe" where she noted:

You can't propose on the top of a drag,  
or holding the curb of a skittish nag;  
Soft clasps are lost on a fur-clad hand,  
And sweet words are drowned in the clash  
of a band.<sup>20</sup>

But a canoe offered a moment of isolation and romance "With a whispering prow through

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<sup>19</sup>. Jacques Collection, Toronto Historical Board.

<sup>20</sup>. American Canoe Association Yearbook, 1893.

TORONTO CANOE CLUB, 1880'S  
Toronto Historical Board, Toronto Canoe Club Collection.



a star-sown tide",<sup>21</sup> a canoe was the perfect place to propose -- at least according to Ms. Rothwell. The practice of a gentleman taking a lady friend for a paddle was commonly called "girling". It afforded pleasure as a gentle outdoor activity and as a romantic interlude. The ladies could take pleasure from their "looks" which elicited signs of praise and enjoyment from the men. While it was a private moment for the couple to converse, they would have been clearly visible from the shore. Those on the beach would be able to note who was paddling with whom and how they looked together.

In addition, unlike yachts, canoes were functional and portable. They could be used and moved to almost any body of water that would be convenient for the user. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries canoeing thrived on the Thames, on the eastern seaboard of the United States and certainly on the Great Lakes.

## CANOEING IN TORONTO

Canoeing had emerged as a racing sport in Toronto as early as 1872 when the Toronto Rowing Club regatta included canoe races. In 1881 the TCC started sponsoring various canoe races and three years later the club was sufficiently well known to appear in C. Pelham Mulvany's account of Toronto, Past and Present.

The season just passed [1883] has been very successful. A number of sailing and paddling races were held on the Bay, and in August some eight or ten members visited Stony Lake, near Lakefield, Ontario, where the annual meet of the A.C.A.[American Canoe Association] was held. In the races the T.C.C. were very successful, three of the members

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<sup>21</sup>. Ibid.



winning flags and others getting good places.<sup>22</sup>

Other clubs in the Toronto area included the Balmy Beach Canoe Club, the Island Aquatic Club and the Parkdale Canoe Club. These clubs took part in energetic regattas throughout the summer on the bay and engaged in a variety of other social activities throughout the year. In 1908 Outdoor Canada declared that "in Canada canoeing has been for many years the foremost aquatic sport."<sup>23</sup>

While it was not possible to experience wilderness canoeing within Toronto harbour, the easy access of the bay did allow those with less time or money to commune with nature. Certainly the bay was a very busy place in the summer. Every year saw a number of fatal canoeing accidents on the bay, mostly as a result of inexperienced canoeists. In fact the bay became so crowded with small boats that the Toronto Harbour Commission decided in 1918 that all canoes, rowing and sailing vessels must be registered. Licenses cost \$.75 for a canoe and those canoeists who didn't have a licence could be fined \$2.00. In 1918, 3,886 small boats were registered.<sup>24</sup> The Toronto Harbour Commission believed this was a fairly accurate account of the number of canoes on the bay. They estimated only 2% of all boaters refused to obtain licenses.<sup>25</sup> That these small boat operators were very busy with their vessels is evidenced by the Life Saving and Police Patrol who were asked to estimate the number of small boaters they saw throughout the month of July and August in 1923.

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<sup>22</sup>. Mulvany, p. 127.

<sup>23</sup>. Outdoor Canada IV, Sept. 1908. P. 65. in Benidickson, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commission Memo #803-L-1.

<sup>25</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commission internal memo, RG313, No. 290.L2.

From Dowling Avenue to the mouth of the Humber the patrol reported 20,100 small boaters in July and 9,555 small boaters in August. The much lower number for August was explained by the cool weather for that month.<sup>26</sup>

Beyond the official members of various canoeing and aquatic clubs, Toronto Bay supported a large number of canoeists. From the 1880's until the early 1920's canoeing for both recreation and racing was extremely popular on Toronto Harbour. Its popularity declined during the First World War but in the 1920's interest in the sport recovered. Since that time canoeing on Toronto Bay has rapidly declined in popularity.

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<sup>26</sup>. Monthly Report of the Life Saving and Police Patrol, August 7, 1923 and Sept. 6, 1923. Toronto Harbour Commission Archives, No. 1018. R. 1 Vol. 4.

## CHAPTER 3

### WALTER DEAN, BOATBUILDER

In the years from 1888 to 1930, Walter Dean Canoe and Boat Company invented, developed and built a number of distinctive boat designs as well as running a successful boat livery operation in the area of Sunnyside. Dean's company is representative of a time period and recreational pursuit which has largely died out from Toronto Harbour. By looking in greater detail at this specific company and activity questions surrounding the popularity and later decline of waterfront recreation can be addressed. Who took part in recreational activities at Sunnyside and why? What was the appeal of these activities and what are some of the reasons for their decline?

Walter Dean's family background allowed him to perceive, and be one of the first to take advantage of, the business opportunities available in recreation at Sunnyside. The Dean family was always proud of their heritage, claiming they had always worked with water. One of their proudest ancestors was Sir Hugh Myddleton who designed and organized the New River Project whereby a regular supply of water was brought to the city of London from the Chadwell and Amwell rivers in the early seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> Walter was born near Liverpool, England on December 19, 1864 and his family moved to Orillia, Ontario in

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<sup>1</sup>. Roger MacGregor, "Toronto's Walter Dean, Boat Builder in a Different Mould". (unpublished article) p. 3.

1866. Walter's father John Dean was involved with building homes in Orillia and he also rented boats on the Orillia waterfront for thirty years. Dean and his sons would continue the tradition of working with water by developing a very successful boat building and livery operation.

Walter Dean moved from Orillia to Toronto in 1883 and began work at H.F. Hodson's Boatshop on the Esplanade west of the foot of York Street. It was a common practice for young men interested in boatbuilding to apprentice with an established craftsman in order to learn the trade. Dean, himself, would later take on apprentices including Wallace Smith who served a four and a half year apprenticeship to become "a capable canoe and boat builder"<sup>2</sup> in 1919.

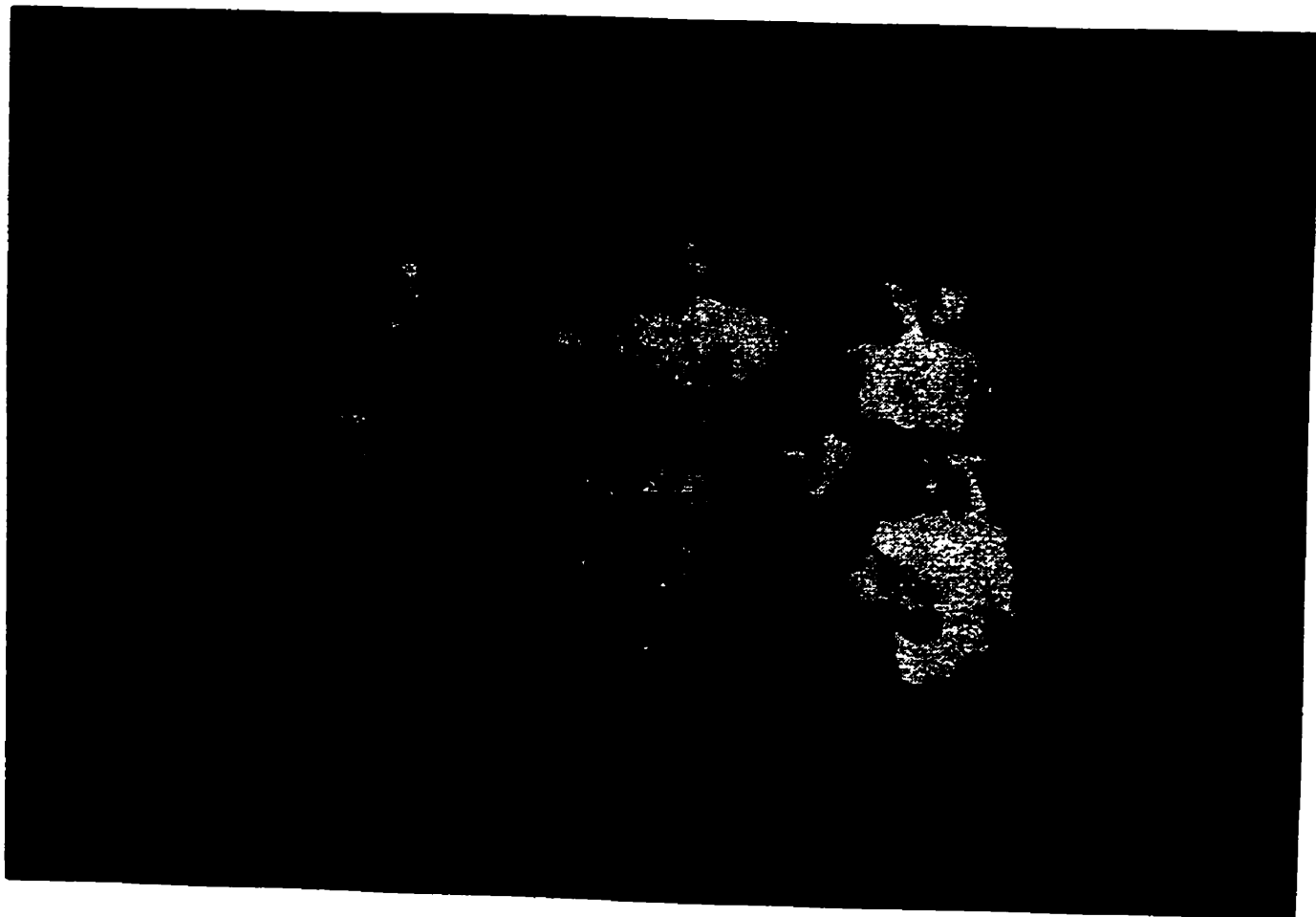
While working with Hodson, Dean married Ellen Olver in 1886, at the age of 22. Dean, very much a family man, is pictured below with Ellen and their six children (see illustration #3). He was a tall, thin man who normally wore a serious expression in photographs. The family is displayed in a very conventional and formal illustration in keeping with Dean's sense of decorum. Ellen had such a high degree of propriety that during her pregnancies she would not allow a male doctor into her room until the babies had been born.

Not uncommon in the late Victorian period, Dean and his wife were both quite religious. They belonged to an evangelical community known as the Brethren, and often let religious speakers stay at their home. The following poem published by Walter on a card reveals his spirituality.

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<sup>2</sup>. Walter Dean, Dean Business File, Toronto Harbour Commission Archives.

WALTER DEAN AND FAMILY  
Roger MacGregor Collection



**My Rock**

I stood upon the shore one day,  
The sand that lined the beach  
Move up and down with every wave,  
Here now, then out of reach.

There is a Rock on which I stand,  
The waters cannot move,  
'Twas placed there by the Saviour's Hand  
And his redeeming love.

And now the waters come and go,  
Their powers I can mock  
Though storms may rage and winds may blow  
Christ Jesus is my Rock.<sup>3</sup>

The family's religious beliefs carried over into their business life. After detailed family discussions Dean decided to stop renting canoes on Sundays even when other liveries were active. No work on Sundays became a standing rule at Dean's Canoe and Boat Works.

According to his son, Dean was "sharp and quick-witted"<sup>4</sup> while his wife was resourceful and energetic, making a strong business team. Dean's advertising and catalogues reflect a personal pride and confidence in his abilities as a craftsman. By 1889 Walter Dean was ready to start his own business: he set up a boatshop behind his home at the base of High Park west of Sunnyside Avenue with the main attraction of the area being a fine sandy beach. When Dean opened his High Park Boat House, he was the first resident and entrepreneur at what would become Sunnyside.<sup>5</sup> This area was ideal for the development

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<sup>3</sup>. Dean, Walter, "My Rock". Roger MacGregor Collection.

<sup>4</sup>. John Dean transcription. Roger MacGregor Collection.

<sup>5</sup>. Wayne Reeves, "Regional Heritage Features on the Metropolitan Toronto Waterfront". (A Report to the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Department, June 1992). p. 54.

of recreational businesses, since it was accessible by both road and the Great Western service which ran to Mimico.

The late nineteenth century was the heyday for small boatbuilders in Toronto. By 1895 the City Directory recorded nineteen different, independent, boatbuilders and a number of these companies also operated livery operations. They were located around Toronto Bay, mostly centred at the foot of York Street or at the east end near the foot of Sherborne Street. Walter Dean's success had encouraged a number of builders to centre around Sunnyside and the Humber River towards the end of the nineteenth century. Some of these Toronto businesses were short-lived, but others like H.F. Hodson, Aykroyd and Sons (later Aykroyd Bros.), Octavius Hicks and Walter Dean would be around for years, establishing reputations as reliable and talented craftsmen. These well-known builders would largely survive as the number of boatbuilders in the City Directory dwindled to seven by 1920.

Boatbuilders across North America quickly discovered that boatbuilding was a risky business, even for the well-established builders. In North America, the best known boatbuilder was J.H. Rushton, whose operation was established in 1873 in Clayton, New York. Rushton built rowboats, skiffs, and other small watercraft, with the canoe being his specialty. He started his business slowly as a one-man operation, and eventually his canoes were shipped around the world and paddled by some of the best canoeists of his day. By sending his canoes to fairs, particularly the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876, Rushton began to build a reputation as a master craftsman. By further responding to the special request of sportsmen, Rushton developed a unique line of canoe models. Through the use of

catalogues, agents in sporting establishments and exhibits at fairs, he was able to promote his product across the United States and Canada. In 1877 business had increased to the point that Rushton needed to build a boat shop and in 1878 his first assistant was hired. Over the next few years, his company continued to build and he was one of the twenty three founding members of the American Canoe Association in 1880. Rushton regularly attended their summer meets promoting his models and skill. By 1881 he built a new larger boat factory which had space for modern steam powered equipment used to dry lumber and aid in the process of boatbuilding, and increased room for storage. Storage space was especially necessary for a boatbuilder dependent on a seasonal product. Rushton would build up a stock pile of 150 canoes in the fall and winter available for purchase during the spring rush. Having sold these canoes he would continue to build throughout the spring and summer, employing, year round, twenty to thirty men depending on the demand. Even with this apparent prosperity Rushton claimed there was little money in canoes. The necessity of floating loans to pay for the winter stockpile meant paying interest which came off the profits. In addition being a luxury item, canoes were susceptible to the rise and fall of economic growth. When the financial panic of 1893 developed in the United States, Rushton was in a vulnerable position having just taken out a loan to produce an exhibit at the Chicago World Fair. Recovery of Rushton's business from this debt and the depression was slow and it was made even more difficult by the beginning of a decline in the sport of canoeing and increased competition from other boatbuilders. By the time of Rushton's death in 1906 the value of the boat shop, once debts were paid, was only \$12,700. After being operated by a succession of different family members the factory finally closed in 1916.



Boatbuilding was indeed a precarious business.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast with Rushton, Dean's business included more than boatbuilding. When Dean was first established at Sunnyside it was just beginning to be a popular location for city dwellers looking for leisure activities. In addition to boat building, Dean rented various canoes and boats while his wife Ellen, supplemented their income by opening an ice cream parlour in the front part of their house at 1751 Queen Street west. With an eye on propriety, Dean built the ice cream counter to a height to ensure that no customer would know when his wife was pregnant. The energetic couple and their growing family began to develop a well-known and diversified business.

By the mid-1890's, several confectioners joined the Dean family at Sunnyside along with a number of aquatic clubs, including the Sunnyside Boating Club, the Parkdale Sailing Club and the Toronto Rowing Club. Two other boatbuilders, Octavius Hicks and Captain Robert Maw, also operated boat liveries from this area. As Sunnyside began to attract more and more people, a boardwalk was constructed from the Grand Trunk crossing to the High Park entrance which was later extended to Windermere Avenue. By 1904, the P.V. Meyer's Restaurant at the foot of Parkside Drive was catering to those with slightly more elaborate tastes than Dean's ice cream parlour.<sup>7</sup>

Still even with, or perhaps as a result of, the increased recreational businesses and activities in the area, Dean's small boatbuilding business expanded. Recording his success

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<sup>6</sup> Manley, Atwood, Rushton and His Times in American Canoeing. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968) p. 140.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

and expansion in his 1913 catalogue Dean wrote:

**My boat-building business in 1889 was quite small compared with the establishment I run nowadays, which is ten times as large. But during those twenty years my boats and canoes have been built with just as much real value in them as time and care, and skill, and the WILL to build on a QUALITY basis could make possible.<sup>8</sup>**

This text was accompanied by four photographs showing the substantial physical expansion of the boathouse. The final illustration from 1909 reveals a small factory large enough for the necessary winter storage of canoes. Dean's success was based on the popularity of canoeing, his advertising, his inventions as well as his fine craftsmanship.

Reputation and advertising skills were essential qualities for a successful boatbuilder. From the earliest days Dean was proud and energetic in promoting his specific vessels and his skill as a craftsman. Unlike the Eaton's Catalogues at the turn of the century, Dean was prepared to make extravagant claims regarding his product. Instead of just describing the commodity he had for sale, Dean proudly remarked on his success and the fine quality of his boats. One of his slogans was: "There must be a good solid reason why nearly every other canoe on the HUMBER, the BAY and the BEACHES is a DEAN."<sup>9</sup> While perhaps not all the boats were built by Dean, he "contributed greatly to the rise of small leisure craft as a characteristic feature of the regional waterfront..."<sup>10</sup> In order to investigate this claim and to better understand Dean's place within waterfront recreation, it is important to look at his product.

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<sup>8</sup>. Walter Dean, "Dean Canoes", 1913, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>. Walter Dean Advertisement, Toronto Harbour Commission Archives.

<sup>10</sup>. Reeves, p. 54.

## DEAN'S CANOES AND BUSINESS

Although Walter Dean Canoe and Boat Company designed and built a wide variety of vessels in an effort to maintain the business, the heart of the operation was always his canoes. From the Klondike Sectional Canoe to the racing canoes to his easy paddling canoes, all his products had in common high quality craftsmanship and a certain amount of originality. Dean was his own strongest salesman as his descriptions and advertisements indicated.

One of Dean's earliest achievements and perhaps his most ingenious invention was the Klondike Sectional Canoe. Patented in 1898, it was designed to take advantage of the rush for Klondike gold. Prospective gold miners were required to bring into the Klondike supplies and equipment to last one full year and in order to move this equipment and themselves, canoes were required for transportation. However the freight charges required to ship the canoe and other goods out to the far north could be prohibitively expensive. These freight charges were based on a combination of weight and size. By substantially reducing the size, the cost would be decreased. For the shipment of canoes a group of men could put one canoe inside another or "nest" the boats to help in reducing the costs, but if an individual wanted to head north on his own, Dean's Klondike Sectional Canoe was the ideal answer.

This very innovative vessel was more expensive than a solid canoe. In 1898 Dean sold a 12 foot canoe with a weight capacity of 800 pounds for \$25.00 if it was a solid canoe and \$33.00 if it was a sectional. Similarly, a 25 foot canoe with a weight capacity of 4,000 pounds sold for \$65.00 for a solid canoe and \$75.00 for the sectional. Clearly the extra

money was worth while considering the potential savings on freight charges. Dean described the vessel in his 1898 catalogue: "We now come to something entirely novel and startling in the idea of cutting a canoe in pieces and making it sufficiently strong and water-tight".<sup>11</sup> To be precise the Klondike Sectional Canoe was shipped in three pieces, each piece nesting inside the other, cutting the size and therefore the cost of shipment by almost two-thirds. Once at the end of the rail line, the sectional canoe could be pulled by toboggan or sled to the river bank, unlike a full canoe which would be difficult to manoeuvre.

The difficulty with this kind of vessel was being able to put the boat together once it reached the Klondike. Once again, in Dean's words, from the 1898 catalogue:

The secret of the strength lies in the two rock elm ribs bent and bolted together, also in the straps which cross the joint and are bolted through the gunwale, by the keel on the outside and iron straps inside. By fitting a strip of candle wick in the joint renders it water-tight.<sup>12</sup> (see illustration #4)

While this may sound a bit complicated, it was also quite ingenious. The model turned out to be extremely successful both in its selling appeal and in its technical design. As well as being awarded a gold medal and diploma of honour from the Academy of Inventors in connection with the Paris Exposition of 1900, Dean's canoe won the support of Mr. William Ogilvie, Dominion Land Surveyor and Explorer in the Klondike. Mr. Ogilvie wrote: "I consider it [Klondike Sectional Canoe] very convenient, sufficiently strong enough to stand the severest tests and of great weight carrying possibilities."<sup>13</sup> According to Edgar

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<sup>11</sup>. Walter Dean, "Dean's Canoes and Boat Company", Catalogue, 1898. p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>. Ogilvie, William, in Dean Canoe and Boat Company Catalogue, 1898. p. 9.

**KLONDIKE SECTIONAL CANOE**  
William Ogilvie, The Klondike Official Guide.  
(Toronto: The Hunter Rose Co., 1898.)

xxxiii

ADVERTISEMENTS.

# CANOEES AND BOATS

FOR

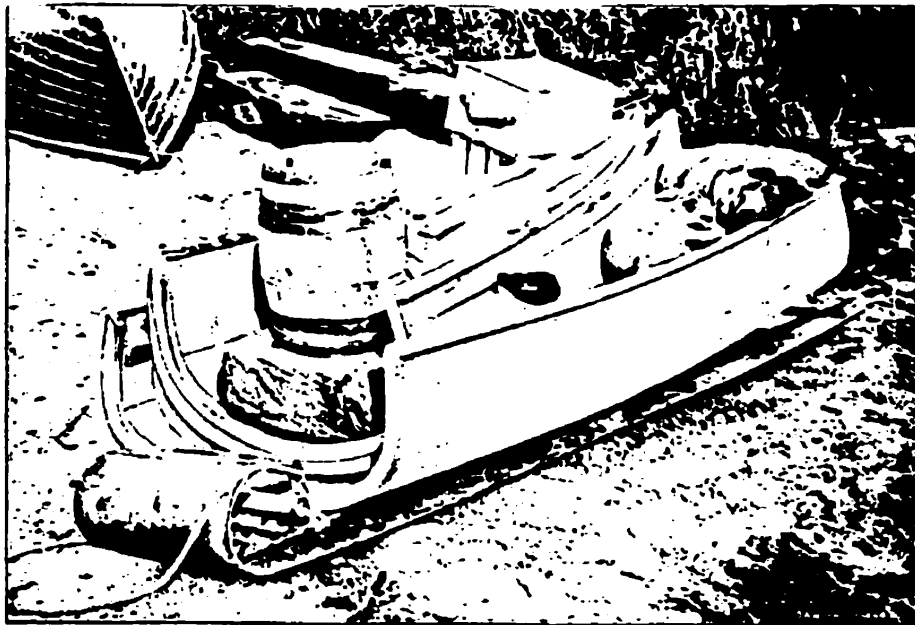
## SURVEYORS AND PROSPECTORS

Capacity 800 to 6,000 pounds.  
12 to 25 feet long.

# Dean's Sectional Canoes

Saves 75 per cent. Freight Charges.  
Occupies One-third the Space.

GUARANTEED PERFECTLY WATER-TIGHT.



These Canoes are STRONGER than the Ordinary.

Read Mr. Ogilvie's Testimony of Canoe shipped to him.

FEBRUARY 1st, 1898.

MR. WALTER DEAN, 1751 Queen St. West.

DEAR SIR,—I have examined your Sectional Canoe, and consider it convenient and serviceable for those travelling to the Klondike.

Yours truly,

W. OGILVIE.

**WALTER DEAN, 1751 Queen St. W., TORONTO, CAN.**

Send for Catalogue.

Telephone 5436.

Dean, Walter's son, this canoe was so successful that in 1898-99, the Dean family had to enlarge the High Park Boat Shop four times and even built an annex. In later years, Edgar remembered having so many orders to fill that the canoes were built on Sunnyside Beach in the winter with a steam boiler and seam pipes going to the boats to bend the planks.<sup>14</sup>

Part of the reason for this success was Dean's timing and advertising. Although word of gold in the Klondike didn't spread until June 1897, Dean was ready to register his Klondike Sectional Canoe only eight months later on February 18, 1898. He quickly promoted his invention by taking out a full page advertisement in The Klondike Official Guide, the bible for all prospective miners. The only other canoe company to advertise in this publication was The Peterborough Canoe Company with their full sized vessels. Dean was able to see a business opportunity and take quick advantage of it. Unfortunately this success seems to have been short-lived. With the end of the gold rush, the Klondike Sectional Canoe lost its appeal, and Dean returned to the steady work of building racing and recreational canoes.

While the Klondike Sectional Canoe was designed for the far north and promoted as a vessel to be used by "Surveyors, Prospectors, and Explorers",<sup>15</sup> it did establish Dean's boatbuilding reputation within Toronto. By winning international acclaim at the Paris Exposition, Dean achieved public notice from the Toronto media and he was remembered in later years for this invention. Even as late as 1948, the Evening Telegram carried a story on "Dean of Canoe Builders Still paddles at Age 84" where they recounted his success for

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<sup>14</sup>. Orillia Today, Feb. 13, 1982.

<sup>15</sup>. Dean catalogue, 1898. p. 8.

the "Invention of Sectional Craft".<sup>16</sup>

Dean also acquired a reputation in the community of canoe clubs for his ability to build speedy racing craft. One of his most popular advertising slogans was: "'Dean's' Canoes Must Paddle Easy for they ALWAYS WIN."<sup>17</sup> According to Walter Dean's son Edgar, Dean was building racing canoes before 1890. In Edgar's words: "For over 10 years our canoes were used in every American and Canadian Canoe Association Championship. It is safe to say our canoes were used by 95% of the winners...In fact for thirty years we made 90% of the racing canoes in the United States and in Canada."<sup>18</sup> While this is more than likely an exaggeration, it does seem clear that Dean was well known. He regularly advertised in the American Canoe Association publications, quoting numerous victories for his vessels including:

**REGINALD BLOOMFIELD**

Champion of America

Winner of 31 First Prizes during the Season of 1904. Breaking the record by 10 seconds. Paddles a "DEAN CANOE" no. 10. Flips his Canoe 2 2-5 seconds. He made fastest time in a Dean Canoe ever made by one man.<sup>19</sup>

Other racers who used Dean's canoes included E. J. Minett, R.R. Weeds, A. Murray Hannah, Louis Drake and the McNichol Brothers.<sup>20</sup> In 1909 the Sylvan Canoe Club wrote

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<sup>16</sup>. Toronto Telegram, Dec. 18, 1948. p. 11.

<sup>17</sup>. Walter Dean advertisement, American Canoe Association Year Book, 1917.

<sup>18</sup>. Transcription of Notes by Mr. Edgar Middleton Dean, Feb. 20, 1974. MacGregor Papers.

<sup>19</sup>. Walter Dean Canoe and Boat Company advertisement in American Canoe Association Year Book, 1905.

<sup>20</sup>. American Canoe Association Yearbook, 1924. p. 90.

Dean to congratulate him on his fine racing canoes. "I certainly wish to extend to you the congratulations of all the member of our Club on the perfect type and first-class model of canoe which you turn out, and we are proud to possess such canoes. They won every event."<sup>21</sup>

Canoe racing had a number of categories including single, double, fours and the large thirty-foot War Canoes. The later was perhaps the most popular form of racing at least from the point of view of the spectators, but Dean's Canoe and Boat Company was not particular about the type of racing boat they built. According to their advertising: "Singles, Double, Four and War Canoes are fastest in existence."<sup>22</sup> Whether Dean's canoes were the fastest or not, canoe racing was growing in popularity in the late nineteenth century and it seems likely that this is where Dean's steady business began. These would have been light, fast and specially designed boats for optimum speed. He would later use a number of the features of his racing canoes to develop a very successful line of recreational vessels. For example, Dean's racing canoes had the distinctive elevated decks that he would later use and make famous for his recreational crafts.

Dean was best known for his Sunnyside Cruiser. Drawing on his experience with the racing boats, this recreational canoe used some of the features and techniques of the racing canoes but was stable and comfortable for the novice paddler. According to Dean this was

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<sup>21</sup>. Dean catalogue, 1913. p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Dean Canoe and Boat Company Advertisement in American Canoe Association Year Book, 1904.



not only "The Canoe that made Toronto Famous"<sup>23</sup> but it was also "The handsomest canoe in the world. This is not a racing canoe, but an easy paddling model."<sup>24</sup> Dean was rightfully proud of this vessel, since it won a number of prizes at the Toronto Industrial Fair and the Canadian National Exhibition. According to Dean's letterhead the cruiser was awarded the great gold medal and diploma at Paris, as well as 12 first prizes, 2 Silver prizes, 5 bronze medals and 4 diplomas at the Dominion Exhibition, Toronto.<sup>25</sup>

The sporty design called for a fairly large canoe with a flat bottom for stable handling.

According to his 1913 catalogue:

Two features that add materially to the speed of the Sunnyside Cruiser are: First - the ends are built low which results in the wind not effecting the speed; Second - the water line is extended the full length of the canoe, which reduces the tendency of the canoe to leave its course, and allows the paddler to put all the more force in his strokes....

The Sunnyside Cruiser Model is a decided departure from the canoe that has been in use for the past thirty years. That it has met with the unqualified approval of the boating public is apparent from the fact that 90 per cent of the orders I receive are for the Sunnyside Cruiser. It is graceful, racy, sporty, and thoroughly up-to-date in appearance; has the "Dean" elevated decks front and aft, and when the water strikes them it is guided off to the sides, and never passes the combing. Weight 55 to 60 lbs. <sup>26</sup> (see illustration #5)

Note the emphasis on the fine "sporty" look of this canoe. Like modern sports cars it was designed for both comfort and for making the "driver" or canoeist look good -- ideal

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<sup>23</sup>. Walter Dean, Manufacturer of Launches, Canoes and Boats, Letterhead, Nov. 24, 1915.

<sup>24</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>. Walter Dean Canoe and Boat Company Catalogue, 1913. p. 4, 5.

SUNNYSIDE CRUISER  
Dean Catalogue, c. 1913, pages 16, 17.

"DEAN" CANOES MUST PADDLE EASILY—FOR THEY ALWAYS WIN  
"DEAN" CANOES MUST PADDLE EASILY—FOR THEY ALWAYS WIN  
THE SUNNYSIDE CANOE 1913 MODEL  
DESIGN REGISTERED 1918



Opinions of All who Use Them:

APPEARANCE.—"The most I see it, the better I like it."

UTILITY.—"I can go much further with less exertion, in a shorter time."

—18—

THE CANOE THAT MADE TORONTO FAMOUS

This is a reproduction of a Michigan canoe full description given on pages 2 and 3.

Mr. Walter Dean, Toronto, Ont.  
Orie St.—I have paddled in many canoes, but never had one that so thoroughly suited me as this one. It will always be a pleasure to speak for canoes made by you. Believe me,  
Sincerely yours,  
Wesleyan College, Toronto.

Rev. J. R. Gregory, B.A., Princeton

for "girling". Although this model was not patented until 1910, it is generally believed to have been in use for some years before that.

The Sunnyside Torpedo was a later model widely used after about 1915. As Dean advertised:

Following the famous "Sunnyside Cruiser", comes our latest word in canoes - the "Torpedo" design. While the lines of this mode are similar to the "Sunnyside Cruiser" it will be noticed that the stems are projected. This idea of the projected stems is that, in rough or choppy water, they will break the waves before striking the main part of the canoe."<sup>27</sup> (see illustration #6)

The projected stems are the main difference between the Cruiser and the Torpedo, making the Torpedo the new model sports canoe.

While Dean was best known for his canoes, he was willing and able to build other wooden items. The Dean catalogues show that they built rowboats, dinghies and sails, paddles, oars, transoms, canoe seats, steam launches, and his later catalogues record a number of motor vessels. In 1898 Dean's Safety Air Tanks were registered as an Industrial design under the Trade Marks and Design Act of Canada. According to their inventor, "DEAN'S SAFETY AIR TANKS are the only tanks which will keep a canoe or boat in upright position when full of water."<sup>28</sup> Evident from the following illustration, (see illustration #7) these buoyancy tanks lay flush against the canoe's interior at about midships providing stability. The ability to right the boat in the event of a mishap would have been a great comfort in the livery operation both for Dean and for his novice customers.

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<sup>27</sup>. Walter Dean Canoe & Boat Company catalogue, 1918. p. 6.

<sup>28</sup>. Walter Dean Canoe and Boat Company catalogue, 1913. p. 14

SUNNYSIDE TORPEDO

Advertisement on back of Walter Dean Letterhead, Nov. 24, 1915, Toronto Harbour Commission Archives.

Note: Stems are projected unlike Sunnyside Cruiser

Dean's Latest Creation



STEM

THE TORPEDO CANOE

Dean's Canoes always lead—the newest designs, the latest ideas are creations of the Dean Factory. Dean sets the pace, others follow. Following the famous "Sunnyside Cruiser" comes our latest word in canoes—the "Torpedo" design. While the lines of this model are similar to the "Sunnyside Cruiser" it will be noticed that the stems are projected. The idea of the projected stems is that, in rough or choppy water, they will break the waves before striking the main part of the canoe. The following letter was received from Mr. J. T. Mitchell, of Swift Current, Sask., who purchased the first canoe made from the mould.

Each article purchased from the DEAN factories is a guarantee in itself. Expert workmen and best materials assure satisfaction.

Walter Dean, Esq., Toronto, Ont.  
Dear Sir,

May 25th, 1915.

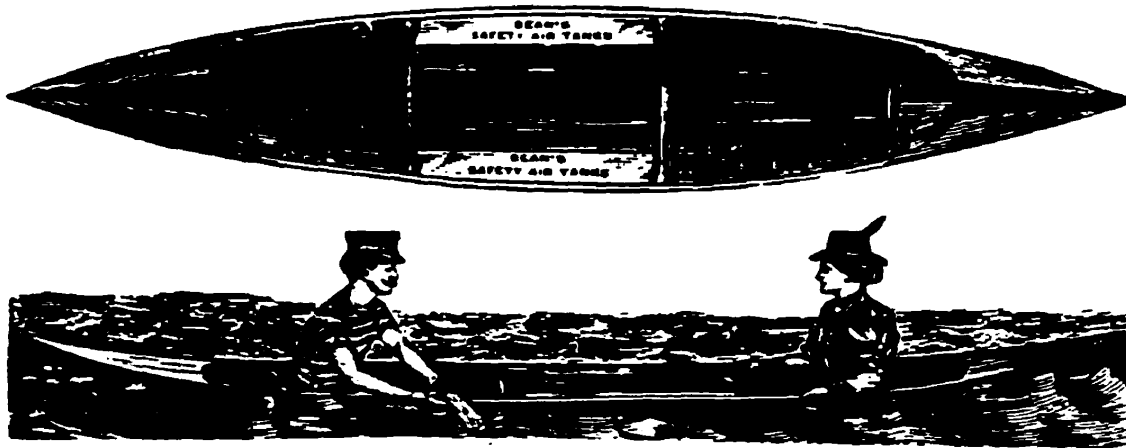
Canoe as per our recent order has been received in good shape. Let me say that this model is in my opinion the acme of canoe construction. In Eastern waters I had learned to thoroughly appreciate your superior craft but this model surpasses anything which I have heretofore seen. While built for comfort she makes remarkable speed, answers rapidly and is easy to handle in rough and windy weather, an ideal feature in this country. Her lines are superb and I agree with my friends that she is the prettiest as well as the most carefully built boat we have ever seen.

Congratulating both of us, I am,  
Very truly yours,

J. T. MITCHELL.

ALL our boats and canoes are built on the DEAN metallic joint construction, a sample of which will be sent free on application.

**DEAN'S SAFETY AIR TANKS**  
Dean Catalogue, c. 1913, page 14.



This cut shows position of tanks in canoe. "DEAN'S SAFETY AIR TANKS" are the only air tanks which will keep a canoe or boat upright position when full of water. When the water is not too rough it can be baled out. These tanks can be removed, when required in two minutes.

Galvanized Iron.....\$5.00

Design of "Dean's Safety Air Tanks" Registered. See Testimonials on pages 25

Certainly the well-dressed couple depicted in the following wood cut (see illustration #7) seem to have great confidence in the air tanks.

Whatever kind of vessel Dean was building, craftsmanship was important. The construction was of such a high quality that Dean guaranteed his canoes for half a lifetime. He became quite well-known for a particular kind of construction which he personally registered called Metallic Joint Construction. By Dean's description:

The planking of these canoes is 3-16 of an inch thick, securely fastened on 5-8 half round ribs 1 1/8 inches apart. A metallic strip is run from end to end, covering the joints on the inside, making them smooth and easily cleaned.<sup>29</sup>

A major selling point for this kind of construction was that as well as being durable it was easy to keep clean. In his 1918 catalogue Dean wrote:

The "Dean" Close-Rib Metallic Joint Construction, our standard system of manufacture. Lighter and stronger than any other jointing; absolutely leakless and a distinct advance in appearance. Fig. 1 shows cross-section of the metal joint with the two edges turned down. These edges are forced into the plank on the inside of canoe, the exposed part lying flush with planking. The metal used being of brass, there is no danger of corrosion, in fresh or salt water. The brass joint runs full length of the planking in one piece, and is held securely by the ribs, which are only 2 1/2 inches apart. There are no cross battens to obstruct the cleaning out of the canoe or boat.<sup>30</sup> (see illustration #8)

As a clear sign of Dean's success with this building method, many other boat builders would copy Dean's techniques.

Although Walter Dean can be considered an innovative master craftsman, he still had

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<sup>29</sup>. Dean catalogue, 1898.

<sup>30</sup>. Dean catalogue, 1918.

**METALLIC JOINT CONSTRUCTION**  
 Dean Catalogue, c. 1913, pages 18, 32.

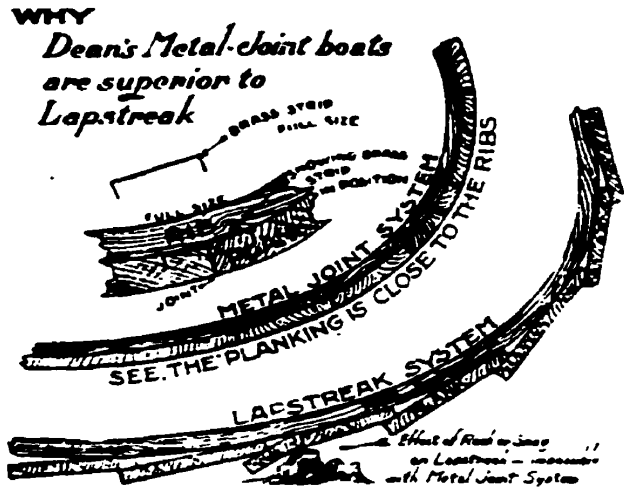
**DEAN'S CLOSE-RIBBED AND METAL JOINT CONSTRUCTION**

A thin strip of hard brass, full length of the canoe or boat, shaped like figure 1 in the cut, the two-turned pressure into the wood at each side of the joint. This is held into place by the ribs, which are only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches apart. There are no cross bottoms to obstruct the cleaning as there are in other canoes and lapstreak boats.

In an ordinary lapstreak boat there are about 240 holes under the ribs, which makes a lot of trouble to clean, and when the water is emptied out the dirt catches under the ribs or against the cross bottoms. No trouble like this with *Dean's Metal Joint System*.

Then they have twice to three times the number of ribs than other makes, which strengthens them beyond comparison.

Carefully Examine the Cut.



-32-

DEAN'S CANOES MUST PADDLE EASILY—FOR THEY ALWAYS WIN

**CLOSE-RIBBED BRASS JOINT BOATS**

Equipped with  $2\frac{1}{2}$  H.P. Motor



Here is the lightest, strongest and best boat ever put on the market. Built of clear cedar or mahogany; varnished, copper fastened, with oak, walnut or mahogany trimmings.

Further information and price on application.

-16-

to contend with the seasonal nature of boatbuilding. To alleviate some of the worst effects of only selling canoes in the spring and summer, Dean demanded at least 25% of the cost of a vessel at the time of the order. The additional money had to be received before the boat would be shipped and all shipping and duty costs were extra. The prices stated in his catalogues were firm with "no discounts being allowed whatever."<sup>31</sup> While he built up a stock pile for the spring, income in the winter must have continued to be a problem and Walter turned to winter sporting goods. He applied for a patent for a special hickory hockey stick in 1901, and built both skis and toboggans throughout much of the company's existence. According to family tradition, he also rented toboggans for High Park from his Sunnyside shop -- but not on Sundays.

In his catalogues, Dean stressed his willingness and ability to meet the needs of his customers. One particularly unusual winter invention, which probably resulted from a special order, was an ice launch. This propeller-driven toboggan, which may have been operated with a small gas engine, was designed and built around 1915 and appropriately called the "AERODEAN". While it was a unique vessel on Toronto Bay, various craftsmen had been building motorized sleds from 1896, and the first commercially successful snowmobiles were developed in 1927 by Eliason in Wisconsin. Dean seems to have experimented with different kinds of propeller driven sleds without making them one of his regular models.

## DEAN'S CUSTOMERS

By 1913 Dean Canoe and Boat Company was a well-established boat building firm.

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<sup>31</sup>. Dean catalogue, 1918. p. 40.



Walter was confident enough with his reputation for excellent craftsmanship to advertise his high prices. In the opening pages of the 1913 catalogue Dean wrote:

I haven't tried ever, to see how cheap I could build a boat or a canoe - especially a canoe - because I believe that it is not possible to put too much quality into a pleasure craft, or indeed into any craft that floats. Of course I have heard, time and again, that Dean charges more for his boats. I do, perhaps charge more than for some of the canoes I see on Canadian waters. But I think you will find that the difference in dollars between a Dean-built boat or canoe, and the plenty-good-enough kind is a difference your good sense tells you it is wise to pay.<sup>32</sup>

Dean was prepared to admit that his boats were more costly and were worth the additional money. While Dean did register a number of his designs, including the Sunnyside Cruiser, he must have been aware that other boatbuilders were copying his designs to some extent. He was prepared to tell his potential customers that a Dean original may cost more but due to its high quality it was worth the money.

Like other material goods, the quality of a canoe could be a status symbol in the early twentieth century. His appeal to the higher classes worked in at least one instance and Dean himself prints a testimonial from Mrs. T. Eaton, on the fine craftsmanship of his canoes.

Toronto, February 5th , '09  
Walter Dean, Toronto,

Dear Sir:

"The beautiful mahogany metal-joint canoe that I purchased from you last summer has given us such satisfaction that it has

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<sup>32</sup>. Dean catalogue, 1913. p. 3.

made our family quite enthusiastic canoeists. We are delighted with it,"

Yours truly,  
M. W. EATON  
(Mrs. T. Eaton)<sup>33</sup>

This is certainly an excellent report from Mrs. Eaton, a recognized member of Toronto's elite by the early twentieth century. By publishing this letter Dean no doubt hoped to attract more clients of this calibre and impress lesser folk.

Mrs. Eaton had purchased the mahogany model which was one of the most expensive canoes that Dean advertised. In 1913 Dean's paddling canoes would have cost between \$35.00 and \$70.00 depending on the size and the wood.<sup>34</sup> The cheapest canoes were built out of basswood which would rot in ten years. Dean rarely even advertised these. Instead he preferred to work with Ontario white cedar which was a much better and therefore a more costly wood, though not as expensive as mahogany.

Dean's least expensive canoe at \$35.00 was more costly than many of his competitors. The Rice Lake Canoe Company advertised basswood canoes starting at \$25.00, as did The William English Canoe Company. Peterborough Canoes with their slogan "The Best and the Cheapest" started at \$20.00.<sup>35</sup> Still, Dean's models in the lower price ranges from \$35.00 would have allowed the ordinary people to aspire to the social status of the Eatons by at least owning a Dean canoe. While the Eatons probably used their canoe up north, less wealthy Torontonians may have taken the opportunity to use a canoe on Toronto Bay which

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<sup>33</sup>. Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>34</sup>. Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>35</sup>. American Canoe Association Yearbooks, 1900, 1901.

was much closer and more accessible. These would have been the boats that dotted Toronto Harbour on a summer day.

While actually purchasing a boat was beyond the means of the working class, they could rent a Cruiser from Dean by the hour or even half hour, a much more affordable proposition. Boat liveryes were popular on Toronto Bay and were operated by a number of independent businessmen including George Ackroyd who later remembered:

"Boat renting" says George Ackroyd "was a favourite way of enjoyment for many years in the days gone by, and 20 cents per hour or 10 cents per half hour was the regular rate. A good number used the half hour."<sup>36</sup>

Boat renting was popular enough for livery operations to be a lively business in the summer months, with most offering over 25 vessels for rent. But similar to boatbuilding, livery operations were not sure money-makers. Along with the cost of stockpiling the necessary vessels, livery operators risked their boats to paddlers who could be complete novices. This later problem was recognized by the Toronto Harbour Commission when they instituted a licensing requirement for all canoes in 1918.

It is maintained that this (licences) is necessary in order to protect the careless boatowner from himself, and to give an additional safeguard for men who frequently lose boats that are rented by unscrupulous or incompetent persons. No opposition to the license scheme is expected from any of the owners of boat liveryes, according to Mr. Cousins, for the reason that it is a protection against loss.<sup>37</sup>

Contrary to the opinions of Mr. Cousins, the Toronto Harbour Commission's Chief

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<sup>36</sup>. C. H. J. Snider, "Schooner Days" in The Evening Telegram, DCVIII. Toronto Historical Board, Snider Collection.

<sup>37</sup>. Globe, April 23, 1918.

Engineer, the livery owners objected loudly to the cost of the licences. Ed Durnan who rented boats from Hanlan's Point on Toronto Island claimed the tax of 75 cents on each of his 125 canoes, rowboats and power launches would actually force him out of business. Another noisy opponent was Octavius Hicks whose rental operation was on the Humber River. Hicks refused to buy licenses and the Commission responded by stopping his patrons while paddling and serving notices on them regarding the licence requirements. In reaction Hicks took the Toronto Harbour Commission to court claiming they had no jurisdiction over the Humber River. Eventually the livery operators and the Commission came to an agreement; people who rented more than twenty five boats paid licence fees of .50 cents per boat instead of the .75 cents.<sup>38</sup> Any livery owner who did not comply was threatened with fines of ten to fifty dollars or thirty days in prison. The intensity of the argument from the livery operators suggests that it was a business with a fairly low profit margin where any new expenditure could tip the balance sheets into the "red".

Dean's more specialized vessels would have attracted a different group of customers. The racing canoes, for example were specially designed for speed and they were built to be paddled from a kneeling position to ensure the greatest power in each stroke. In general, they were narrow, streamlined and much less stable than the broad based Sunnyside Cruiser. (see illustration #9) They were not easily transferable for "girling".

In the late nineteenth century, it was essential for those who wanted to race to own a canoe. According to the American Canoe Association: "Members must paddle or sail

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<sup>38</sup>. Letter from Toronto Harbour Commission to Edward Durnan, May 21, 1918. Toronto Harbour Commission Archives.

RACING CANOES

Dean advertisement in American Canoe Association Yearbook, 1902.

**DO THEY LIKE "DEAN" CANOES? THEY SAY SO.**



E. J. Minett, Toronto Rowing Club, Single and Double Blade Champion at Pan-American. Breaking all previous records at A. C. A. Meet. 1900. He paddles a "Dean" Canoe, No. 30.  
 WALTER DEAN, Toronto. Halifax, N. S., Jan. 8, 1902.  
 Dear Sir.—I am leaving for South Africa next week. I have used your racing canoe, model No. 30, in all my races in the last two years, and consider it far superior to any other racing model made, having won 11 firsts and two second prizes, including five American championships.  
 Yours truly,  
 ERNEST J. MINETT, Single Champion America.



McNichol Bros., Toronto Canoe Club, Champion Tandem at the Pan-American. They paddle a "Dean" Canoe, No. 30.  
 WALTER DEAN, Toronto. Toronto, Jan. 2, 1902.  
 Dear Sir.—In reply to your enquiry of 15th, I beg to say that during the last two years we have used your canoe, we are well pleased with it, having won 30 prizes including 6 American championships.  
 Yours truly,  
 McNICHOL BROTHERS, Tandem Champions America.



Toronto Canoe Club Four Paddled to victory in a No. 30 "Dean" Canoe at Pan-American.  
 Write for Catalogue. **WALTER DEAN, Toronto, Canada.**

their own canoes, and must not exchange canoes for racing purposes."<sup>39</sup> A Dean single canoe cost between \$40.00 and \$55.00 in 1913.<sup>40</sup> These kinds of canoes purchased by those with the money, the time and the inclination to take up racing required young gentlemen who belonged to one of the canoe clubs which grew rapidly in Toronto in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The most expensive racing boats were the huge war canoes. They were designed to be paddled by 15 canoeists going full out. In 1913 Dean charged \$150.00 for a cedar war canoe and \$200.00 for a Spanish Cedar or Mahogany war canoe.<sup>41</sup> This was a substantial price and normally these boats were purchased by clubs. Once a club owned a war canoe, any one of its members could be chosen to paddle in the team. In some ways the popularity of war canoe races opened up the sport of canoeing in a democratic way since the individual paddlers didn't need to actually own a canoe. However, these paddlers did need to belong to one of the canoe clubs and had to be eligible to race in official events sanctioned by the Canadian Canoe Association.

Like most sports in this time period there were discussions and rulings regarding who was eligible to race in official events. Gentleman sportsman who competed for social and status reasons following rules of proper sportsmanship should not have to compete with professional sportsmen. In the world of aquatic racing it was particularly unfair for a gentleman banker who paddled on weekends to be asked to compete against a fisherman

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<sup>39</sup>. Vaux. p. 150.

<sup>40</sup>. Dean catalogue, 1913. p. 6.

<sup>41</sup>. Ibid. p. 9.

who spent all his summer days in his boat. This prejudice against professional boating man ensured that canoeing would remain a gentleman sport.

Edgar Dean was quite an accomplished canoeist who was very interested in racing, but unable to race due to the Canadian Canoe Association's rule that no son of a boatbuilder could compete in their races. Once this rule was changed in 1914, Edgar Dean competed successfully with the Toronto Canoe Club, being a member of the 1923 war canoe crew that came second at the Canadian Canoe Association Regatta<sup>42</sup>. The Telegram reported that if Edgar "really got down to serious training" he would be a contender for the 1924 Olympic team.<sup>43</sup> At this point, canoeing was only a demonstration sport and would not be recognized as an official olympic sport until 1936. According to Edgar, he was on nine Canadian Championship paddling teams and helped to select Canada's first Olympic canoe team.<sup>44</sup>

Next to war canoes, the most expensive boats produced by Dean were the special orders, such as the Aerodean built in 1915. Boats with distinct and special requirements were more costly and probably were purchased by those in the upper or upper middle classes. As the accompanying photo of Dean's Aerodean indicates these clients had the money to dress in the furs and finery of their day. (see illustration #10)

It should be noted that Dean's market extended far beyond the boundaries of Toronto. He was prepared to ship his products all over Canada and the United States and

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<sup>42</sup>. Toronto Star, July 14, 1923.

<sup>43</sup>. Toronto Telegram, Jan. 28, 1924.

<sup>44</sup>. Orillia Today, Feb. 13, 1982.

AERODEAN, JAN. 1915

Toronto Harbour Commission Archives, PC15/3/459

Note: Furs and finery of passengers on this special order Dean Motorized Sled.





his catalogues discuss both freight charges and American duty. In particular, Dean's racing canoes were purchased by clubs all over the States, and his toboggans and canoes were purchased by miners in Northern Ontario and the Yukon.

## DEAN AND THE TORONTO HARBOUR COMMISSION

Walter Dean ran a successful boating business until the First World War when he ran into problems with a decrease in the number of customers and the construction work of the Toronto Harbour Commission. By the time the war broke out, the Toronto Harbour Commission had been seriously considering developing Sunnyside for some years. In 1912 they designed an extensive and comprehensive plan to develop the harbour providing for industrial development at Ashbridges Bay at the eastern end of the harbour, commercial development in the central portion of the waterfront and recreational development to the west. The plan called for

Park and Boulevard improvements along the twelve miles of outer waterfront from Woodbine Avenue to the Humber River, with a protected waterway from the Humber on the west to Victoria Park on the east. A preliminary estimate places the total cost of the entire project at \$19,142,088.00, to be borne by the Dominion Government, the City of Toronto and the Commissioners in proportions varying according to the object of the different works.<sup>45</sup>

In the western area the plans called for parkland with the only provision of a

commercial nature being in the district from Sunnyside Crossing to the Humber, where a tier of lots is being reserved as a location for refreshment privileges and other amusement features, which are incidental to the development

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<sup>45</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commissioners, "Toronto Waterfront Development 1912-1920".

of a summer resort watering place.<sup>46</sup>

In order to facilitate these waterfront improvements, the Toronto Harbour Commission needed to acquire all the land along Sunnyside Beach. (see illustration 11) As early as 1911 they had removed all the boathouses between Bathurst Street and the Humber, forcing Walter Dean Canoe and Boat Company to move. Dean began to lease property from the Toronto Canoe Club at the foot of York Street to build his canoes but he requested a livery site at Sunnyside.

The loss of the property at 1751 Queen Street West meant that the Dean family would need to move to a new home. Dean and his wife purchased a large, three storey brick house at 26 Calendar Street which still stands today. (see illustration 12) Located to the north west of Sunnyside in Parkdale, the property was assessed in 1912 at \$2,275 for the land and \$4,500 for the house for a total of \$6,775.<sup>47</sup> Considering the price, his lot (which was larger than others of the street) and the fact that Parkdale was a fairly prestigious area of town in the pre-World War I period indicates that Dean had been doing very well for himself. With the changes at Sunnyside, however, he began to run into some financial difficulties.

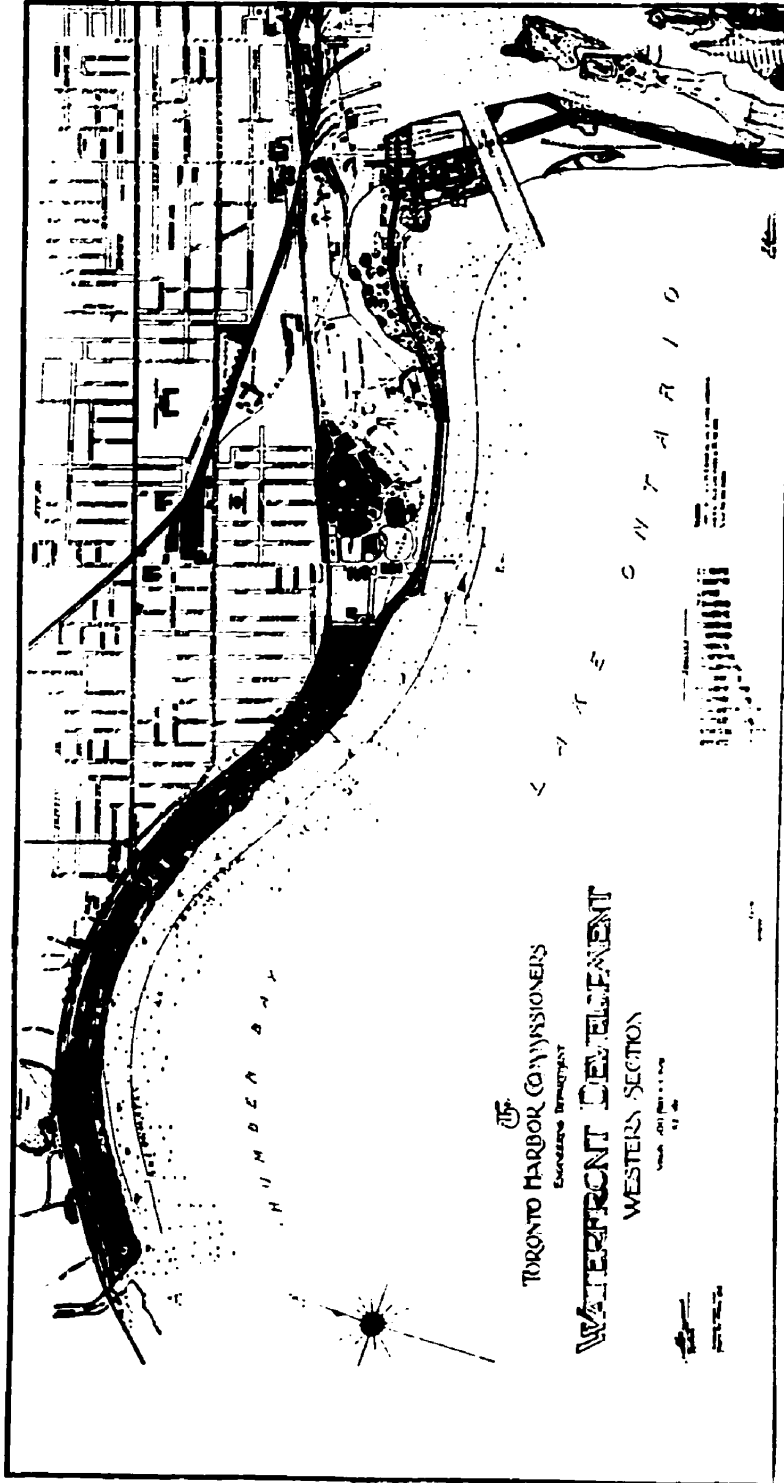
Early in 1912 the Harbour Commission agreed to lease a temporary boat livery site to Dean at the foot of Indian Road, just to the east of his earlier location. Since he was going to have a monopoly of the livery operation at Sunnyside the Toronto Harbour

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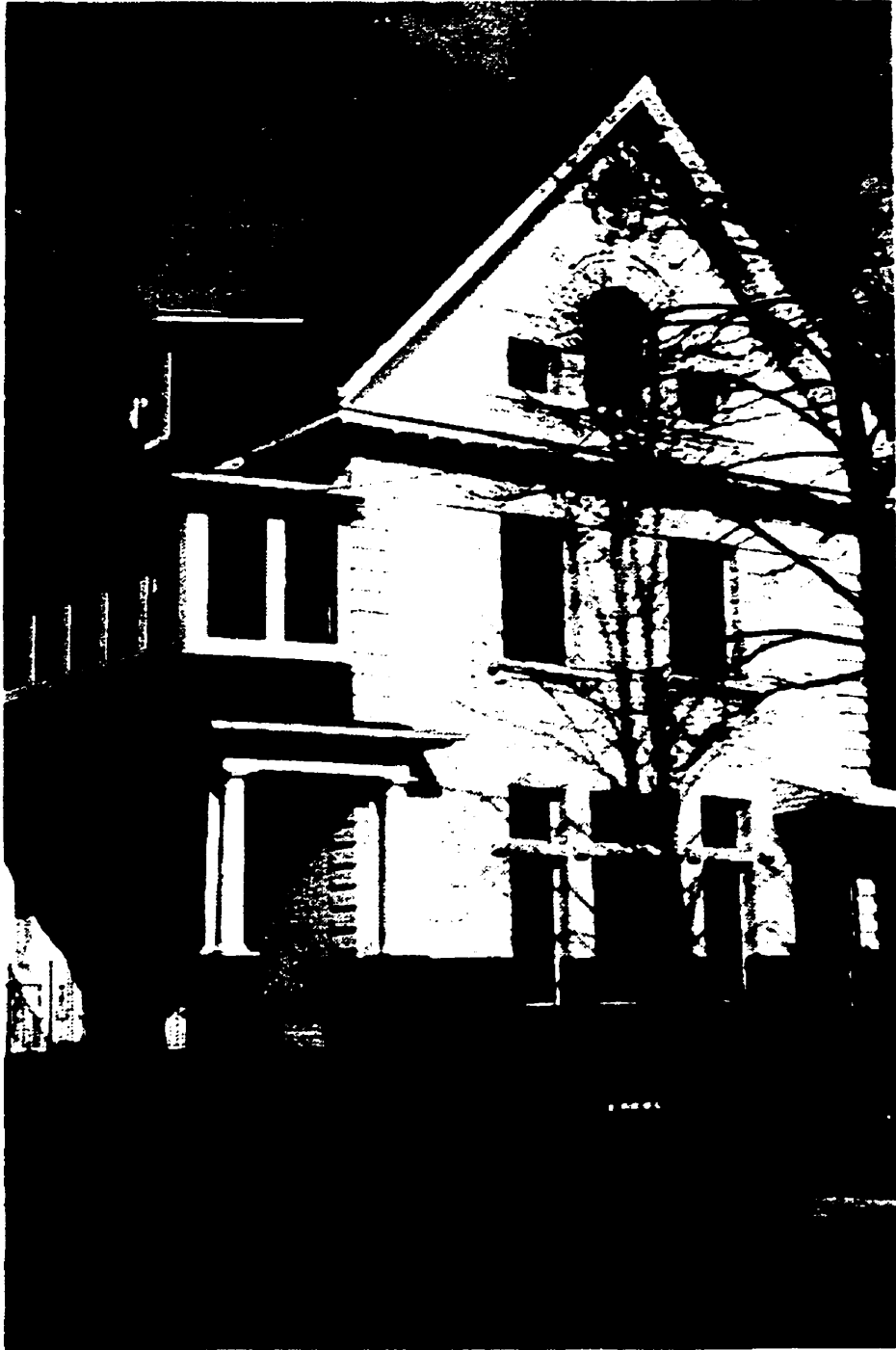
<sup>46</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>. City of Toronto Assessment Rolls, 1913.

TORONTO HARBOUR COMMISSION 1912 PLAN - WESTERN SECTION  
Toronto Harbour Commission Archives



DEAN FAMILY HOME AFTER 1912, 26 CALENDAR STREET  
author's photograph, 1994



Commission demanded \$200.00 a year for the 2 years of the lease.<sup>48</sup> Agreeing to this, Dean installed a temporary boathouse to carry on his rental operation.

Walter Dean seems to have had a successful year in 1912 at this site. Early in 1913 he requested permission to add to his building, proposing the addition of an office to the north of his temporary building as well as an additional 12 or 14 feet to the south side. He requested the southern addition "as I am already full and the Parkdale Canoe Club being burnt there will surely be some who will want space. It may be some time before they will rebuild."<sup>49</sup> Dean as always had an eye for a business opportunity. The Toronto Harbour Commission agreed to the expansion but at the increased rent of \$300.00 per year. They too were aware of every money-making chance.

While the Indian Road Boathouse was successful in the first two years, problems soon became apparent. The Toronto Harbour Commission began their work on the grade separation and reclamation scheme for the western end of the bay. With this kind of work in progress, the area soon become quite unpleasant for recreational boating. Dean began to complain of these difficulties to the Harbour Commissioners, and never prompt with payments, he refused to pay any rent in 1915. In 1914, the "business was spoiled, owing to the exceedingly cold and rainy weather, and what little warm weather we had, only intensified the stench emanating from the sewage in the pond in the neighbourhood."<sup>50</sup> If this was not bad enough, 1915 was worse.

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<sup>48</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commissioners to Walter Dean, April 3, 1912.

<sup>49</sup>. Walter Dean to the Toronto Harbour Commission, Feb. 8, 1913.

<sup>50</sup>. Walter Dean to the Toronto Harbour Commission, Nov. 24, 1915.

This season the boating was ruined owing to the work going on between Sunnyside and the Humber, not only is this true of the livery, but also to the private canoes and boats, many owners of which have taken them to the Humber rather than to take the chance going between the piling or out into the lake to get around, which in either case made it very inconvenient, if not dangerous.<sup>51</sup>

Dean reported that the 1915 livery operation had only made \$1350.00 while maintenance and running costs had amounted to \$1995.00.<sup>52</sup> With a deficit of \$645.00 largely due to the work of the Harbour Commission, he felt it would be very unfair to pay any rent in 1915.

At least one reporter agreed that boating was extremely unpleasant at Sunnyside due to both the pilings and a sewer on Keele Street that terminated at the lake. He wrote in the Telegram in 1915:

The sewer outlet is side by side with Dean's boathouse and besides affecting his business is a nuisance to those who have to pass the spot about to go boating and thus pleasure on one hand and business on the other is lost.<sup>53</sup>

Apparently bathing in the polluted water was even worse than boating. The Harbour Commission, however, was not overly sympathetic and Dean was forced to pay for 1915. By 1916 the landfilling operations of the Harbour Commission forced Dean to move his entire operation to the foot of York Street.

Adding to Dean's difficulties was the effect of the First World War. Many young men in Toronto had signed up to fight in Europe. The whole focus of the city was turned away from pleasurable activities and clubs and instead concentrated on the events in Europe.

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<sup>51</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>. Walter Dean to the Toronto Harbour Commission, Nov. 30, 1915.

<sup>53</sup>. Toronto Telegram, August 16, 1915.

Most aquatic clubs carried on with restricted programmes and reduced members and boating on the bay in general declined. According to family tradition Dean himself turned away from building canoes and built wooden struts for the aircraft being used in the war.

The Toronto Harbour Commission kept on with the work of developing a recreational area at Sunnyside, as Dean continued his business from the foot of York Street. In about 1918 Walter Dean senior retired from the business and left it in the hands of his two eldest sons, Edgar and Gilbert. These two men carried on the business in both building boats and running a livery operation.

While Edgar and Gilbert were negotiating with the Toronto Harbour Commission for a prime location within the proposed Sunnyside Park, tragedy struck at their York Street Boathouse. At about 9:00 on the evening of February 10, 1920 fire erupted at Dean's shop. It was thought to be the result of a defective wire in the machine shop, but, whatever the cause, fire was one of the greatest enemies for any wooden boatbuilder. As Walter Dean told a reporter for the Globe:

We will lose the accumulation of years of experience in boat-building in our patterns, which were all burned in the machine shop,...We will also lose the moulds with which we were constructing twenty dinghies for the Buffalo Canoe Club.<sup>54</sup>

But the greatest loss according to Dean was the lumber worth about \$6,000. "This is the biggest loss because money cannot replace it." stated Mr. Dean.<sup>55</sup> Good, old and seasoned lumber for boatbuilding was already becoming difficult to find by 1920. Although there was

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<sup>54</sup>. Toronto Globe, Feb.10, 1920.

<sup>55</sup>. Ibid.

insurance, the loss of these stocks as well as the patterns was a severe blow to the company.

(see illustration #13)

## **PALAIS ROYALE**

By 1920 Sunnyside Beach was once again drawing crowds of people from Toronto. The sewer problems had been cleaned up and a boardwalk and large Sunnyside Pavilion restaurant were in place. A series of amusement rides and concessions as well as a huge Bathing Pavilion were actively being planned. But according to this 1922 account, something was missing.

Among the new attractions to be found at Sunnyside Beach next season will be boating and canoeing. Those who spent the warm days and evenings on the Beach and Board Walk last summer, longing to get on the water as well as in it, will this year be able to enjoy to the fullest extent all the pleasures to be derived from the protected waterway.<sup>56</sup>

By 1921 Dean Canoe and Boat Company had negotiate a permanent place at the new Sunnyside Amusement Park. The Dean brothers saw this recreational oasis as the perfect place for a grand and large scale boat livery operation. They arranged for a 21 year lease from January 1, 1922 for a boat livery and restaurant at the eastern end of Sunnyside beach.

Dean's Sunnyside Pleasure Boats would be responsible for building the structure based on a 50% mortgage owned by the Toronto Harbour Commission.

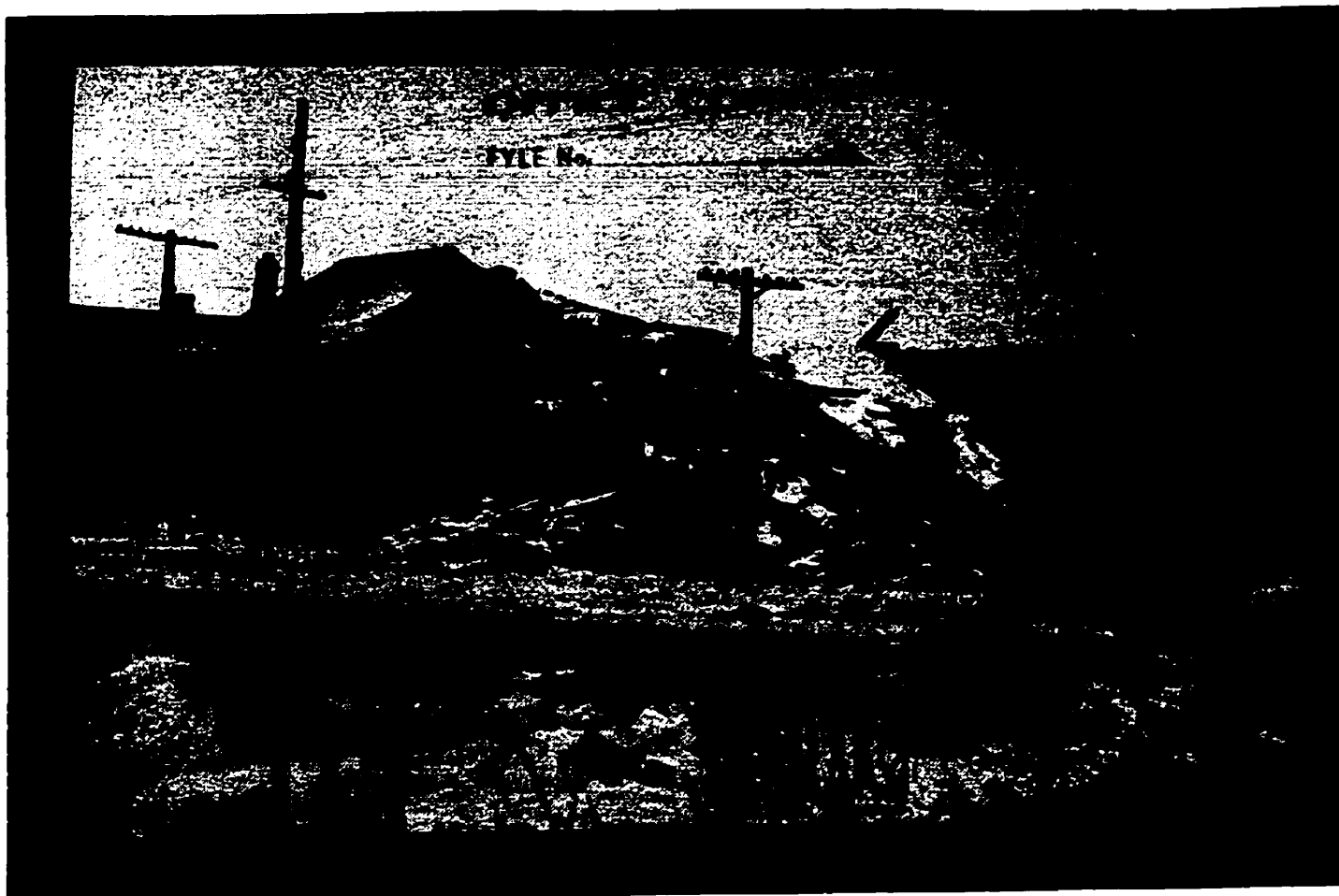
The Dean brothers dreamed of a very grandiose building which in later years would

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<sup>56</sup>. Hubert Groves, ed., Toronto Year Book, 1922. (Toronto: Municipal Intelligence Bureau, 1922) p. 111.



DEAN'S BOATSHOP AFTER THE FIRE, FEB. 10, 1920.  
Toronto Harbour Commission Archives (PC/1/1/4760)



become known as the Palais Royale. Backing directly on the lake, it was a large white palatial structure designed to fit with the other buildings at Sunnyside Amusement Park.

According to a 1922 account:

The building will be two storeys, of a style similar to the buildings already erected in the district. The ground floor will be devoted entirely to the boating business, while the upper storey will contain a large dance hall, restaurant and refreshment room.<sup>57</sup> (see illustration #14)

Opened in 1922 the building cost \$60,000 and covered 2,246 metres squared or 24,177 square feet.<sup>58</sup> Dean proposed that this grand structure should be stocked with 300 canoes at a value of \$30,000.<sup>59</sup> Made of mahogany, these high class vessels would have been either the Sunnyside Cruiser or the Sunnyside Torpedo. However probably somewhat less than this number ended up being used, since Dean only order 75 licence plates for his canoes in 1923.<sup>60</sup> Both the canoes and the building were designed to be top of the line. When Sunnyside Amusement Park officially opened on June 28, 1922, with a midway, a boardwalk, and a bathing Pavilion, Dean's Sunnyside Pleasure Boats was also ready for business.

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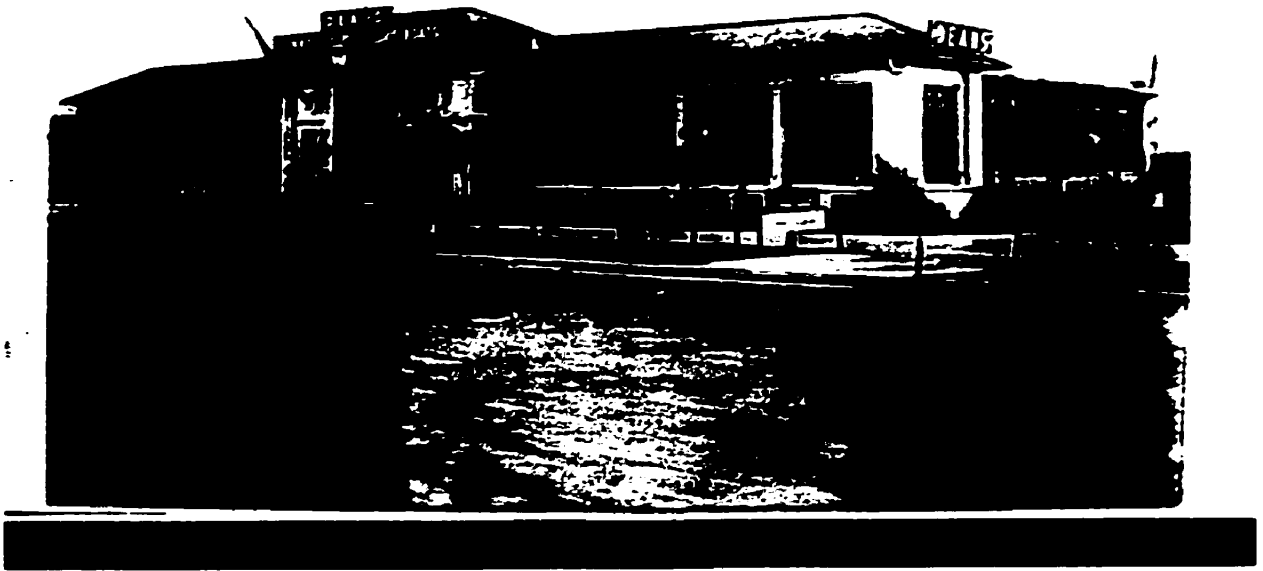
<sup>57</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commission Minutes, Dec. 20, 1921.

<sup>59</sup>. Dean Canoe and Boat Company to Toronto Harbour Commission, August 23, 1921.

<sup>60</sup>. Walter Dean Purchase Order. Toronto Harbour Commission Archives. (RG3/3 #803-L-1)

DEAN'S SUNNYSIDE PLEASURE BOATS, JULY 25, 1922  
Toronto Harbour Commission Archives PC1/1/8514



## CHAPTER 4

### SUNNYSIDE AMUSEMENT PARK

Canoeing was only one of the many recreational activities available at Sunnyside Amusement Park. In order to put Dean's business into the context of its surroundings it is important to look at Sunnyside as a whole entertainment area. With its noisy midway, fashionable boardwalk, and wide sandy beach, the park provided countless ways to unwind after a busy work week. Whether seeking the solace of nature or the excitement of large crowds and busy activities, Sunnyside attracted thousands of pleasure-seekers.

Open from Victoria Day to Labour Day, Sunnyside stretched from Dowlands Avenue to Roncesvalles on the west end of the harbour. Owned and operated by the Toronto Harbour Commission, the park was 130 acres in size, stretching for two miles along the lake. Open during the day and well into the evening, various concessions were rented to independent businessmen to give the area a wide variety of attractions. It was described in the Toronto Year Book for 1925:

Sunnyside Beach was formally opened on June 28th, 1922. It now contains a bathing pavilion with accommodation for 7,700 bathers at one time, a restaurant having dining-rooms and terraced tea gardens with a total seating capacity for 780 persons; boathouse and dancing pavilion with accommodation for 400 couples; band stand, refreshment booths and numerous amusement devices and games.<sup>1</sup>

A visitor to the park on a Saturday afternoon in the summer of 1925 probably would

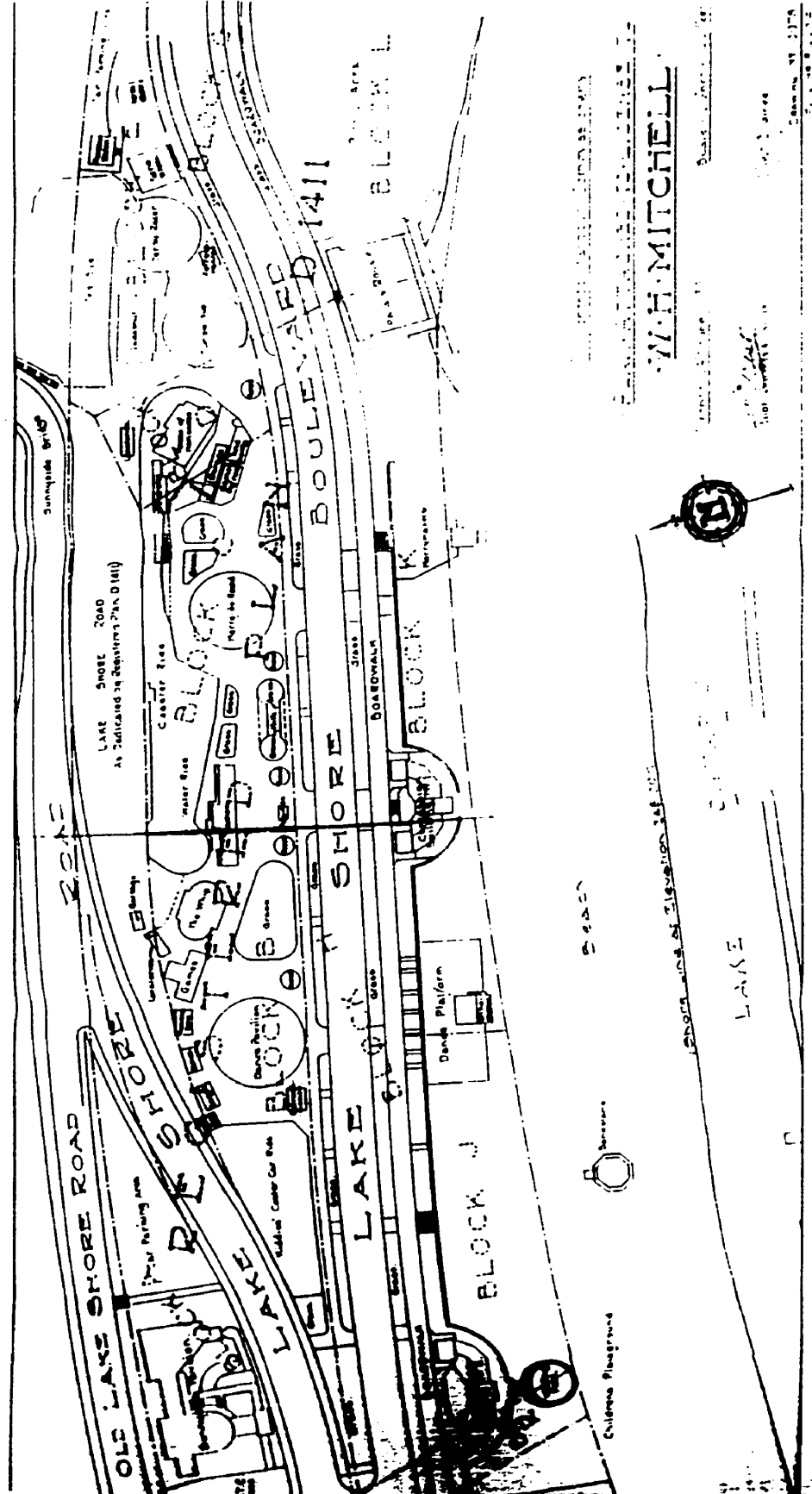
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<sup>1</sup>. A.C. Curry, ed. Toronto Year Book, 1925. (Toronto: Municipal Intelligence Bureau, 1925) p. 38.

have approached from the east, where the streetcars stopped. The midway was the first major attraction. It was a conglomeration of noises and smells including squeals from the Derby Racer, music from the Merry-Go-Round and the smell of peanuts roasting. As this visitor strolled through the crowded midway, she or he would see long lines for the roller coaster ride, excited children begging for a Honeydew or a ride on the Whip, while grandparents rested in the grassy areas. Continuing to walk west through the midway, music for the Charleston could be heard as our visitor passed the Dance Pavilion, heading towards Sunnyside Pavilion restaurant, a good place to relax over tea. Further west, the huge Sunnyside Bathing Pavilion was attracting groups of young people. Three hundred feet long and seventy five feet wide, the heated pool had both life guards and instructors for those who wanted to concentrate on swimming. After tea, our visitor could cross Lakeshore Boulevard because directly south of the midway on the far side of the boulevard, was a long boardwalk where young women strolled along in their best finery, showing off the latest fashion while young men wandering along watching them. Before crossing south to the beach, our visitor could stop at one of the concessions for a cool drink or pause at the Dance Platform or the Merrymakers stage where in the evenings live entertainment could be heard. Finally, if our visitor once again walked south he or she would reach the beach where young children played in the sand and waded in the water, while their parents looked on from rented beach chairs. To the extreme east of the beach was Dean's Sunnyside Pleasure Boats, listed as Palais Royale on the map. (see illustration #15).

The heyday for the park was the mid-1920's. By 1925 most of the buildings and concessions had opened and were drawing crowds. The highest attendance day recorded was

MAP OF SUNNYSIDE AMUSEMENT PARK  
Toronto Harbour Commission Archives



Friday, July 1, 1927, when close to 100,000 people came to the waterside park to celebrate Canada's Diamond Jubilee.<sup>2</sup> Through photographs and newspaper reports it is possible to suggest the wide variety of people who enjoyed the park.

With the range of activities offered at Sunnyside, it is perhaps not surprising that newspapers regularly reported the thousands of people who flocked to Sunnyside in the summer. With captions like: "All Toronto Splashes at Sunnyside Beach"<sup>3</sup>, there was a sense that Sunnyside was packed every night. An article in the Star described one such crowd:

A whole city full of people "Sunnysided" at Sunnyside yesterday, with a surplus to populate some quite respectable sized village, a cheerful, shouting, laughing, splashing crowd that swarmed like flies on the beach or jostled one another in the lake.<sup>4</sup>

The crowds are generally described in a positive, fun way, which reveals an affection for Sunnyside among the media and the residents of Toronto. The people were laughing and cheerful, or smiling and chatting. This was a happy place to be.

The crowd was composed of all sorts of people, all ages, both sexes, the well-off and the less privileged. Ethnically, Toronto was largely British or British Canadian and it is likely that most visitors to Sunnyside also came from a British background. However, the variety in respect to age, and class was notable. In 1923, the Globe described a typical crowd under the caption: "Elders as well as kiddies keep amusements packed.", the reporter went on to say:

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<sup>2</sup> Chicago Illustrated News, August 1927.

<sup>3</sup> Toronto Telegram, July 6, 1920.

<sup>4</sup> Toronto Star, July 14, 1921.

Sunnyside, the Coney Island and Atlantic City of Toronto citizens, came into its own last night as never before...Good-natured and fun-loving, the people who visited Sunnyside last night were a typical Toronto crowd. Rowdyism was absent and the pleasure of the evening was marred by no untoward incident.<sup>5</sup>

While there is a suggestion here that crowds may be a danger in their propensity to get out of control, the report is reassuring. The "typical Toronto crowd" was well-behaved, and civilized so that it was a pleasurable evening for everyone. The crowds are noted for their politeness and good natured approach to fun, but just what were these people enjoying, and who was enjoying what?

The activities at Sunnyside can be divided into different areas or types which each attracted a different clientele. Taken on a geographic basis from north to south, these areas are the midway, the various spectator events, the boardwalk, and the beach. It is entirely possible that the same visitor to Sunnyside would have enjoyed more than one of these activities but they tended to appeal to distinct groups.

This geographic distinction to each type of entertainment also relates to the type of enjoyment being offered. John Fiske, an expert in popular culture who has studied many well-frequented group activities, has argued that the beach is a special realm defined by custom and convention. Influenced by Marxism, he sees the class struggle continued in much of popular culture. Fiske believes that in order for something to be popular it must embody resistance to the established order. For example, riding a roller coaster could represent resistance to the mechanized world by inverting a practical device (a train) into a frivolous ride with little true purpose and no destination. It inverts the relationship

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<sup>5</sup>. Toronto Globe, May 25, 1923.



between people and machinery. Culture, according to Fiske, must be relevant to the users regardless of the way in which society's leaders view it. As a result the roller coaster could have different meaning to different people. The Toronto Harbour Commission, representing authority, viewed the roller coaster as an economic device to generate revenue while the masses riding on it saw it as an escape from the realities of ordinary life. Fiske has a very clear view of the beach expressing the effort of civilization to control nature, with less and less success as one moves away from the shore, towards the water.

Fiske in his "Reading the Beach" identified the land area of a beach as the city while the sandy beach itself represented nature.<sup>6</sup> "The land, then, becomes culture, the city, civilization; the sea becomes nature, untamed, uncivilized, raw. The beach mediates this terrifying boundary."<sup>7</sup> (see illustration #16) In the case of Sunnyside this analogy can be taken one step farther. (see illustration #17) The midway, made up of man-made electrical devices that were carnevelesque in appeal was an extremely artificial environment. As Rollin Lynde Hartt wrote in 1909, amusement parks were "an artificial distraction for an artificial life."<sup>8</sup> The Boardwalk can be seen as the dividing line between the artificial world of the carnival and the more natural enjoyment of the beach. The many spectator events such as parades and mass contests often blurred this line.

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<sup>6</sup>. John Fiske, Reading the Popular. (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.) p. 44.

<sup>7</sup>. Fiske. p. 45.

<sup>8</sup>. Rollin Lynde Hartt, The People at Play. (New York: Arno Press, 1975.) p. 84.

JOHN FISKE'S CONCEPTION OF A BEACH

John Fiske, Reading the Popular. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989. Page 44.  
(author's drawing)

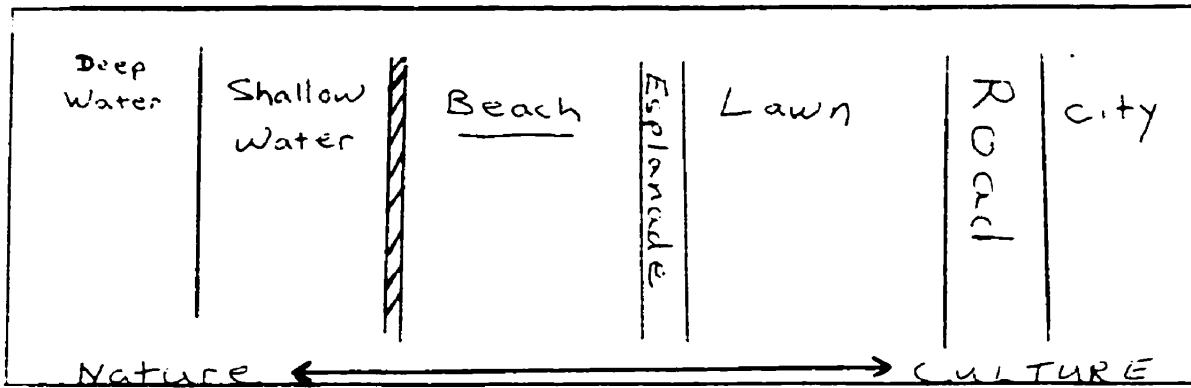
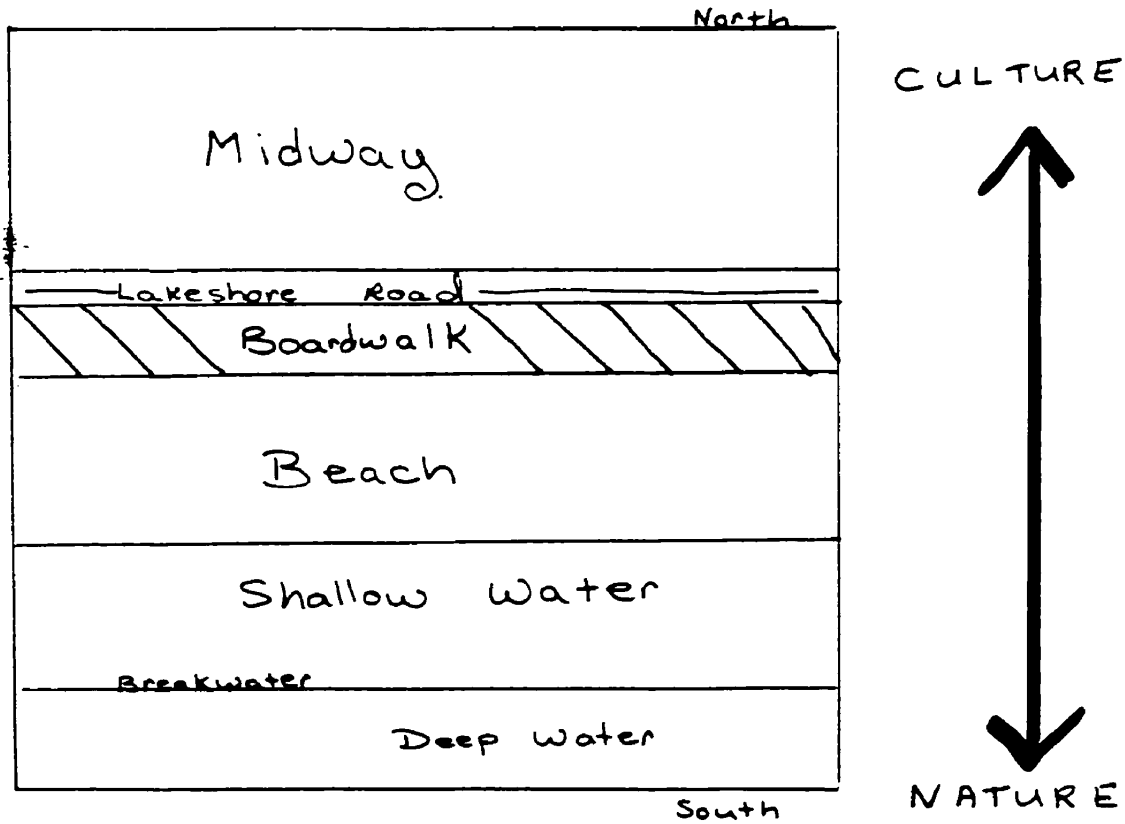


ILLUSTRATION #17

CONCEPTION OF SUNNYSIDE AMUSEMENT PARK

author's drawing



## MIDWAY

The midway was a combination of amusement rides, refreshment stands and grass areas for eating or sitting and watching the crowds. However the main attraction of the area that set the atmosphere for all the rest was the rides or "amusement devices" as they were called at the time. Geographically this area ran along the northern end of the park towards the east entrance. Separated from both the boardwalk and the beach by the busy and wide Lakeshore Boulevard, it was distinct from the rest of the park because of its noise, smells, colours and crowds. Due to the type of entertainment offered, the midway appealed to children as well as families and young adults.

The rides attracted the crowds and made the most money on the midway. The games and amusement devices earned \$131,098.26 in 1925 while the refreshment stands in the midway area only grossed \$54,001.40,<sup>9</sup> less than half the gross receipts of the rides and games. The appeal of these rides rested on the idea of doing something quite different from the everyday. The normal is inverted. Nothing productive or useful is achieved by riding on a Merry-Go-Round. The horses go nowhere but up and down to the music. Stepping aboard a train called a roller coaster will only see you whipped around corners and over hills to return to your previous location, not one step farther ahead. These rides had only one object for the participants – that of enjoyment. It was a release from conventional behaviour in a safe and socially acceptable environment.

Similar to other amusement parks in this period, the roller coaster at Sunnyside, called The Flyer, had the highest gross receipts and was the most popular ride. Other top

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<sup>9</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commission Memo, Receipts and Expenditures, 1925.

grossing rides were the traditional Merry-go-round and the Derby Racer. This later ride was similar to the Merry-go-round: customers rode on wooden horses in a circular pattern, however the Derby Racer differed in that one of the horses was randomly and automatically chosen to win the "race" or come in first with each ride. This allowed for both the appeal of the gentle Merry-Go-Round with the added spice of a bit of competition thrown in. Other rides included the Ferris Wheel, the Aerial Glider, the Whip, and the House of Nonsense, each provided a spectacle to be seen and heard.

All of these rides elicited laughter and enjoyment. The House of Nonsense in particular allowed customers to laugh at both themselves and the people around them. E. Garry Allighan writing for the Telegram in 1927 wrote the following lively and energetic description of the "House of Nonsense".

...we followed... through what appeared to be a gilded gate of glory. But it led to paths of pleasant peril. The stairs we walked up wriggled and squirmed under our tread; the walls wilted to our touch, mysterious wind-storms assailed our garments. Those perilous passages led our ingenuous feet into a cage-like maze and we were lost. Goudy began to think of sending a search-party to find us when we stumbled out into the comparative calm of a room-full of mirrors all of which were engaged in a campaign of calumny. My features - never attractive at the best of times- assumed varying characters. And each character was a lying libel, until my brain reeled at the sight and I shuddered to look again.

Staggering out we found ourselves in safety at last and sank with a sigh of relief into the delightful embrace of a large well-upholstered chair. Thank heaven for this, I sighed to myself. Whereupon the wall facing us fell apart and we were pitched forward and outward to slither down a carpeted hill, bumpetty-bumpetty-bump, landing in undignified mis-assortment at the bottom. There was only one thing to do - laugh heartily. And we did.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 27, 1927.

The House of Nonsense was full of the unexpected, completely undignified, and really quite silly, but it did make Mr. Allighan "laugh heartily". He was laughing at both himself for being fooled by the chair that tipped him forward and at those around him who were also landing in "undignified mis-assortments". Such an amusement allowed the participants to let go of their social dignity and have fun in the carefree way of children. They also put the customer at the centre of the enjoyment. It was the actions of Allighan and the people around him that created the laughter. By their pure absurdity they caused merriment. As one historian wrote about the British resort, Blackpool:

Presenting oneself as ridiculous - putting on masks or silly hats, posing in a hall of mirrors, fooling around - encourages a legitimate laughter. Such exhibitionism requires (or engenders) spectators, and so creates the communal complicity and fraternization essential to the enjoyment of resorts like Blackpool.<sup>11</sup>

Like Sunnyside, Blackpool was a seaside resort with a midway area. Both recognized that visitors to the midway area would want to be participants in the fun.

A further source of enjoyment on the midway was the sense of danger without any real fear. The hazards at Sunnyside included the excitement and safety of the roller coaster, ferris wheel and other mechanical rides. As Allighan went on to write: "The "Philosophy of Fun" is simple: It is as big a thrill as you can with as little danger as you can. And incidentally, at as low cost as possible."<sup>12</sup> Sunnyside advertising was more than ready to promote this same idea. In August of 1927 their advertisement proclaimed: "SUNNYSIDE

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<sup>11</sup>. Grahame Thompson, "Carnival and Calculable: Consumption and Play at Blackpool", in Formations of Pleasure. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) p.130.

<sup>12</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 27, 1927.

**BEACH HAS A PURPOSE.** That purpose is to manufacture happiness. Sunnyside is equipped with the best amusement devices of the day, for pleasure seekers can get thrills and enjoy laughter without danger."<sup>13</sup> Excitement with safety seemed to be a successful formula for drawing thousands to the midway.

On an individual basis the various games of chance brought in less gross revenue than the rides, but they added substantially to the air of festivities and excitement in the park. There was the possibility of showing off your skill and winning a prize. These games ranged from a Fish Pond to an Adding Game to the Penny Game. It was described by Allighan in the following way:

One section at Sunnyside is given over to housefurnishing where, by the investment of about 50 cents, a skilful marksman can collect enough ornaments to lay the foundations of a good home or a nice rock-garden. ... vases, all covered with geraniums and cucumbers; 18-carat iron toast racks and scores of other articles of bijouterie and virtue. All that I had to do explained one showman, was to score 20 with three darts and "any article is yours." I got 17 once and 12 the second time, but as he wouldn't let me add them together, I got no shaving mug to take home.<sup>14</sup>

These games along with refreshment stands selling peanuts or honey dew or even milk would all add to the crowds and noise of the midway. Other refreshments available included ice cream, pickled gherkins, coca-cola, french fried potatoes and of course "red hots". People gathered around the games or refreshment stands would in turn draw more people to see what the attraction was.

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<sup>13</sup>. Toronto Star. August 24, 1927.

<sup>14</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 27, 1927.

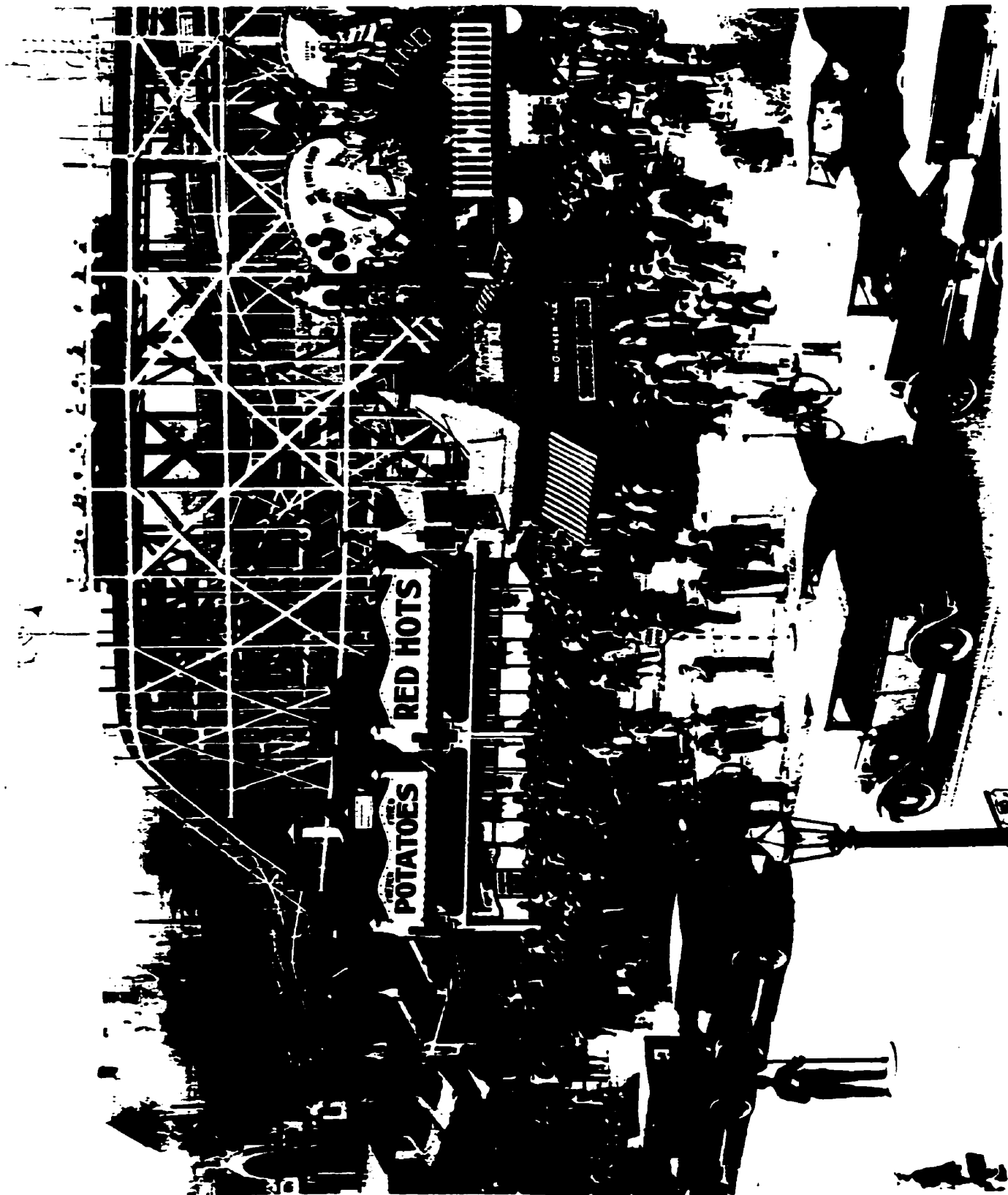
Most of the activities on the midway allowed adults some of the abandonment of childhood but they also appealed to children and young adults. Rides such as the Kiddies' Custer Car Ride were marketed specifically to children, but rides like the popular roller coaster would also have attracted their attention. The suggestion of danger and the ability to test your level of bravery had an appeal for children. Other amusement devices like the Lovers Express or the "Old Mill" were specifically aimed at young adults and were "patronized heavily by lovers".<sup>15</sup> Another area attractive to couples was the dance pavilion in the midst of the midway. Photographs from the 1920's reveal huge crowds milling about in front of the midway. They are a mixed group, similar to the one Allighan describes as: "...Toronto's youth, ranging in age from six to sixty".<sup>16</sup> (see illustration #18) It is difficult to tell if some of the large crowd is actually walking past the midway on their way to the boardwalk or other spectator sports or if in fact the midway itself was an area for spectators to watch people pouring out of the House of Nonsense, or the young people screaming on the roller coaster or children laughing on the kiddy rides. What is apparent is that the crowds appear to be well-dressed and happy. Everyone is talking or laughing, huddled in small groups or strolling in pairs, or lined up at the refreshment stands. Although children and young people are apparent, it is not an homogeneous group of people. Members of the older generation are evident in some of the photographs but they tend to be outnumbered by the younger crowd. Older people are often seen accompanying families rather than strolling along on their own.

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<sup>15</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 27, 1927.

<sup>16</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 27, 1927.

MIDWAY, SUNNYSIDE AMUSEMENT PARK  
Toronto Historical Board, Sunnyside Collection





Unlike the beach, which children could enjoy for free, sampling the delights of the midway would require some ready cash. Allighan spent an evening on the midway visiting rides, trying the games of chance and drinking Honey Dew. At the end of the evening he had only spent \$1.15. For three hours of entertainment, he considered this to be - "pretty cheap fun".<sup>17</sup>

It was estimated by Michael Piva that in 1921 58.9% of the work force in Toronto was blue-collar.<sup>18</sup> In this class 60 to 80 per cent of the income would have been spent on necessities such as food, shelter, fuel and light.<sup>19</sup> Average weekly earnings in this period for blue collar workers was \$24.05. <sup>20</sup> This would allow between \$9.62 to \$4.81 for other expenses during the week, including clothing, transportation, any capital expenditures on furniture or other items as well as entertainment. It is clear that the average blue collar worker did not have a lot to spend at Sunnyside Amusement Park, though entertainment at a cost of \$1.00 for an evening was affordable for many.

Sunnyside Pavilion, a restaurant just east of the midway, was an even more expensive proposition. In 1921, a citizen wrote to a local newspaper to complain about the table charge of \$1.50. In the writer's opinion, this was too high for the majority of people and was therefore an outrageous price to pay at a restaurant built by public money.<sup>21</sup> The Toronto

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<sup>17</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>. Piva, Michael, The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979.) p. 15.

<sup>19</sup>. Ibid. p. 38.

<sup>20</sup>. Ibid. p. 31.

<sup>21</sup>. The Toronto Harbour Commission Scrapbook, July 8, 1921.

Harbour Commission was quite sensitive to this kind of criticism. They made a point of advertising the fact that Sunnyside was built for and used by the citizens of Toronto. In their original call for tenders for the amusement rides at the park, the Telegram reported: "We've got to remember that we are spending public money," said an officer of the commission today, "and that there are an awful lot of people who like to go for a ride on a merry-go-round".<sup>22</sup> This idea of a public park for the citizens of Toronto is repeated over and over in the media comments. As the Globe reported on May 11, 1925:

The glowing coronet of light which crowns Toronto's summer playground at Sunnyside, flashing its signal to those in search of gaiety and innocent relaxation amid healthful scenes. Saturday witnessed the brilliant official opening of the amusement owned by the citizens of Toronto.<sup>23</sup>

There was clearly a sentiment on the part of the media and the Toronto Harbour Commission that Sunnyside as a park owned by the citizens of Toronto should be used by the residents of the city. It seems likely that there was some attempt to keep the midway affordable to at least the more affluent members of the working class and certainly the middle class. Still, this would not have been within the reach of most children without their parents along to supervise and enjoy the entertainments. It was probably affordable for the working men to take their families to Sunnyside for an evening occasionally, while it may have been considered a rare treat for those with less disposable income. After all, both the boardwalk and much of the beach entertainment was completely free of charge, while the midway was a luxury.

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<sup>22</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 8, 1921.

<sup>23</sup>. Toronto Globe, May 11, 1925.

At the other end of the scale, there is little evidence of the upper class partaking of the treats of the midway. Any comments regarding the upper classes visiting Sunnyside were strictly related to their presence on the beach on hot summer days. The midway appears to have geared its advertising and attractions to the notion of the "poor man's riviera", as Sunnyside was known within Toronto. At least the poor man who had a dollar to spend on an evening's entertainment was welcome.

The midway is by far the most artificial of waterfront recreations. As a combination of electrical devices, games and refreshment stands, the midway was a busy noisy place offering no relief from the crowded conditions of a city life. However the midway was undeniable popular, particularly with children, young adults and families. In its ability to create a fantasy world of absurd activities the midway catered to a desire for a change from everyday life. It was more noisy and crowded than the average city street, but it was also a lot more fun.

#### BOARDWALK:

The boardwalk just south of the midway marked a boundary between the city and the natural environment of the beach. According to Fiske it "marks the boundary beyond which the sea is not allowed to come; like all boundaries, it is a popular place to walk, a moment of balance in a sacred no-man's land outside profane normality."<sup>24</sup> It was certainly a popular place: throughout the season, in all temperatures, the boardwalk was busy. Easter Sunday was a particularly popular time to parade, but really any sunny day would do. The

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<sup>24</sup>. Fiske. p. 45.

boardwalk appealed particularly to groups of young women and groups of young men, who respected the polite traditions of promenading.

Ladies and gentlemen and children can all be seen in photographs promenading, often in their best clothes. Although couples are visible, and families with children are not unusual, the most common collections are same sex groups, often women. An article in the Toronto Star discussed this phenomenon in 1923.

#### SUNNYSIDE'S FASHION PARADE

Toronto's women no longer go window shopping when they wish to learn the latest styles. Sunnyside boardwalk has become a daily fashion parade. The Star photographer snapped several pairs at random one of the sunny afternoons this week.<sup>25</sup>

Occasionally wearing fur (often fox) stoles the ladies stroll along, mostly in pairs, chatting away. One group after another, they do indeed appear to be a fashion parade. The four ladies in the following photograph (see illustration #19) from 1923 are wearing "slightly bloused bodices with hipline emphasis and low hemlines for an elongated silhouette"<sup>26</sup> which represents the latest style. Brimmed hats, buckled shoes and fur trim all indicate that this group had recovered economically from both the war and the post war depression. They may not be the upper echelon of society but they are definitely ladies of leisure.

The boardwalk appears to have been the place to show off your best clothes rather than your partner. While fashion appealed to various ages, the boardwalk tended to attract younger women and their friends as well as groups of young gentlemen who may have gone

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<sup>25</sup>. Toronto Star, June 16, 1923.

<sup>26</sup>. Caroline Routh, In Style, 100 Years of Canadian Women's Fashion. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974). p. 48.

BOARDWALK, SUNNYSIDE AMUSEMENT PARK, JUNE 16, 1923  
Toronto Star, Sat. June 16, 1923



to meet the young women. As the Telegram proclaimed in 1927:

**It is Proved That the Crowds Follow the Pretty Girls and Therefore Amusement-mongers Direct the Appeal of Their Attractions to the Feminine Youth of Toronto, Who Enjoy Sunnyside to the Full.<sup>27</sup>**

Another newspaper article in the 1920's commented on the flirting that could be seen on the boardwalk:

**Some of the girls of Toronto who have a fondness for Sunnyside can tell amusing yarns about the "sheiks" of the Board Walk, but flirtations, attempted or carried on, are very mild and discreet. Indeed, considering the thousands of young people of all types and dispositions who go for fun to Sunnyside, the resort is singularly free of conduct not thoroughly decorous.<sup>28</sup>**

The Boardwalk required certain polite and socially acceptable activity. While a lady could perhaps take a gentleman's arm, public fondling and kissing were unacceptable. The behaviour of those promenading should be "decorous" and polite without any hint of scandal. As long as the flirting was apparent but not indecent, it did not provoke actions by the authorities. Unlike some American beaches Sunnyside had no official censorship. Atlantic City, on the other hand, had both official regulations regarding the length of a bathing suit as well as a Woman Beach Censor who "keeps a sharp eye on costumes, on "petting" parties, and other amusements that go a little farther than they should."<sup>29</sup>

While Sunnyside did not employ a Beach Censor, it did have a number of regulations to monitor behaviour. Pets and bicycles are not evident in photographs and may not have been allowed. If the boardwalk was a boundary between civilization and the more natural

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<sup>27</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 30, 1927.

<sup>28</sup>. Toronto Mail, August 14, 1923.

<sup>29</sup>. Ibid.

environment of the lake, it fell on the side of civilization. People were expected to be both well-dressed and well-behaved. Absolutely no alcohol was allowed anywhere in the park, and Sunnyside was closed on Sundays. These rules indicate a desire on the part of the Toronto Harbour Commission to encourage what was considered correct and acceptable behaviour.

### **SPECTATOR ACTIVITIES (SPORTS, MUSIC AND SPECIAL EVENTS)**

Many of the thousands of people who enjoyed Sunnyside throughout the 1920's were involved in watching various activities or sports. Often a particular event or game would bring down especially large crowds who watched rather than participated in the events. These people may have sampled some of the treats on the midway or spent some time on the beach but they converged as spectators at a specific event that was advertised and promoted to ensure huge numbers at the park.

While the events took place all over the site depending on the activities planned, many of them were concentrated in the area south of the boardwalk but north of the actual beach area. Swimming events took place at the huge swimming tank to the west while the baseball diamond was built to the east of the midway. Geographically this should place the events in a category somewhat closer to the natural side than the civilized. However there are civilized constraints in this area. Athletes were expected to dress in team uniforms, while the spectators were dressed in correct attire of jackets, ties and hats or dresses, coats and hats. Clearly participants in the sporting events had written rules and regulations that they were required to follow. The spectators were also expected to be well behaved and

were seated in a designated space. However, unlike the boardwalk, the spectators were allowed to shout and boo in a most impolite way. In this sense they were given somewhat more freedom than a stroll along the boardwalk.

These sporting activities attracted varied crowds depending on the event. In general more men than women seem to have attended the sporting events, and for the most part women who attended appeared to be accompanying men. One very popular sporting event at Sunnyside in the 1920's was ladies' soft ball. In 1926 for example, the Major Ladies League Games were played on Monday and Thursday, while the Sunnyside Ladies League played every Wednesday and Saturday. The results for both leagues were often reported in the major papers with accompanying stories. Men may have been the spectators but it was the women who were playing the sports.

Sporting events were just the beginning of the spectator activities available at Sunnyside. Sing-alongs and bands were also popular in the park, but it was the various carnivals and special events throughout the decade that attracted the huge crowds. The Water Nymph Carnival in 1923 was sponsored by the Evening Telegram and attracted thousands. The highlight of this event was a parade of 180 "winsome water nymphs",<sup>30</sup> all Toronto beauties who were judged by the crowds. 10,002 votes were cast for the most "winsome" of the lot.<sup>31</sup> As the Telegram reported on August 13, 1923:

The intense human interest occasioned by the carnival was manifest in the diverse character of the crowds, representatives

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<sup>30</sup>. Toronto Telegram. August 13, 1923.

<sup>31</sup>. Toronto Telegram, August 20, 1923.



being present from all walks of life - all enjoying the scene with equal zest, all contributing to the success of the pageant.<sup>32</sup>

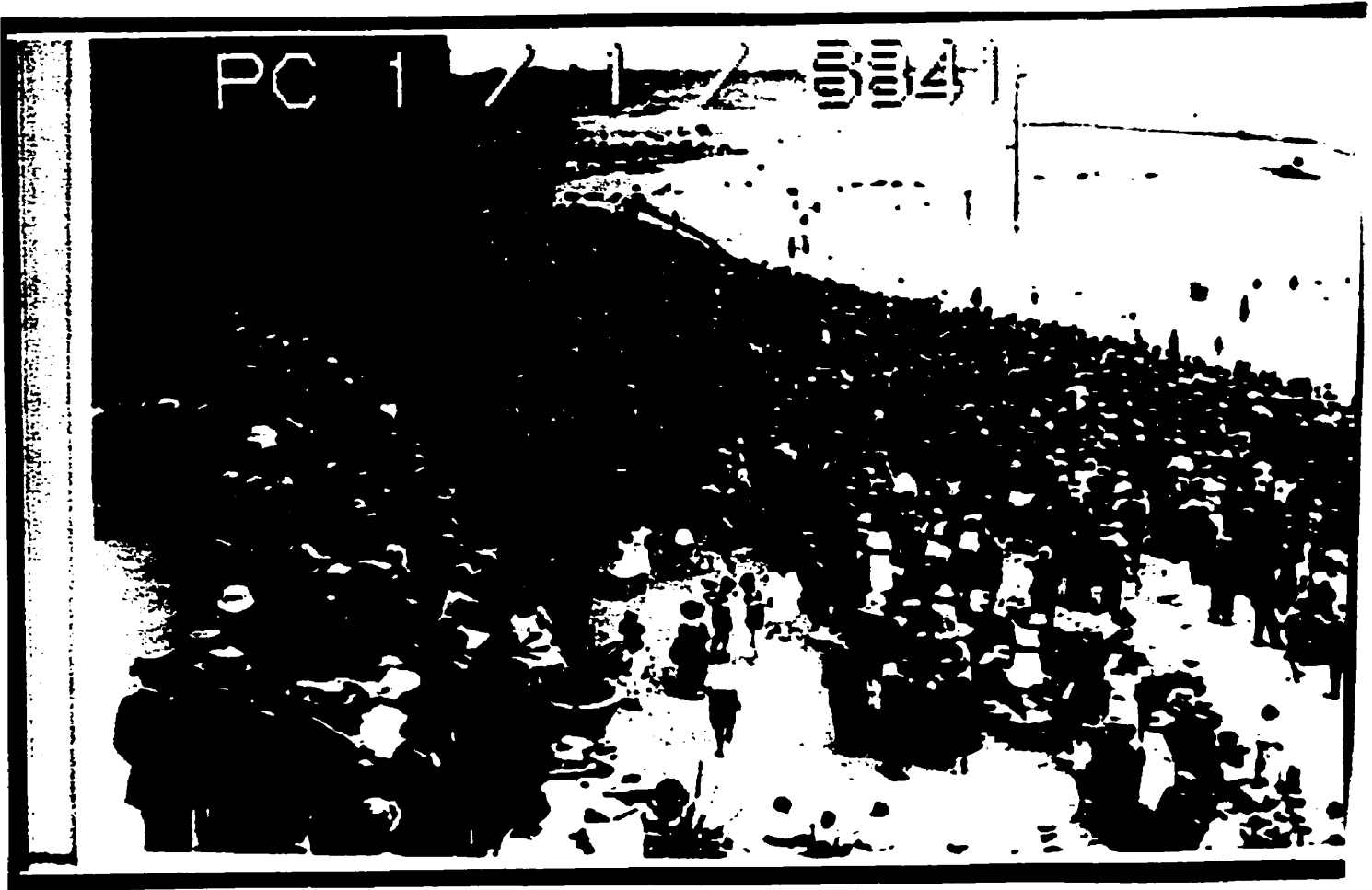
Photographs reveal massive crowds in front of Sunnyside's Bathing Pavilion with individuals largely indistinguishable one from the other. (see illustration #20) Much of this particular event took place on the beach and the attire of the audience is interesting. Those who were watching from the shoreline actually standing in waves from the lake are dressed in swimming costumes, while those who were standing farther back, towards the boardwalk were more formally dressed in suits, dresses and hats. Even in the midst of that immense group of people, and the festive atmosphere, the geographic distinction between the civilized area of the boardwalk and the more natural area of the beach was recognized.

Not to be outdone by the Telegram, the Star also sponsored events at Sunnyside. The paper had the particularly ingenious idea of sponsoring a parade for children 15 and under who were dressed in costumes made from the Star newspapers. Like most of the parades, this event took place on the boardwalk. The 1920's saw other major events at the park including Charleston contests and pushmobile contests. Perhaps the most celebrated contest held at Sunnyside was the 1926 Miss Toronto Beauty pageant. With 475 applicants, the contest was a resounding success. Similar to Ladies Soft Ball and the Water Nymph Carnival, the focus was once again on women. The following year 1927, saw a popular Female Impersonator's contest in the park. But even when the contestants for "Miss Toronto" were dressed in bathing costumes and parading down the beach, the audience watching them from the north were fully dressed in hats and suits, recognizing the civilized

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<sup>32</sup>. Toronto Telegram, August 13, 1923.

WATER NYMPH CARNIVAL, SUNNYSIDE AMUSEMENT PARK  
Toronto Harbour Commission Archives PC1/1/8841



constraints.

A number of major events took place in the lake itself, including canoe races and the baptising of bible students. Among the most dramatic events were the burnings of various older ships off the beach. The red glow of the burning vessels lit up the sky in spectacular fashion similar to a fireworks spectacle. The last schooner on the Great Lakes, the *Lyman M. Davis* was burned at Sunnyside in 1934. While the events were taking place in the natural world of the lake, the audience remained firmly in the civilized side of the equation, generally along the boardwalk.

Many civic celebration like Dominion Day or the welcoming home of the rowing hero Joe Wright, were held at Sunnyside. The park had the official support of both the city and the business community. The later hosted major events at the waterside park during a Rotarian conference in June of 1924.

In the photographs of large crowds watching a spectacle it is often almost impossible to distinguish individual faces. It is difficult to know who made up the thousands visiting Sunnyside for particular events. In general the carnivals were free for the audience, being sponsored by a local newspaper while participants may have paid an inexpensive entry fee. It is important to remember that Sunnyside itself did not have a single entrance fee. You could go to the park and not spend a penny, if you never bought anything to drink or eat, never rented a canoe and were never tempted by the treats of the midway. It seems more likely that most people who found their way to Sunnyside for special events expected to spend at least a little money on refreshments if nothing else. Still, in general, they were inexpensive events and probably attracted a similar crowd as the other areas of Sunnyside.

Not all the visitors to Sunnyside were Torontonians. Sunnyside was built to generate revenue for the Toronto Harbour Commission, and in the final analysis a tourist's dollar was just as good as a local's. In 1923 Home Smith, the Toronto Harbour Commission Chairman, made the following comment:

The harbour commissioners have always had in mind that Sunnyside will not only be a continuing and increasing joy to the citizens of Toronto, but that it will become the playground of the one million people who live in the central portion of the province of Ontario and that it will attract to this city the tourist traffic, which, we all agree, we must have.<sup>33</sup>

To promote the tourist trade brochures were published including the slogan: "If you haven't seen Sunnyside Beach you haven't seen Toronto."<sup>34</sup> There is no reason to doubt the commission's success in attracting visitors from out of town. Papers from cities as far away as Chicago ran stories on the events and attractions at Sunnyside -- "Toronto's Lake Shore Playground".<sup>35</sup>

## BEACH

Fiske conceptualized "the beach as nearer nature than culture: the beach is natural,..."<sup>36</sup> The natural had a poignant appeal to the people of a large urban centre who could view it as an opportunity to escape the city. The beach at Sunnyside was the original reason for its popularity as a resort and the main reason the midway, boardwalk and other

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<sup>33</sup>. Star, April 3, 1923.

<sup>34</sup>. Sunnyside Pamphlet, Toronto Historical Board Collection.

<sup>35</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>. Fiske. p. 46.

recreational activities were placed in the area. Of the many attractions at Sunnyside, the lake was the most popular, particularly in the heat. According to the Globe on June 8, 1924:

Huge crowds thronged the bathing area at Sunnyside Saturday, and found comfort in the largest and coolest bathtub in the city. Never before in June has the lake done such a rushing business. The water provided the one sure refuge from the torrid heat and apparently every one who could do so sought it.<sup>37</sup>

Photographs from the period reveal a wide range of groups throughout the beach area. Children can be seen splashing in the water while parents look on. Groups of adults can be seen lounging on the beach, or chatting under umbrellas. (see illustration #21) It was a busy, crowded place, without the artificial devices of the midway or the strict formal clothing of the boardwalk. One reporter in 1920 described a varied beach crowd:

"All Classes Present."

For one whose hobby is the study of human nature and likes to mingle with crowds' Sunnyside surely is the happy hunting ground for him. Old men, young men, old ladies, young girls and babies scarcely able to walk, all found their way to the water's edge. While for bathing suits, anything that would keep the swimmer from the firm grip of the law could be seen. There was naturally, style too. Young girls in their 'teens and dapper youths were there with the more expensive bathing togs, but it was truly a cosmopolitan gathering.<sup>38</sup>

The author of this article clearly feels that not only were all ages represented on the beach, but all classes were also present. This sense of a democratic crowd reveals a belief that not only were all classes present on the beach but they were also able to mingle. In the natural environment of the beach, city strictures regarding class and who one should associate with

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<sup>37</sup>. Toronto Globe, June 8, 1924.

<sup>38</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 6, 1920.

SUNNYSIDE BEACH, SEPT. 4, 1922  
Toronto Harbour Commission Archives, PC1/2/58



were swept away. Whether you were wearing an expensive brand new bathing suit or a ragged old outfit, all could enjoy and be welcome on the beach. In effect all persons were equal in nature.

This image may not be particularly accurate. Photographs reveal that individual groups on the beach did not appear to do a great deal of mingling. Those with more money could have rented an umbrella and a beach chair which offered some shade from the sun as well as a bit of privacy from the masses. The use of these pieces of furniture allowed individual groups to mark out their particular spot on the beach. This space was not to be violated by those around them. Although the beach is a more natural world than the boardwalk, it still contains barriers. While the image of a beach for all classes is powerful, it is in conflict with Sunnyside's nickname: "The Poor Man's Riviera". Because it was a free entertainment area, Sunnyside's beach was likely to cater to those with less money in the city. The varied crowd may have been attracted by the extreme heat where people from all over the city streamed to the beach and lake for some relief from the oppressive weather. The crowd described as cosmopolitan in the Globe may well be as unusual as the high temperatures.

The average crowd on the beach was more likely to be made up of children. Huge numbers of young people gathered on the beach both with their families and on their own. In fact there was a free bathing-car service. As early as the 1890's, children who carried a bathing suit and a towel could ride on the transit free of charge to and from Sunnyside on specific free bathing cars that ran during summer afternoons. These cars were packed with children heading for an afternoon at the beach.

One result of this was thousands of children visiting Sunnyside beach. In the early 1920's, Sunnyside had two separate beach areas, one for boys and one for girls. Society clearly felt it was necessary to segregate the sexes and impose some discipline on the natural world of the beach. The Sunday World reported the following numbers for children at the Sunnyside Beaches:

	1923	1922
Sunnyside (boys)	73,150	69,075
Sunnyside (girls)	37,710	25,500 <sup>39</sup>

For July and August of 1923 the Life Saving and Police Patrol reported the total number of people on Sunnyside Beach at 149,760. <sup>40</sup> If children made up 110,860 of that number, they represent about 74% of all bathers.

While the number as a whole is impressive, it is also interesting that there was clearly a difference between the number of boys and girls. In 1922, the boy's beach saw over double the numbers at the girl's beach, and in 1923 there were almost double the number of boys as girls. It seems that boys were allowed more freedom to visit the beaches on their own and therefore went more often. In these years, three other beaches in the Toronto area -- Fisherman's Island, the Western Sand Bar and The Don River only allowed boys to swim. Society within Toronto regulated even the natural environment of the beach. While boys

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<sup>39</sup>. Sunday World, June 9, 1924.

<sup>40</sup>. Monthly report of the Life Saving and Police Patrol, August 7, 1923 and Monthly report of the Life Saving and Police Patrol, Sept. 6, 1923.



were encouraged to swim in the lake and explore this natural world, girls were not given the same opportunities.

Whatever the type of activity at Sunnyside they all had an element of escapism in common. From the midway with its undignified almost childlike fun, to wearing your best finery along the boardwalk to playing in the sand on the beach, Sunnyside offered a relief and a change from everyday life in the city. It was a place to play where participants could be enveloped in an environment that might have been just as crowded and noisy as a city street but it was not a city street. It was a playground designed to encourage laughter and merriment.

## CHAPTER 5

### DEAN'S SUNNYSIDE PLEASURE BOATS

When Dean's Sunnyside Pleasure Boats opened in 1922, the business was in quite a different environment from Dean's Boat and Canoe Company. There were a few confectioneries and boat livery operations at the old Sunnyside and even a boardwalk and of course the beach, but it was not the organized playground that Sunnyside Amusement Park represented. Dean's competition for customers had changed from a few small businesses scattered along a boardwalk to a vibrant midway, various spectator sports, a huge bathing tank and the wealth of other amusements offered at Sunnyside. (see illustration #22)

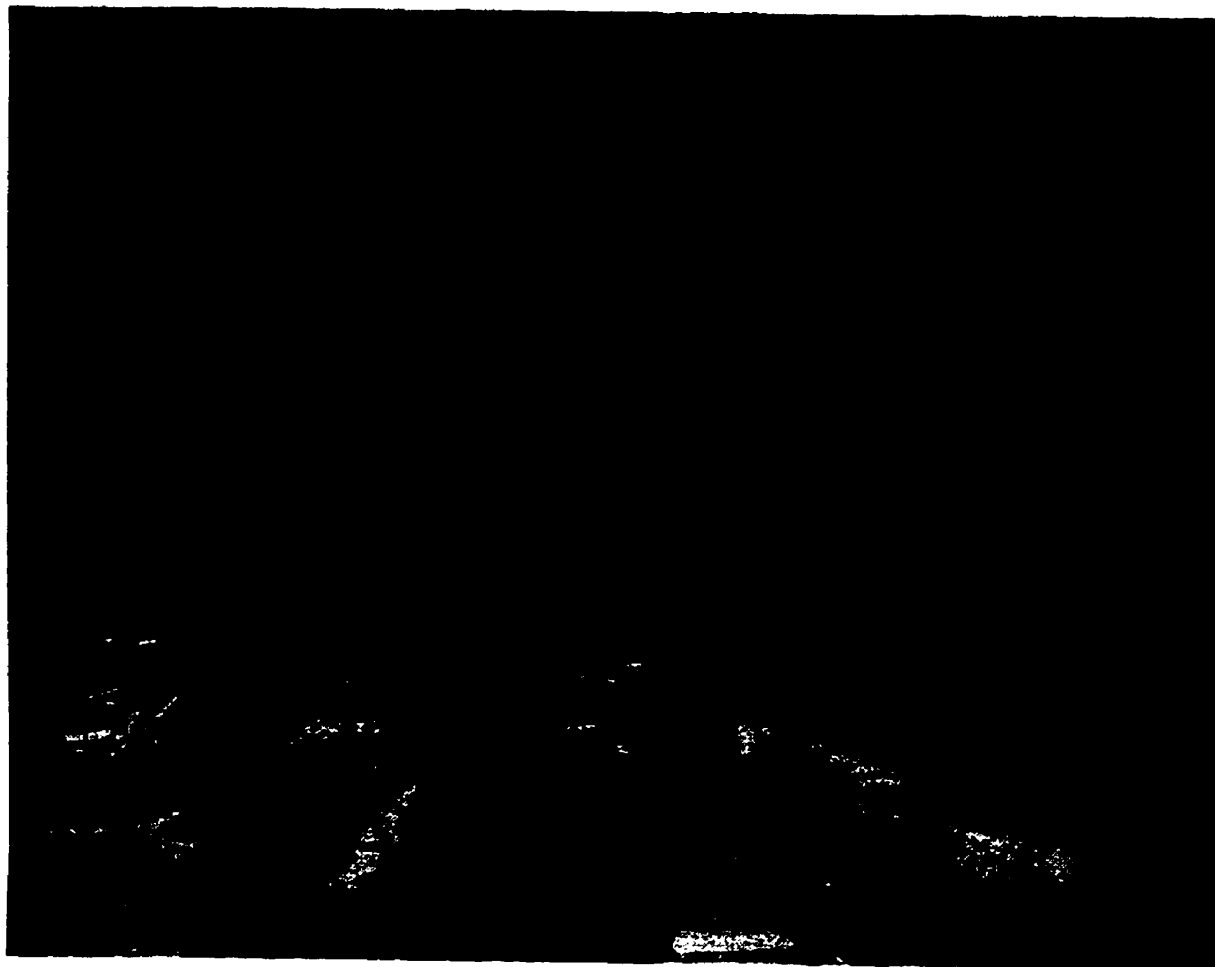
By 1919 there were over 1,500 amusement parks in the United States<sup>1</sup> and the vast majority of these were situated in the area of a beach. From Coney Island to Sea Breeze Amusement Park, many of these places offered canoe rental as an option. Seen as one of the healthier and more wholesome activities, it was a standard component in the same way as the Ferris Wheel was expected on the midway. While the rest of Sunnyside provided the draw to bring in large crowds, Dean's canoes could offer a temporary escape from the noise and confusion on the grounds. With all these potential customers it is perhaps not surprising that the Dean brothers felt their grandiose boat rental operation would prosper.

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<sup>1</sup>. Gary Kyriazi, The Great American Amusement Parks, A Pictorial History. (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1976) p. 98.

**ILLUSTRATION #22**

**SUNNYSIDE BEACH, c. 1912, c. 1925**  
**Toronto Harbour Commission Archives**



Geographically Dean's Sunnyside Pleasure Boats was located right on the beach but both the activity of paddling a rental canoe and the popular canoe races sponsored by the Toronto Harbour Commission were run on the lake. This area was the most southerly portion of the park and in many ways the most natural. According to Fiske, there are basically two areas within the water.

The first is the safe shallows for wading and splashing. Beyond this, beyond the breaking waves, is the deep sea, used only by strong swimmers, usually youths, those between childhood and full adulthood. Their meaning is one of leaving culture, of accepting the risk and challenge of nature, of testing their strength against that of the sea.<sup>2</sup>

Canoeing could take one even beyond the level of the strong swimmer, leaving the civilized world behind.

Located at the south western end of the park it seems likely that Dean's clients largely came from the throngs of people on the beach. The majority of the average beach crowd was made up of children and there is some evidence that young boys, similar to the people in Fiske's argument did rent canoes from Dean. The Life Saving and Police Patrol gave the following report in the first year that Dean was open for business as part of Sunnyside Amusement Park.

Sunday, August 27, 1922, 3:30 pm

Three boys were sighted by the lifeguards at Sunnyside Pavilion standing up in a canoe, one half mile out in the lake. The lifeguards put out and brought the boys ashore. Names: Frank Munroe, 54 Manning Ave (14 years), Jack Simpson, 58 Manning Ave., Paul Allister 2130 Bloor St. W. (12 years). The canoe had been rented from Dean's Boathouse.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>. Fiske. p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>. Life Saving and Police Patrol, 1922. Toronto Harbour Commission Archives.

These neighbourhood boys may have felt that since they were on the lake away from adult surveillance, they could do as they pleased. However, in risking the power of the lake they put themselves in real danger. There was a realistic fear on the part of the Toronto Harbour Commission of people, and children in particular, drowning while out paddling a canoe. The following year, John Katz, a young Toronto boy, drowned near the Humber after two rental canoes manned by novices collided. After this incident the question of whether or not canoes should be rented to young people became a lively issue in the press. It was suggested that the boat livery operators and the Toronto Harbour Commission regulate who was allowed to challenge nature out on the lake.

While being on the lake may provide a natural environment it was still within the reach of the Life Safety and Police Patrol. The concern here was with safety rather than protocol. On the boardwalk it was a question of flirtation, while on the water it becomes a question of personal safety. The consequences of not following the rules and guidelines became much harsher in the natural environment.

The breakwater was another example of civilization attempting to control nature. Most of the Western Breakwater which ran for three miles from the mouth of the Humber, was constructed between 1920 and 1923. Originally, the sea wall had breaks every thousand feet to allow for both the entry of small boats and for the water to circulate. Very quickly, the beach began to erode in the areas of these gaps. One of the worst cases of erosion was in front of Dean's Pleasure Boats. This problem along with the heavy wave action in the area of Sunnyside led to the gaps being filled to form a solid wall. The continuing expense and discussion on the breakwater, was a clear indication that the lakefront in Toronto only

made a suitable playground when many of the natural elements could be controlled and limited.

Even with the civilizing limits, the natural world of canoeing continued to be attractive. Adults as well as children rented canoes from Dean's, and enjoyed viewing the civilized world from the perspective of the natural. In 1924, a reporter for the Star expanded on this theme:

Soon the canoes become more numerous, the shouts of bathers more distinct, and we find ourselves approaching Toronto's wonderland, Sunnyside Beach. We have all been to Sunnyside some in motor cars, and others on the broad boardwalk, but those who have never viewed it from the waterfront have a treat in store. The bathing pavilion resembles an old castle, with its arches, its flower gardens, and picturesque urns. The beach, gaily decked with umbrellas and awning chairs might be a part of the Riviera, but to the bathers bobbing up and down in the surf, it is a swimmer's paradise.<sup>4</sup>

There was a definite appeal in looking at Sunnyside from the comparative calm and distance of a boat. More than being a part of the actual scene from the boardwalk, Sunnyside could be enjoyed by a spectator on the water who could take in the whole scene rather than just one small part of it. The appeal was looking at the colourful and romantic view of the park without being a part of it, therefore giving a paddler the opportunity to reflect on the civilized world from the more natural environment of a canoe.

Canoe racing also took place within the natural environment but it had many elements of the civilized world. Participants wore uniforms which identified them with a specific club. For example, the Toronto Canoe Club members who were known as the "Red

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<sup>4</sup>. Toronto Star, August 16, 1924.

Ringers" sported a bright red circle on their shirts.<sup>5</sup> There were also specific rules and regulations regarding who could race, and what kind of vessel they were allowed to use. In essence aspects of the natural world were being controlled by clubs and organizations.

These same organizations were essential to the promotion of canoeing. Organized races attracted

What officials of the Canadian Canoe Association term "the largest crowd that ever witnessed an aquatic meet in Canada" saw Roy Nurse of the Balmy Beach Club win the feature of the canoeing and rowing program inside the breakwater in front of the bathing pavilion.<sup>6</sup>

This kind of popularity encouraged the Toronto Harbour Commission to sponsor canoe races every Wednesday night beginning in 1923. A reporter for the Telegram believed that this "should do much to encourage support for paddling".<sup>7</sup> As this support grew, it became clear that the appeal of competitive racing was not limited to men. Although women paddlers never gained the popularity of Ladies Soft Ball, there were lady crews for war canoe races. As the Sunday World reported: "Another ladies' war canoe race is on the program for Wednesday night at Sunnyside. Judging from the Dominion Day results, the quarter-mile race will be worth seeing."<sup>8</sup> While competition was limited to contests between female groups, it was none the less lively and entertaining for spectators.

It seems reasonable to assume that the popularity of participating and watching canoe

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<sup>5</sup>. Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club, The Red Ringers. (Toronto: Toronto Sailing and Canoe Club, 1980)

<sup>6</sup>. Toronto Globe, June 18, 1924.

<sup>7</sup>. Toronto Telegram, June 12, 1923.

<sup>8</sup>. Sunday World, July 13, 1924.

racers would lead to an increased popularity in renting and buying canoes. Dean's location so close to the popular race course at Sunnyside may well have helped his business and many of the racing canoes were probably built by the Dean family. But as early as 1923 there were complaints about the quality of the racecourse at Sunnyside. An article in the Star in July of that year recorded the disenchantment with the Sunnyside track. It was considered to be fine for practising but it was too difficult to run truly competitive races inside the breakwater due to lack of space, while outside of the breakwater was far too rough.<sup>9</sup> As a result of their poor race course, Sunnyside lost the chance to hold the 1923 Canadian Canoe Association Championship. By 1929 the Globe was declaring that people would never be attracted to canoe racing until there was a proper course.<sup>10</sup> These kinds of negative comments would not have helped the Dean brothers who were beginning to run into serious financial difficulties.

In the opening season of 1922 Dean's Sunnyside Pleasure Boats grossed \$9,445.12. They were off to a good start. In 1923 the gross receipts went up to \$9,656.45 followed by a sharp drop in 1924 to only \$5,549.84.<sup>11</sup> Even in the first two years when the business was making a good return, expenses were high. They included taxes, staff wages, rental to the Toronto Harbour Commission at the rate of 10% of gross sales from the restaurant and 15% of gross sales from the boat rentals<sup>12</sup>, as well as payment on the mortgage owing to the

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<sup>9</sup>. Toronto Star, July 14, 1923.

<sup>10</sup>. Toronto Globe, May 2, 1929.

<sup>11</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commission Internal Correspondence, April 12, 1943.

<sup>12</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commission Minutes, Item 1178, December 20, 1921.



Toronto Harbour Commission at a level of \$2,000 per year for 1922 and 1923, and \$4,000 per year after that.<sup>13</sup> The result would have been little real profit.

By late 1923 the finances of Dean's Sunnyside Pleasure Boats had to be reorganized and the Dean's boatshop on York Street was closed. New backers were found for the boat livery and the business opened in 1924 as Pleasure Boats Limited. They continued to have difficulties, especially with the drop in revenue in 1924. For the next six years the company repeatedly asked the Toronto Harbour Commission to allow them to defer paying the principal on the mortgage for the building. With this financial arrangement and various late payments Pleasure Boats hung on throughout the 1930 season. On January 29, 1931 Pleasure Boats Limited declared bankruptcy.<sup>14</sup> By 1933 Dean's Sunnyside Pleasure Boats had become the Palais Royale, a dance pavilion.

One of the major reasons for this economic decline was the way in which the company was significantly overextended by the building of their grandiose boat rental and restaurant. The expansion had followed fairly closely after both the retirement of Walter Dean senior and the devastating fire at their boatshop. The Dean brothers may have fared better if they had been satisfied with a small boat rental concession. Gilbert Dean later operated a small boat rental concession on the beach at Sunnyside during the Second World War. However, by that point canoeing as a sport and recreational activity had significantly declined on Toronto Harbour and the little concession only lasted a few short years. Boat rental operations within the complex of Sunnyside Amusement Park were not particularly

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<sup>13</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commission Minutes, Item 2394, July 30, 1923.

<sup>14</sup>. Toronto Star, January 29, 1931.

successful.

The main attractions at the park were the midway, the various spectator sports and the beach itself. The natural attractions of the beach did not seem to spill over to the rental of canoes to any great extent. Perhaps there were too many other activities in the park. If a person was tired of lounging on the beach they could go for a swim or wandered over to the tea gardens, or listen to a band or even visit the midway. Renting a canoe was only one of many, many attractions.

Walter Dean senior continued to build at least a single canoe every year until well into his eighties, dying at the age of 87 on June 18, 1952. Long before that time he had transferred his interests from the canoe business on Toronto Harbour to real estate in the area of the Severn River. He and his wife Ellen had built a summer home they named "Deanellen" where there was always a canoe or two available for rent. Walter never lost faith in the canoe and when the Evening Telegram interviewed him in 1948 he still proudly predicted, "Despite inroads made by the automobile and airplane there will always be an essential need for the canoe in present day and future travel."<sup>15</sup>

Edgar and Gilbert Dean also found work in other areas, turning away from canoes as a business while keeping paddling as a hobby. Dean's youngest son, Walter II, opened a small boat sporting shop in the 1940's but it was a short lived venture. Sunnyside Cruisers and Torpedo's quietly became outdated until gradually they came to be considered collector's items for their fine craftsmanship and beauty. In 1994 Canadian canoes, similar

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<sup>15</sup>. Toronto Evening Telegram, December 18, 1948.

to Dean's, were auctioned in London bringing prices as high as 1265 pounds sterling.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>. Phillips, Son & Neale, Traditional River Craft and Ephemera. July 9, 1994. p. 74.

## CHAPTER 6

### URBAN CANOEING DECLINES

The sport of canoeing grew rapidly in the 1880's, however by the late 1890's periodicals were already beginning to predict its decline and eventual death. In Canada urban canoeing decreased during the First World War but recovered some popularity in the early 1920's and then quickly declined again. Wilderness canoeing continued to be a common sport throughout the twentieth century while canoes on Toronto Harbour became a rarer site. Urban canoeing decreased as a result of racing becoming too specialized, other sports and activities beginning to emerge and the lack of real class identification for canoeing as a sport.

As early as December of 1890, Forest and Stream, an influential American sporting magazine read by many Canadians, was worried about the decline of war canoe racing. The reporter argued that war canoes had, "rapidly deteriorated until in some cases the boats are but racing machines."<sup>1</sup> The problem was that the normal, large, sturdy war canoes could not compete with these specialized crafts. It was felt that war canoe racing was a, "test of skill and endurance", so that, "the nearer alike the boats are, the better for the sport".<sup>2</sup> If specialized craft were allowed to develop, it would become a race between designers rather than between true sportsmen. Since canoeing was seen as an activity for sportsman this was to be avoided at all costs.

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<sup>1</sup>. Forest and Stream, Vol. 52, December 4, 1890, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid.

War canoe racing was not the only area of the sport beset by the problems of specialized craft. As the above reporter noted:

The matter is one which cannot be dealt with too quickly if war canoe racing is to escape the fate of canoe sailing and canoe paddling, done to death by flimsy machines.<sup>3</sup>

When sailing canoes and paddling canoes became specialized for racing, they lost their abilities as recreational crafts for a paddle down the lake on a summer day. While they became narrow, and lightweight for speed, they also became unstable and unreliable, requiring the skill of an expert paddler. This kind of boat was impossible to use for the cruises into the wilderness which had originally earned canoeing its popularity with the public and the patronage of the upper classes.

At the time, the emergence of specialized canoes for racing was seen as the major reason for a decline in canoeing. Forest and Stream reported in 1898 with the clarity of hindsight:

We have always been of the opinion that if American canoeists had acted with ordinary foresight and good judgement over a dozen years ago in at once prohibiting all canoes without sleeping space in the cockpit, there would still have been canoes and canoe racing in this country to-day.<sup>4</sup>

This was a bit of an exaggeration since canoes and canoe racing did continue in the United States even to the present day, but there was a steady decline evident by the late 1890's. In an effort to revise the sport, new rules were devised in the fall of 1898 specifically designed to discourage specialized racing vessels. There was a general preference for the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Forest and Stream, Vol. 50, May 21, 1898, p. 417.

open Canadian Canoe which was versatile enough for both a lively race and a long cruise through Algonquin Park. This kind of boat had the addition advantage of being "easily propelled by a paddle" and "with her proper sail and leeboards, and in skilful hands, she is fast under sail."<sup>5</sup>

While these new rulings were designed to revitalise canoeing, it is arguable that they aided in its decline. Canoeing never again gained the vibrancy and popularity of the late 1880's. By 1900, Forest and Stream declared:

The condition of American canoeing at the present time, as for several years past, is a peculiar one, and at the same time one which must be altered, if the sport is to prosper. There are many canoeist throughout the country, a large number of canoe clubs, most of them settled in good houses and fairly prosperous in a financial way, and there are many canoes in use. At the same time there is practically no racing and no designing nor building of new craft.<sup>6</sup>

With the new rulings regarding specialized crafts, canoeing clubs lost some of their vibrancy. Lively arguments regarding the best sailing canoe or the fastest model for a racer quickly diminished. Without these continuing discussions in sporting magazines throughout the winter months, canoeing became strictly a summer activity. The canoe coverage in Forest and Stream began to decline rapidly. In 1900 regular weekly columns on canoeing changed to a monthly feature. By the following year even this effort was dropped and canoeing was relegated to brief, periodical articles. Canoe owners began to return to cruising or recreational paddling, generally an individual pursuit. The energetic club meets of the late nineteenth century where new styles were discussed and debated and finally resolved through

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<sup>5</sup>. Forest and Steam, Vol. 51, August 20, 1898, p. 154.

<sup>6</sup>. Forest and Stream, January 6, 1900.

racing turned into summer camps.

At the same time new sports were emerging that would capture the attention of many canoeists. Years later, Edgar Dean commented that, "when bicycles came in, it meant a collapse in the canoe industry."<sup>7</sup> Forest and Stream agreed that new sports were leading to a decline in canoeing. In 1897 they reported: "The sport has had to contend with the rivalry of newer ones, with the bicycle and golf; the continued business depression has acted to reduce the club membership and to keep men from camp..."<sup>8</sup>. Bicycling had many appeals that were similar to canoeing. It was relatively cheap, and as a recreational pursuit, it appealed to both women and men and therefore represented opportunities to meet members of the opposite sex. Bicycling also allowed for even greater physical mobility than canoeing since no water was required. The two-wheeled vehicle allowed a new and exciting freedom as both a sport and a form of transportation.

Urban and club canoeing declined in the United States in the late nineteenth century but the sport remained vibrant in Canada much longer. Just as the American Canoe Association was beginning to lose some popularity, the Canadian Canoe Association was established in 1900. Up to the First World War and again in the 1920's urban canoeing and racing enjoyed a large following, and supported a number of canoe builders. Although the problems described by Forest and Stream affected canoeing on both sides of the border, the continuing popularity of canoeing in Canada indicates uniquely Canadian influences were also at work. Possibly the identification of canoeing as a national past time helped to

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7. Today, February 13, 1982.

8. Forest and Stream, Vol. 49, September 18, 1897, p. 234.

maintain the sport. Canadian nationalism was often linked with wilderness images and ideals of strong northern people surviving in a harsh climate. The open "Canadian canoe" fit right in with this mythology. Walter Dean recognized this link when he chose a vibrant autumn maple leaf for his company's logo, symbolizing wilderness and Canada (see illustration #23). Urban canoeing in Canada did not decline to any great extent until the late 1920's when exterior forces began to impact. After the First World War, when cars became more affordable and widespread they affected the appeal of canoeing in cities. Once highways were built to wilderness areas, a canoeist had far more choice of where to paddle. A highway was built through Algonquin Park in the 1930's and by 1936, the first full year of the highway's operation, over 3600 cars entered the park.<sup>9</sup> While automobile traffic declined during the gas rationing of the Second World War, the post war period saw camping and canoeing in Algonquin and other parks expand rapidly. Cars allowed canoeists the freedom to reach wilderness areas like Algonquin Park which were often more inviting to the paddler than city waters.

Along with land-based sports such as bicycling, canoeing had to contend with the development of new water sports. As Forest and Stream reported: "...the interest in all kinds of sailing and water sports is far more general now than it was twenty years ago, when canoeing came to the fore so rapidly with a host of enthusiastic followers.<sup>10</sup> Yachting and rowing had continued to grow in popularity and soon the new water sports, including

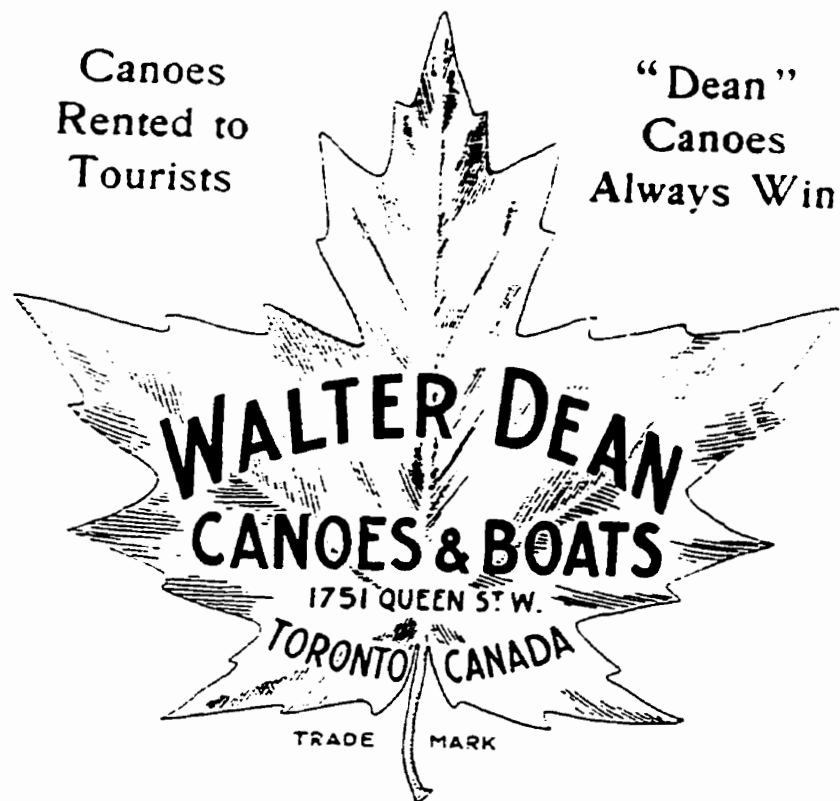
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<sup>9</sup>. Ministry of Natural Resources, A Pictorial History of Algonquin Provincial Park. (1978)

<sup>10</sup>. Ibid., Vol. 52, May 13, 1899, p. 375.



**WALTER DEAN LOGO**  
American Canoe Association, 1924



motorized boats, started to take participants away from canoeing. The Dean brothers noticed this trend at Sunnyside in the 1920's. As an experiment they offered the use of a self-propelled pleasure boat for rent. According to later correspondence at the Toronto Harbour Commission this experiment was so successful in one week that it hurt the canoe business and was stopped by Dean.<sup>11</sup> By the late 1920's motorized boats were being raced at Sunnyside while the canoe races were being relegated to special regattas like Dominion Day.

Both yachting and rowing continued to prosper while canoeing lacked the class identification of yachting and the national heroes of rowing. Yachting was clearly identified with the upper classes from an early stage of its development and maintained this connection throughout its growth by the high cost of owning a yacht. Yacht clubs in Toronto, such as the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, were associated with the leaders of business and culture within the city. As a mark of prestige and class, yachting would continue to be a rich man's sport. One of the original reasons for the popularity of canoeing was that it was not as expensive as yachting and therefore more affordable and open. This very fact meant that owning a canoe in itself was not a mark of prestige after the first novelty began to wear off. Without the class identification to maintain the sport, canoeing had to rely on grass roots popularity.

Rowing did not have the class identification of yachting, although it was associated with major universities such as Harvard and Oxford. However, being a relatively inexpensive sport it faced the same difficulty as canoeing because it was a sport open to most people.

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<sup>11</sup>. Toronto Harbour Commission, Interdepartmental Memo, December 3, 1947.

In Canada, rowing had the privileged position of having specific champions who achieved a level of hero worship. As early as 1867 four rowers from Saint John won international acclaim with their victories at the Paris Exposition. This was quickly followed by Edward (Ned) Hanlan who won 300 consecutive races all over the world in the 1870's and 1880's, gaining international recognition for Canada. Through his personal magnetism and style Ned Hanlan raised awareness of rowing and became a national hero.<sup>12</sup> While there were a number of Canadians who won races at the American Canoe Association meets in the 1880's, they never achieved the popularity or world class success of Ned Hanlan. With the exception of Francis Amyot's gold medal in the 1936 Olympics, canoeing in Canada never produced a major international champion.

Canoeing on Toronto Bay was effected by the international trend of the declining sport, and in addition, it also had to contend with particular problems on the harbour. Canoeing continued to be popular in Toronto in the early years of 1900 but during World War I there was a significant decline in boating on the bay. As George A. Dingwall wrote in the Star in 1918:

Toronto has been treating her aquatic clubs very badly of late years, and seems to be getting worse all the time, and if they keep up the way they have been doing since the new Harbour improvements started I venture to say that a few years will kill all desire to own or use a boat on Toronto Bay.<sup>13</sup>

Just as the Toronto Harbour Commission forced Walter Dean to move away from

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<sup>12</sup>. S. F. Wise and Douglas Fisher, Canada's Sporting Heroes. (Don Mills: General Publishing Company, 1974) p. 83.

<sup>13</sup>. Toronto Star. December 30, 1918.

Sunnyside, they also forced various aquatic clubs to change their sites at the western end of the harbour. Many of these clubs were later relocated in comfortable positions but during the time of relocation, many felt a drop in membership. In 1929 the Globe recounted three major reasons for the decline in paddling on the bay. The first was the war itself, "Like all other sports the most outstanding contestants served overseas. A large number never came back, and those who did return were in no condition or state of mind to resume training."<sup>14</sup> Then, "on top of the war came the harbour developments and the end of racing on Toronto Bay."<sup>15</sup> In addition to these two reasons there was the problem of the lack of a decent racing course on Toronto Harbour. Sunnyside was considered to be quite inadequate and it did not attract major championship races.<sup>16</sup> For all these reasons canoeing in Toronto continued to decline. In 1967 the old Toronto Canoe Club stopped its paddling program all together.

Wooden canoes built by craftsmen like Walter Dean became a thing of the past. The canoe builders themselves began to encounter some difficulties by the early 1900's. The scarcity of prime lumber in the east was already being felt and some canoe builders turned to the west to supply their needs.<sup>17</sup> When lumber became more scarce wooden canoes became more expensive. Like many other industries, mass production took over from the private boatbuilder. Just as the wooden canoe had superseded the bark vessel, newer

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<sup>14</sup>. Toronto Globe, May 1, 1929.

<sup>15</sup>. ibid.

<sup>16</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>. Atwood, p. 134.

materials like aluminum and fibreglass became more popular than the traditional wooden canoe. Gradually the hand built Dean originals would again become sought after -- but as collector's items rather than the latest, most fashionable model.

Many of the early reasons for the popularity of canoeing would lead to its decline. As an affordable sport canoeing never maintained a class identification. As an activity that provided for an escape from the city, canoeing on Toronto Bay was eclipsed by first the more readily usable bicycles and later cars which allowed the general populace to get much farther away than the polluted waters of Toronto Harbour. Even the link with nationalist images was reduced for the urban canoeist by the increasing possibilities for canoeing in the wilderness. Yachting continued to have an active presence on the bay but with the emergence of new aquatic sports such as motor boats and water skiing, canoeing appeared as a very tame alternative. Without the support of a specific class, or a national hero canoeing within Toronto Bay has continued to decline.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUNNYSIDE DECLINES

The heyday for Sunnyside Amusement Park was the mid to late 1920's. Shortly after that attendance at Sunnyside began to decrease. The most profitable year in terms of rent and commissions was 1929 when the Toronto Harbour Commission earned \$100,793.43<sup>1</sup> on the waterside park. However the economic depression which occurred in September of 1929 had a devastating effect. By 1932 profits had dropped by almost two thirds to a total of \$32,824.86.<sup>2</sup> Similar to the decline of canoeing on the bay, this decrease in both profits and attendance was a reflection of international trends as well as problems unique to Sunnyside.

The effect of the depression was felt on many entertainment facilities throughout North America. By 1936 the 1500 amusement parks which had been operating in the United States in 1919 had shrunk to only 500.<sup>3</sup> Parks in the United States that survived to the 1940's generally managed to recover and grew successful again. This was not the case with Sunnyside. The lack of spare cash for entertainment during the depressed years of the 1930's was only one of the reasons why Sunnyside declined from 1930 until its final closure in 1955.

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<sup>1</sup>. James O'Mara, "Shaping Urban Waterfronts: The Role of the Toronto Harbour Commissioners, 1911-1960". (York University, Department of Geography, 1976, unpublished paper) p. 41.

<sup>2</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>3</sup>. Gary Kyriazi, The Great American Amusement Parks. A Pictorial History. (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1976) p. 165.

The growth of the automobile is often cited as the main reason for the demise of Sunnyside as well as other amusement parks. There is no denying that cars opened up the countryside and made many new areas accessible to urban dwellers. Most cars were owned by city folk and after 1920 many car advertisements depicted automobiles in the country, creating the forceful image of the car as the perfect way to escape from the city to the country.<sup>4</sup> The growth of the automobile had a significant impact on Sunnyside itself because soon after the rides were demolished in 1956, Sunnyside Bridge was dismantled to make way for a western continuation of Lakeshore Boulevard. Within a few years the Gardener Expressway was constructed directly over the site of the old amusement park.

By the 1950's the desire for better roads at the south west end of the city may have been the proverbial "straw that broke the camels back" for Sunnyside but in the 1920's and 1930's automobiles provided a means for reaching the waterside park. Accessible by both streetcar and automobile, one reporter counted the cars present at Sunnyside in July of 1921,

By a process of careful "clocking" a proceeding which took over half an hour, it was found that there were exactly 827 motor cars "parked" on the boulevard driveway in the near vicinity of the water's edge. Four out of every five of these cars were being used as bathing machines, ample privacy being secured by the simple expedient of lowering the side curtains of the cars.<sup>5</sup>

The reporter went on to note that were also, "hundreds of motorcycles and bicycles, and standing amid this aggregation of "gas Wagons" was one lone horse hitched to an old

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<sup>4</sup>. Stephen James Davies, Ontario and the Automobile, 1900-1930: Aspects of Technological Integration. (PHD, McMaster University, 1987)

<sup>5</sup>. Toronto Telegram, July 6, 1921.

"Victoria".<sup>6</sup> The comment on the cars is particularly interesting, because not only were automobiles a convenient way to travel to Sunnyside, they also served a purpose once the beach was reached as changing rooms. In this sense cars were probably the best possible way of going to Sunnyside.

Later on in the decade when more of the amusements were open, photographs reveal parking lots full of cars. (see illustration #24) The easy access to the park by way of Lakeshore Boulevard encouraged this means of reaching the park. On busy days the traffic congestion in the area often required the assistance of a traffic warden from the Police Force. The introduction of automobiles as a means of transportation does not appear to have affected either the growth or the popularity of Sunnyside Amusement Park. If anything, the waterside park appears to have benefited from the automobile, at least initially.

It was only much later in the post war years, when Toronto began to expand away from the lake in a northern direction as well as out to both the east and the west that cars posed a threat to Sunnyside. The congestion along Lakeshore became a real problem and the idea of building a superhighway to cut across the southern end of the city from east to west was first recommended in 1948. By this point Sunnyside was already a doomed park for reasons that are not directly related to the automobile.

The key events and circumstances that led to the decline of Sunnyside Amusement Park happened in the 1930's. The depression had a massive economic impact on the entertainment industry as a whole but there was also a shift in leisure activities during this

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<sup>6</sup>. Ibid.



SUNNYSIDE AMUSEMENT PARK, LOOKING NORTH WEST, c. 1928  
Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, T10032



crucial decade. For example, listening to the radio, grew in popularity as sets became less and less expensive. By the late 1920's radio shows began to have massive audiences. In 1921-2, only 1,226 Canadians reported receiving radio licences. By 1931 this number had increased to 763,446.<sup>7</sup> In addition large urban areas tended to have more radio listeners than rural areas. In 1931, there were 106.16 radio set per 1,000 people in Ontario as a whole, where as in the large urban areas of Ontario, such as Toronto there were 120.41 radio sets per 1,000 people. While the depression ensured that many forms of entertainment would be unaffordable, the radio was an accessible and popular alternative.

Within Sunnyside Amusement Park circumstances combined to ensure that the waterside park would never recovered from the depression in the 1930's. In order for amusements parks to maintain their public appeal they needed to be constantly upgraded and not allowed to fade.<sup>8</sup> By 1932 Sunnyside Amusement Park was in need of an overhaul. In October of that year, E. L. Cousins the engineer for the Toronto Harbour Commission had warned the Commissioners that parks like Coney Island had found they needed to be revamped every five years to keep the customers coming back.<sup>9</sup> The Toronto Harbour Commission decided to ignore his warning and throughout the 1930's no substantial work was done at the park. By the time the second World War ended Sunnyside was looking old and faded and had no new attractions to entice visitors. It was an easy target for the City's Planning Committee who were beginning to look at options for new highways in the city.

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<sup>7</sup>. Vipond, Mary, Listening In. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992.) p. 36.

<sup>8</sup>. Al Griffin, "Step Right UP, Folk!". (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1974) p. 19.

<sup>9</sup>. O'Mara, p. 47.

The decreasing popularity of Sunnyside represents a move away from waterfront recreation in Toronto. Of all the amusement parks on the waterfront only the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) survived. But even in the case of the CNE the focus on waterfront activities such as swimming and various boating competitions shifted. There are no more docks for steamships to deliver visitors and the grounds have become physically separated from the lake by the increasingly busy Lakeshore Boulevard. Instead of lining the shores to watch steam tugs race, thousands of people began going to the CNE to look up at the air show, and shop for bargains in the various buildings on the grounds. After the Second World War both the Better Living Building and Sportsplex were built to accommodate more shopping areas. Instead of concentrating on exhibits, demonstrations and lakefront parkland the "EX" has become a commercial enterprise known for the midway and shopping -- both land based activities.

It would not be until the 1970's that the harbour would once again be viewed as a recreational resource. In that decade Ontario Place would be established on reclaimed land along the bay and the redevelopment of Harbourfront would begin. However Toronto would not have an amusement park on the scale of Sunnyside until Canada's Wonderland opened in the early 1980's. This park was very different from Sunnyside. Located far to the north of the bay and even north of the city boundary, Canada's Wonderland is one of the new generation of amusement parks like Disney Land which attempts to provide a full fantasy experience.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

The popularity of both canoeing and Sunnyside Amusement Park in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century illustrate a Toronto society that looked to the waterfront for a release from the noisy constraints of the city. But, at Sunnyside and along the Toronto Harbour as a whole, nature was carefully disciplined by culture. Bathing beaches were segregated, modes of dress were established, umbrellas and chairs marked out furnished territorial areas, canoe courses were controlled and even the recreational canoeist remained under the watchful eyes of the Life Saving and Police Patrol. The water of the lake itself was carefully controlled by an expensive breakwater. Wave action and free movement of nature was only allowed outside the limits of popular recreation.

However, by the 1930's, Torontonians were finding ways of visiting the wilderness that lay beyond the control of the civilizing influences of city culture. Algonquin Park may have had a road and hiking trails but wildlife still roamed free and much of the park was isolated and secluded from the eyes of the wardens. As long as campers were prepared to respect this wilderness, it was left much in its natural state. The desire for the revitalizing and nurturing qualities attributed to a visit in the natural world remained powerful. No longer was Toronto Bay the best or even the most accessible method of reaching the wilderness. It is possible that the more the Toronto Harbour Commission sought to control and discipline the recreational areas, the more they lost their appeal. The harbour was no longer

a natural world. Instead, it had many of the same controlling influences as the rest of the city. Nature was sought outside the city limits.

Historian Allan Metcalfe has suggested that, "the history of sport to 1914 affords concrete support to the contention that upper and middle-class Canadians tend to turn to British models in both games and ideology while the working class turned to the United States."<sup>1</sup> Canoeing, an upper and middle class sport in the early twentieth century, was clearly imported from Britain. The ethnic origin for the seaside amusement park is more difficult to trace. Britain sported many seaside resorts such as Blackpool, Brighton and Scarborough which were separated from the large urban areas. These locations were an escape from the city for a holiday -- sometimes for a day, but often for a longer period of time. The model for Sunnyside, a large urban waterside amusement park seems to originate in the United States. The inspiration for Sunnyside appears to have originated when a group of American businessmen approached the Toronto Harbour Commission with the idea of an amusement park. The Commissioners responded by developing the park themselves rather than allowing the American entrepreneurs free reign. The point remains that Sunnyside, which largely appealed to the growing middle class and the working class, was based on American experience with a distinct Canadian twist.

Unlike Coney Island in New York, Sunnyside was owned and operated for government profit. The Toronto Harbour Commission was a government appointed body responsible for many of the civilizing restrictions apparent at Sunnyside. Every amusement devise, game of chance or concession had to be approved by the commissioners. They

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<sup>1</sup>. Metcalfe, p. 31.

controlled the activities and the very look of the park. In July of 1927 they even refused to allow Pleasure Boats to install an electric sign. By controlling the exterior look and the activities available, the commission was able to present a wholesome image and create a wholesome atmosphere for their park. The entrepreneurial nature of other parks such as Coney Island may have led to a freer atmosphere. Certainly, for much of its history, Coney Island had a shady reputation as a place for thieves and con artists, as well as freak show, exotic dancers and other "tasteless" activities. Sunnyside, in contrast to the American park, offered safe fun, decent entertainment, and a family atmosphere in keeping with the palatial structures approved by the highly respected and powerful Toronto Harbour Commission. The influence of this particular government body that could create prime land through lakefill and impose cultural strictures on a natural environment can not be denied. The Commission controlled both the physical shape of the harbour and the way it would be used for entertainment. From the enthusiastic response of the media, it is apparent that citizens of Toronto were pleased with the waterside park. It provided needed recreational facilities and met their moral standards.

Victorian Toronto enjoyed the midway and boardwalk at Sunnyside and it responded enthusiastically to local sporting competitions. Various community groups and clubs within the city provided teams for ladies soft ball or war canoe races on the harbour. Often named after areas of the city, the Parkdale Canoe Club, the Beaches Canoe Club, the Island Aquatic Club and the Humber Bay Aquatic Association represented neighbourhoods and indicate a sense of identity with smaller areas within the city. While these clubs fostered competition between local communities, Sunnyside acted as a medium for bringing these

groups together. Sunnyside was "Toronto's Lake Shore Playground", where all of Toronto could celebrate the Miss Toronto beauty pageant or the rowing prowess of local boy, Joe Wright. As the city grew and annexed various new territories Sunnyside helped citizens to identify themselves as Torontonians, creating a metropolitan image.

The emphasis on waterfront recreation shifted as the city grew away from the lake and technological changes such as automobiles made the northern wilderness more accessible for recreation. With the decline of the waterside amusement parks and a lessening of commercial development on the harbour, the focus of the city turned away from the lake. Instead of looking down Bay Street residents looked north up Bay Street towards the financial centre of the city.

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