

## "The Heritage of the People Closed Against Them:" Class, Environment, and the Shaping of Burlington Beach, 1870s–1980s

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### Résumé de l'article

À la suite des graves inondations qui ont touché le secteur de Burlington Beach dans les années soixante-dix, les politiciens et les planificateurs de la ville de Hamilton, Ontario ont essayé de le transformer en espace vert à vocation récréative. Il s'agissait là d'un vieux rêve. Un siècle plus tôt, les leaders sociaux et politiques de Hamilton avaient déjà songé à transformer en zone récréative ce secteur aux plages magnifiques en bordure du lac et sa baie aux rivages pittoresques. Dans les années 1870, ils prirent donc délibérément le contrôle de cette petite communauté de pêcheurs et de fermiers, prétextant que le secteur devait être préservé « pour la santé et le bien-être des gens ». Les gens en question s'avèrent être des résidents aisés désireux de profiter d'un refuge estival privé, à l'abri de la chaleur, de la poussière et des habitants d'une ville en voie d'industrialisation. En moins d'une génération toutefois, des citoyens aux moyens plus modestes contestèrent « l'isolement aristocratique » de la plage et luttèrent avec succès pour faire aménager des plages et des parcs accessibles à un plus vaste public. Leur victoire fut cependant de courte durée. Une génération plus tard, la bande de plage avait cessé d'être une zone récréative attrayante. Y voyant un site propre à la construction d'habitations relativement bon marché, la classe ouvrière de Hamilton contribua à l'expansion de la communauté domiciliaire privée et, du même coup, à la création de cette communauté singulière qui allait contrecarrer les plans de la nouvelle génération de promoteurs de projets à vocation récréative qui s'y intéressa dans les années 1970. Ayant hérité des droits et revendications sur la propriété privée entretenus par les politiciens de la ville depuis les années 1870, les résidents de la communauté forcèrent les politiciens et les planificateurs des années 1970 et 1980 à considérer la bande de plage sous un angle nouveau.

Cet article retrace la lutte des groupes sociaux en vue d'édifier et de mettre en œuvre leur vision de la plage, lutte qui a à son tour été modelée par le développement urbain et industriel particulier de la région de Hamilton entre 1870 et les années 1980. Les perceptions des groupes sociaux relativement à la plage et aux fins auxquelles elle pouvait servir ont été influencées par la transformation environnementale de cette bande de terre et la dégradation des eaux limitrophes. Son histoire donne un aperçu de l'interaction entre loisirs, classe sociale et environnement dans une ville industrielle.

# ***“The Heritage of the People Closed Against Them:” Class, Environment, and the Shaping of Burlington Beach, 1870s–1980s***

**Ken Cruikshank and Nancy B. Bouchier**

## **Abstract**

*Following serious flooding in the 1970s, Hamilton, Ontario politicians and planners sought to transform the Burlington Beach area into a recreational parkland. This dream was not a new one. One hundred years earlier, Hamilton social and political leaders also had envisioned the area, with its fine lakeside beaches and scenic bayside shoreline, as a recreational area. In the 1870s they consciously took control of this small fishing and farming community, contending that the area should be preserved for “the health and welfare of the people.” The people, it turned out, were well-to-do residents eager to create a private summer refuge from the heat, dirt, and people of an industrializing city. Within a generation, however, city residents of more modest means challenged “the aristocratic seclusion” of the beach, and successfully struggled to create beaches and parks that would be open to a wider public. Not for long. Within another generation, the beach strip ceased to be an attractive recreational area. Working Hamiltonians saw it as a site for relatively inexpensive housing, and expanded the private residential community. They helped to build the unique community that would frustrate a new generation of recreational promoters in the 1970s. Residents of the community had inherited the private property claims and rights that city politicians had fostered in the area since the 1870s, and forced politicians and planners of the 1970s and 1980s to adopt an alternative vision of the beach strip.*

*This paper traces the struggle of social groups to create and enforce their vision of the beach, a struggle that was in turn shaped by the particular urban and industrial development of the Hamilton region between the 1870s and 1980s. The environmental transformation of this strip of land, and the degradation of the waters surrounding it, affected the ways in which social groups perceived the beach and the purposes it might serve. Its history provides insights into the interaction of leisure, class, and the environment in an industrial city.*

## **Résumé**

*À la suite des graves inondations qui ont touché le secteur de Burlington Beach dans les années soixante-dix, les politiciens et les planificateurs de la ville de Hamilton, Ontario ont essayé de le transformer en espace vert à vocation récréative. Il s'agissait là d'un vieux rêve. Un siècle plus tôt, les leaders sociaux et politiques de Hamilton avaient déjà songé à transformer en zone récréative ce secteur aux plages magnifiques en bordure du lac et sa baie aux rivages pittoresques. Dans les années 1870, ils prirent donc délibérément le contrôle de cette petite communauté de pêcheurs et de fermiers, prétextant que le secteur devait être préservé « pour la santé et le bien-être des gens ». Les gens en*

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In 1973, flooding from Lake Ontario severely damaged homes in certain areas of the Burlington Beach, Ontario, a narrow strip of land separating the lake and Hamilton's bay and lying under the Burlington Skyway Bridge portion of the Queen Elizabeth Way.<sup>1</sup> Many of the homes were winterized cottages that local building authorities had long considered to have poor structural quality and bad septic systems.<sup>2</sup> Hamilton health authorities concurred, condemning many flood-damaged homes. Believing the area to be unsuitable for a residential community, Hamilton's city council sought to transform the beach strip into a large public recreational area to serve the region. The flood provided them with an opportunity to pursue their vision, as many owners of water-damaged homes south of the Burlington canal sought financial help from the local government.<sup>3</sup> Municipal authorities encouraged residents to sell their homes, and planned to raze the buildings to make way for parkland.

Plans to transform the beach strip into a recreational playground proved more contentious than Hamilton politicians and planners expected. Some beach residents, like members of the

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Hamilton Beach Protective Association, wanted to stay put and fought to save their community. They lobbied politicians and supported research to buttress their case against its destruction. Ultimately their efforts led Hamilton politicians to reverse their long-term plans for the area. Many Hamiltonians sympathized with the homeowners' plight, criticizing the plans to create public space at the expense of people's homes. Others argued that the recreational interests of the general public were more important than any individual's private interest. An editor from the *Spectator* held this view and questioned the wisdom of the local government caving in to public pressure, asking whether the council knew what it was doing and wondering whether this "sudden leap in the dark hasn't landed them in a very expensive muddle."<sup>4</sup> Hamilton politicians and planners learned an important lesson from the muddle: they began to work with homeowners and local businesses to establish recreational areas on the beach strip, while maintaining, rather than removing, the residential community. The properties acquired by Hamilton for park development remained vacant lots for years, and are now being sold to private individuals.<sup>5</sup>

The dream of transforming the beach strip into a recreational playground was not a new one. One hundred years earlier, Hamilton social and political leaders also envisioned the area, with its fine lakeside beaches and scenic bayside shoreline, as a recreational area. In the 1870s they consciously took control of this small fishing and farming community, contending that the area should be preserved for "the health and welfare of the people." Initially, *the people*, it turned out, were well-to-do residents eager to create a private summer refuge from the heat, dirt, and people of an industrializing city. Within a generation, however, city residents of more modest means challenged "the aristocratic seclusion" of the beach, and struggled to create beaches and parks that would be open to a wider public. Their struggle received support from the Canadian town planner and city beautifier Noulan Cauchon in his *1917 Reconnaissance Report on the Development of Hamilton*.<sup>6</sup> Cauchon considered the beach strip to be one of Hamilton's "jewels in the gift of nature awaiting acknowledgement by the hand of man."<sup>7</sup> Not for long. Within another generation, the beach strip ceased to be an attractive recreational area. Working-class Hamiltonians saw it as a site for relatively inexpensive housing, and expanded the private residential community. They helped to build the unique community that would frustrate a new generation of recreational promoters in the 1970s and 1980s.

The history of the Burlington Beach Strip underlines the contingent and contested nature of urban space, and the social contradictions of urban growth. This unique geographical area has at all times been a complex "multi-coded space," holding quite different meanings and purposes for different social groups.<sup>8</sup> This paper traces the struggle of various social groups to create and enforce their vision of the beach, a struggle that was in turn shaped by the particular urban and industrial development of the Hamilton region between the 1870s and 1980s. The environmental transformation of this strip of land, and the degradation of the waters surrounding it, affected the ways in which social groups perceived the beach and the purposes it might serve. Its

history provides insights into the interaction of leisure, class, and the environment in an industrial city.

### *"The Heritage of the People . . ."*

In the summer of 1828, people like the English travel writer Basil Hall encountered the Burlington Beach Strip while travelling between Niagara Falls and Toronto, or York as it was then known. Hall's travels led him along a rather crude road that took full advantage of the four-mile narrow strip of land stretching across the extreme western end of Lake Ontario, separating it from a large bay. It had been surveyed in 1791 as a strategic route between the Niagara peninsula and York after the British government had purchased the beach from the Mississauga people. Hall described this "most extraordinary thing" at some length:

This very singular embankment is . . . nearly straight and rises about 12 or 15 feet above the level of the lake. It varies from 40 to 100 yards in width and is formed entirely of sand, and covered with Oaks. This grand pier, or spit, or key, is called the Beach . . . Within it lies a large harbor, five or six miles across and carrying 15 fathoms water in the middle.<sup>9</sup>

At the time, the harbor and the lake were connected by a short canal constructed to replace a natural channel. The newly built Burlington Canal, in combination with a more extensive one at the western end of the bay, the Desjardins Canal, opened inland mill towns to shipping on the Great Lakes waterways.

When Basil Hall visited the area a small community had already begun to emerge on the beach strip.<sup>10</sup> At a time when Lake Ontario still teemed with herring, whitefish, trout and salmon, it provided an excellent base for small fishing stations situated along its sandy shores. Its bay-shore side also held rich soils for gardening along warm waters. By the mid-1840s, beach-strip squatters supported themselves through fishing and market gardening, as well as providing hospitality for travellers. Across the bay's waters on its southern shore lay the town of Hamilton, which became a substantial market for the beach community's fish and produce. It emerged as the main population centre of the region, growing from a small settlement in the 1830s and 1840s to become one of the province's most important commercial port and railway centres.<sup>11</sup> Its waterfront space had ample wharf facilities for storage and outfitting and its busy harbour made Hamilton a key distribution centre for Lake Ontario.<sup>12</sup> By 1860, the city was home to a sizable population of some 20,000 people.

A community of squatters populated the small fishing and market gardening community on the beach. Residents had worked out their own system of property rights — although they lacked formal legal title to the land.<sup>13</sup> By the late 1850s a market had developed for their fishing-station rights. The price of occupancy was thought to be about \$200 but the community resisted efforts by the province to formalize land and fishing titles, refusing to pay more than \$10 for 21-year leases from the government. The community could not sustain this resistance, however, and by the mid-1860s, fishers paid between \$30 and \$500 for the right to fish. Various squatters also negotiated legal rec-

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ognition of their land claims, although in some cases their claims were under dispute for decades to come.<sup>14</sup> In 1871, some 25–30 households held about one acre of land each, making up a permanent beach strip population.<sup>15</sup> Fish and market-garden products, mostly for sale in the city of Hamilton, would continue to provide an important if declining economic basis for this core community through much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>16</sup>

With the rise of the industrial city, Hamilton residents began to see the beach strip community as more than a source of fish and produce; they looked to it as a summer recreation destination. Small steamers, like the *Victoria*, travelled between Hamilton and “resorts” like the Burlington Beach Garden Pleasure Grounds two to three times daily over the 24th of May weekend. Other small steamers made regular trips throughout the summer season between Hamilton, the beach, and the north shore of Burlington Bay, prompting the editor of the *Spectator* to report in 1860 with some satisfaction, “There is no lack of pleasure resorts this summer in the neighbourhood of the ambitious city.”<sup>17</sup> The beach attracted those who were interested in sport fishing and boating, or who were simply anxious to escape the heat of the city. An estimated 1500 to 2000 people visited the beach during the August civic holiday weekend in 1865, many of them simply looking for a cool picnic spot under the shade of the oak and willow trees.<sup>18</sup> At the time the small beach community boasted five hotels and taverns to serve many travellers and summertime tourists, like the employees of Hamilton industrialists on company picnic excursions.<sup>19</sup>

Soon railway promoters began to eye the beach strip, valuing it as part of a direct route between Toronto, Hamilton, the Niagara peninsula, and Georgian Bay. It also held promise as a recreational site for railway tourists—something that concerned some Hamilton political leaders who feared what railway development and land speculation might mean to the area. In 1871, a local Member of the Legislative Assembly, James Williams, helped block the sale of Crown Land on the beach to a private individual, petitioning the provincial government to give the city of Hamilton control over all unclaimed land on the beach strip. Williams justified having the city claim land that lay in a neighbouring township some distance from its limits, on the grounds that “it is important for the health and welfare of the people to possess a place of this description where they may enjoy the fresh air from the lake breezes.”<sup>20</sup> The province concurred, granting an order in council which permitted Hamilton to lease unclaimed lands on the Burlington Beach for a nominal annual payment of one dollar, “as a place of recreation for the whole people.”<sup>21</sup> Hamilton’s parks committee would administer the beach, although neighbouring Saltfleet Township would continue to collect taxes from beach residents.<sup>22</sup>

### **“. . . Closed Against Them”**

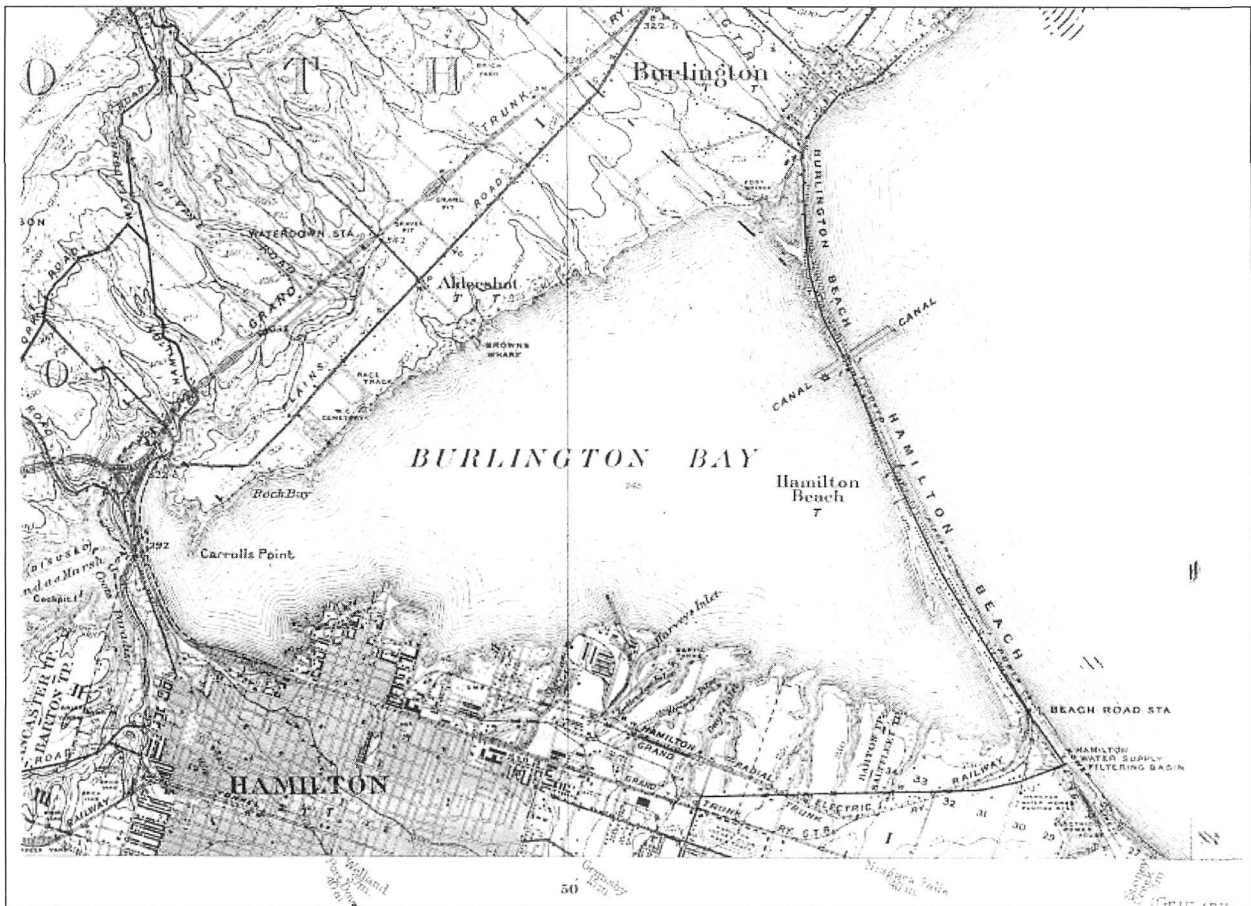
In the late spring of 1874, the ever-vigilant keeper of the lighthouse at the Burlington canal, Captain George Thompson, whose voluminous diaries recorded all manners of beach strip happenings, recorded for posterity the invasion of the area by two groups of land surveyors.<sup>23</sup> One surveying party plotted the line along the beach strip for a railway connecting Hamilton to the port of

Collingwood on Georgian Bay. The completion of the Hamilton and North Western Railway two years later would provide an alternative to steamers for those residents interested in travelling around the bay from Hamilton to get to the beach (Figure 1). Within a decade, this railway’s summer timetable sent seven trains to the beach strip six days a week, with two trains on the Sabbath.<sup>24</sup> The second surveying party represented the city of Hamilton, which had acquired control of all vacant Crown Land in the name of recreation for its people. Just what that meant in practical terms soon became evident. The surveyed lots were sold at an auction to individuals who then subleased the land for \$10 annually. Revenues from the annual rent, purchasers were assured, would be spent on the further development of the beach. The leasing arrangement ensured that the city would have money to spend on the area, since it was denied the right to collect other taxes from the residents. Thompson’s successor as lighthouse keeper, Captain Thomas Campbell who began the job in 1875, later reflected sadly on the significance of the city’s policy:

This was the first wall erected to keep out the public and confine the benefits of the beach and lake breezes to the favoured few, the pets of fortune, who were able to secure a lot. The very best of it was sold off and the public were deprived of the free use of the beach.<sup>25</sup>

Like Thompson, Captain Campbell kept a close watch on beach strip happenings, astutely identifying changes in the area’s social character and recording his own history of the place in a series of articles in 1899 published in the *Burlington Gazette*. The place had indeed changed. In 1892, some five hundred people could be found camping along the side of the lake north of the canal. The place “has within itself all the requisites of a jolly good time,” mused a reporter from the *Hamilton Herald*, as he described the arrangement of the number of families housed in sixty-five large tents, each of them fitting some six to eight people. Some of those “roughing it” were housed in canvas-covered structures with wooden frames. The description of the makeshift kitchens and cooking stoves that the campers had constructed suggests that they weren’t entirely without amenities for making life easier.<sup>26</sup> While the paper suggested that “all sorts of citizens are indulging in the luxury of loafing around and lying in the sand,” on closer inspection the names of people identified in the newspaper report suggest that the campers were members of Hamilton’s more affluent citizenry. They came from families headed by men with managerial and professional occupations.<sup>27</sup> A little steamer transported them back and forth between the beach and the city, making sure that the commuters got to their offices on time. By 6 p.m. they returned to the strip in time for a family supper. A few of the encampments, especially those toward the end of the strip on the side of the lake across from the Brant Inlet, were described as “bachelor roosts.” There, in an encampment called *Annie Roonie*, young men like Masters Willie Southam and St. Clair Balfour Jr could lead a devil-may-care existence away from the prying eyes of their wealthy and successful fathers—one the publisher of the *Spectator* and the other a prominent Hamilton grocer.

## *Shaping of Burlington Beach, 1870s–1980s*



**Figure 1:** *Map of Burlington Bay (Hamilton Harbour), 1909, showing the rail lines connecting the beach and the city of Hamilton. Sources: Canada. Department of Militia and Defense, Geographical Section, General Staff, No 2197. Topographic Map. Ontario. Hamilton Sheet, No. 33, 1907-1909. 1:63360*

Not all Hamiltonians spending their summers on the beach strip, however, occupied such quarters or were inclined toward such affectations of life in rustic surroundings. Between 1875 and 1900, many members of Hamilton’s social elite constructed grand summer homes on the beach, a few of which still stand today. A land assessment roll from 1890 provides some idea about twenty-four of the summer resort properties found south of the canal. Whereas the average permanent beach resident owned 1/2 acre of land valued at \$400, the average summer resident owned only half that space but it was assessed at nearly double the amount.<sup>28</sup> In 1900, some thirty-five Hamilton households included in the city’s exclusive *Blue Book* social directory listed their homes on the beach strip as their summer residences — more than half of all the summer places listed for Hamiltonians in the book.<sup>29</sup> In June 1895, the *Spectator* identified holders of summer homes on the beach strip both north and south of the canal.<sup>30</sup> Some thirty of them belonged to members of Hamilton’s entrepreneurial, managerial and professional classes. The smaller community north of the canal where the tent colony had existed was more mixed in nature, including

some clerks and craftsman, although nearly half of the homes were also owned by members of Hamilton’s social elite.

By the close of the nineteenth century, Hamilton city council’s decision to auction beach strip land had thus helped create a recreational suburb available primarily to that city’s social elite. As in other British and North American cities, political, legal, medical, and business leaders sought refuge from the dirt, pollution, and disease of the city during the hot summer months, creating borderland communities along the water or out in the country. Hamilton’s social elite inherited a well-established tradition, one that has been described brilliantly by historian John R. Stilgoe in his work on borderlands.<sup>31</sup> In the early nineteenth century, British and American tracts advocated summer residences for urban families outside of the industrial and commercial city, “beyond the effluvia of smoke and mud.”<sup>32</sup> They hoped to counter the sedentary nature of middle and upper-class work not through strenuous farm work, but with pure air and places to ramble. The beach provided an ideal “breathing place of tired citizens of Hamilton” between the 1870s and 1890s, since it was just a short train or steamboat ride from the city. It featured the

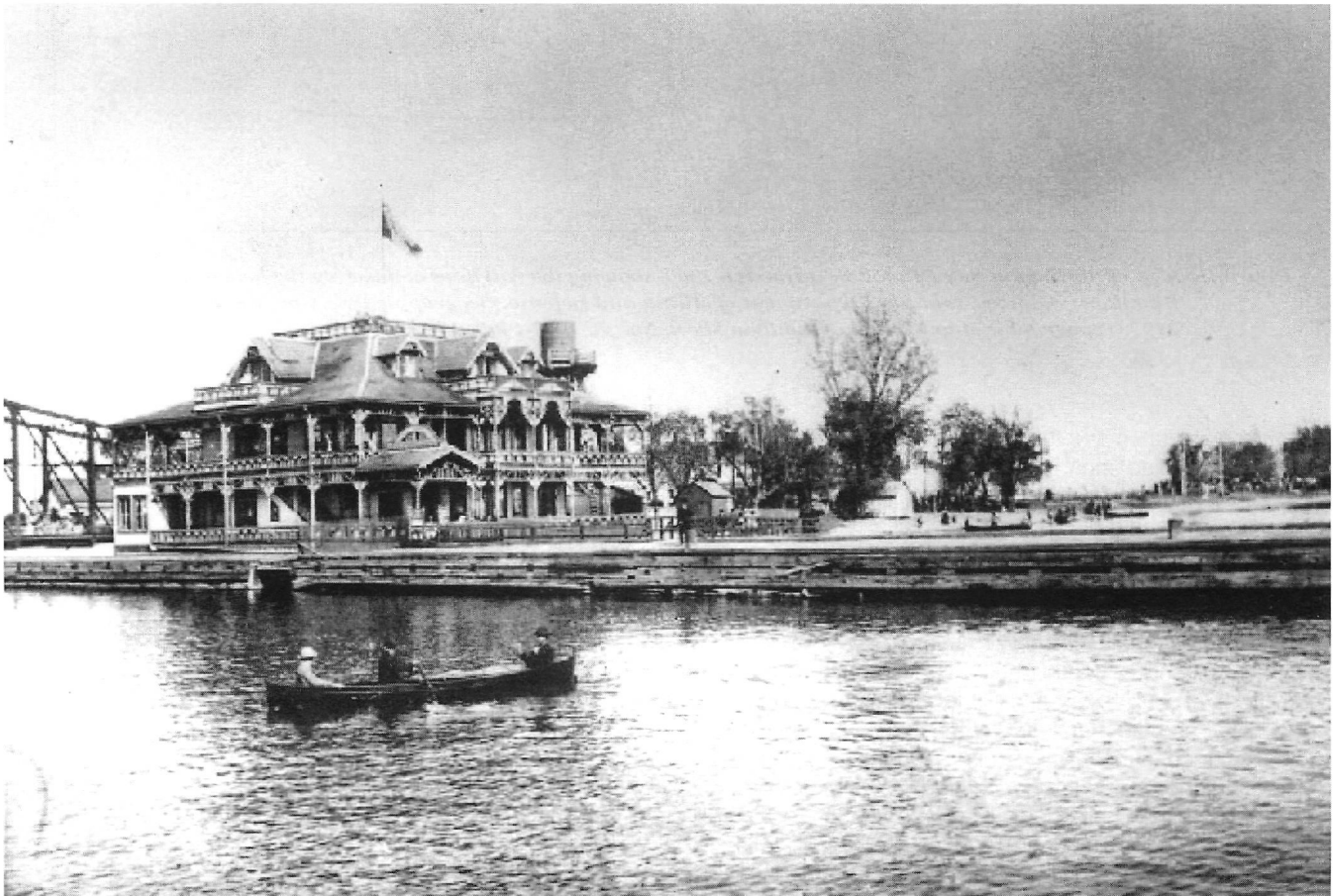
## *Shaping of Burlington Beach, 1870s–1980s*

“invigorating breezes” of Lake Ontario, the protected, warmer waters of Burlington Bay, and soils suitable for “numerous garden plots of flowers and grass lawns.”<sup>33</sup>

Unlike many suburban retreats elsewhere, Hamilton’s local government played an active role in promoting this recreational area. Its municipal politicians acted to prevent any individual from speculating on the beach land, or developing it in ways they might not approve. Crown ownership — or what Canadian historian H. V. Nelles terms Canada’s “frontier of monarchy” — permitted the local state to intervene on behalf of an amorphous public interest.<sup>34</sup> Although providing the foundation for the creation of public recreational space, the city government promptly privatized important segments of this space. Private individuals — the social peers of most city politicians and indeed some of the politicians themselves — acquired access to and control over the beach “for a song.”<sup>35</sup> Bylaws and revenues derived from the leases were used to ensure the area would be an attractive summer resort. In the 1870s and 1880s, for example, the city’s parks committee planted and maintained shade trees along the beach strip. In 1885, at the request of influential sum-

mer residents, the committee acted to prevent the construction of bathhouses that would “interfere materially with the enjoyment of the Beach promenading.”<sup>36</sup>

Apart from the often ornate summer residences, two buildings symbolized the social transformation of the beach community as an elite enclave between the 1870s and 1890s. In 1875, a luxurious resort hotel, the Ocean house, was built where the old Baldry tavern and hostelry had burnt to the ground a year before.<sup>37</sup> It provided a social centre for the beach just south of the canal piers on the bay. To those travellers who could afford its high rates, the elaborate three-storey building offered large, airy, and well-furnished rooms, excellent dining facilities, and impressive views from its wraparound second-storey balcony. Within a few years, the resort also featured various recreational facilities, including a bowling alley, a billiards room, a ballroom, and a bar. In 1892 its opulence would be exceeded by the new clubhouse for the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club (RHYC), built next door in a prime bayside location at the canal.<sup>38</sup> This “gem of a building” offered its socially restricted membership all the amenities of club life (Figure 2). To the general public, it was both con-



**Figure 2:** *Aristocratic seclusion: the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club with boaters in the Burlington canal.* Source: Andrew Merrilees Collection, National Archives of Canada. PA 193352.

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spacious and inaccessible. A roofed gangway covered the entrance to the canal pier. Wide galleries wrapped around the building's first two stories, providing members with a magnificent view of both the lake and the bay. Inside, the place had all the amenities of the good life: marble wash stands, a banquet hall for fine dining with an exquisite carved oak mantel and glazed tile hearth, and game rooms for whist, chess, and other such sedate entertainments. The Ocean House and the RHYC each helped set the tone of the beach as a fashionable resort community (Figure 3), bringing to the beach what Hamilton's populist newspaper, the *Herald*, dryly termed "sassiety."<sup>39</sup>

Much was done by Hamilton politicians to pander to the social and aesthetic tastes of those who frequented these places. In 1895, three city officials convinced the federal government to remove all unnecessary buildings on the land it controlled around the Burlington canal where the Ocean House and RHYC were located. As a result, it ordered the removal of a number of small stands, including a number of popular amusement facilities — the photograph gallery, a candy shop, and an ice cream booth — along with a boathouse and an ice house.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, swimming in the canal and camping on the canal lands were outlawed. While the canal lands remained open to the general public, these limitations therefore represented efforts to define the type of recreational use of the lands. As a writer from the *Spectator* noted approvingly,

the beach is now beginning to be what it can and ought to be, a well-planned, well-laid out summer resort, in every way restful to the mind, body and eye.<sup>41</sup>

To make the beach community conform to their vision of an orderly recreational space, city politicians and local officials worked with the provincial commissioner of crown lands to firmly secure the city's claims to the land. Throughout the spring of 1895, the commissioner resolved a series of disputes still outstanding over the exact claims of the original inhabitants of the beach community. A newspaper headline captured the result of these cases: "More Land For The City: Squatters Compelled To Give Up Property On The Beach."<sup>42</sup> While the property rights of the squatters were recognized, the city's solicitor (who also leased a summer residence on the beach) convinced the commissioner of crown lands to restrict the extent of their claims.<sup>43</sup> By the summer of 1895, the city of Hamilton had formal control over about one-third of the total land area of the beach strip and of the land it controlled, about one-fifth already had been leased to private individuals. Other parts of the city's land had been devoted to six short avenues running between the central beach road and the lake. These landscaped avenues would allow for further property development while ensuring that those who had built summer residences would continue to be able to reach the lake. Hamilton's parks committee also retained some property, to establish the kind of orderly and restful parks that it was working to create on the canal lands.

In spite of the city's commitment to retaining accessible public space, some observers shared the opinion of lighthouse keeper Captain Campbell that the city had failed to seize the opportunity



**Figure 3: Aristocratic seclusion: Hamilton Souvenir Calendar, 1907, featuring the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club and yachts, symbols of the socially exclusive beach strip recreational area. Source: Albertype Company Collection, National Archives of Canada, PA 032130**

offered by public control of the beach. In an angry letter to the editor in the local press, "Rustic" captured some of this criticism:

The beach was leased to the city in the interest of the public, but the city at once sold and shut the public out of the most desirable part. Those who remember the beach in the time of the Baldry hostelry, when the public were free to roam wherever they chose over that part of the beach, know that nothing can undo the mischief the city has done in ruining and closing forever what might have been one of the most desirable parks in Ontario. Talk of "great improvements made!" Talk rather of the heritage of the people closed against them.<sup>44</sup>

### **"Vulgar Invaders" and "Aristocratic Seclusion"**

Two debates at the turn of the century, over the proposed annexation of the beach by Hamilton and over the construction of an electric railway across the sand strip, suggest just how anxious resort owners were to construct an exclusive area. As a result of these debates, the editor of the *Hamilton Spectator*,

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whose paper had voiced support for the improvements to the beach, concluded that the interests of private summer residents and the wider public did not, as he seemed to have previously assumed, necessarily coincide. “The people of Hamilton want a beautiful summer spot,” observed the paper late in the summer of 1895, “while beach residents want to keep the vulgar invaders from the city from their sacred soil . . . They want aristocratic seclusion.”<sup>45</sup> From the 1890s to World War I, the beach “aristocrats” and “vulgar invaders” struggled to define the character of the area (Figure 4).

The annexation debate began in the summer of 1895, following a dramatic fire that destroyed the Ocean House resort in July of that year.<sup>46</sup> Alarmed by the absence of fire fighting facilities, one summertime beach resident, George S. Papps, circulated a petition in favour of having the beach community join the city of Hamilton. The proposal, as observers quickly noted, showed that Papps, a prominent Hamilton lawyer, and other beach summertime residents were “quite able to look out for number one.” Beach residents were not to assume any of the debts of the city nor its taxation rate, but were to pay only those taxes necessary to pay for the construction and maintenance of roads, sidewalks, streetlights, and firefighting, as well as sanitary facilities for the beach community itself. Further, Papps proposed that the city pay a frontage tax on all of its land, to help pay the interest on the cost of a waterworks system for beach residents. The petition noted in particular that property holders should not have to pay taxes to support the development of public parks or other facilities intended to benefit Hamilton visitors to the beach. Perhaps understandably, residents who already paid taxes on their other properties in the city of Hamilton, sought to restrict any tax increases that would result from seeking modern facilities for their summer properties.<sup>47</sup>

City politicians willingly considered the proposal to annex the beach. Some pointed out that the city had worked to turn the beach into a prosperous recreational area, yet the resulting increase in its land values — and therefore in property taxes — benefited the township of Saltfleet, not Hamilton. The city solicitor noted that the city had spent more than \$3000 on the beach in 1894 and 1895, far more than the \$600 it received from leases, and far more than was spent by the township of Saltfleet, which collected its property taxes. Hamilton city councillors approved the basic principles of Papps’ annexation proposal, although they tried to retain greater control for the city. The resulting provincial legislation collapsed, however, in the face of sustained opposition from the township of Saltfleet, as well as most permanent and summer residents on the beach, including eventually Papps himself. Even Papps’ more generous proposal had been opposed by some members of the community. These opponents were joined by others, who feared both immediate tax increases and the possible loss of control over the future development of the area. Beach residents decided to do without city services, rather than end up paying for public improvements “for the benefit of nonresidents or visitors from the city,” which they believed would be of no real advantage to themselves.<sup>48</sup>

When the residents opposed what seemed a more than generous annexation proposal, the *Spectator* suspected that they simply feared making the beach more accessible to the public. The newspaper expressed disgust at the petition’s stance that the strip’s sandy soil made it suitable only for summer residences:

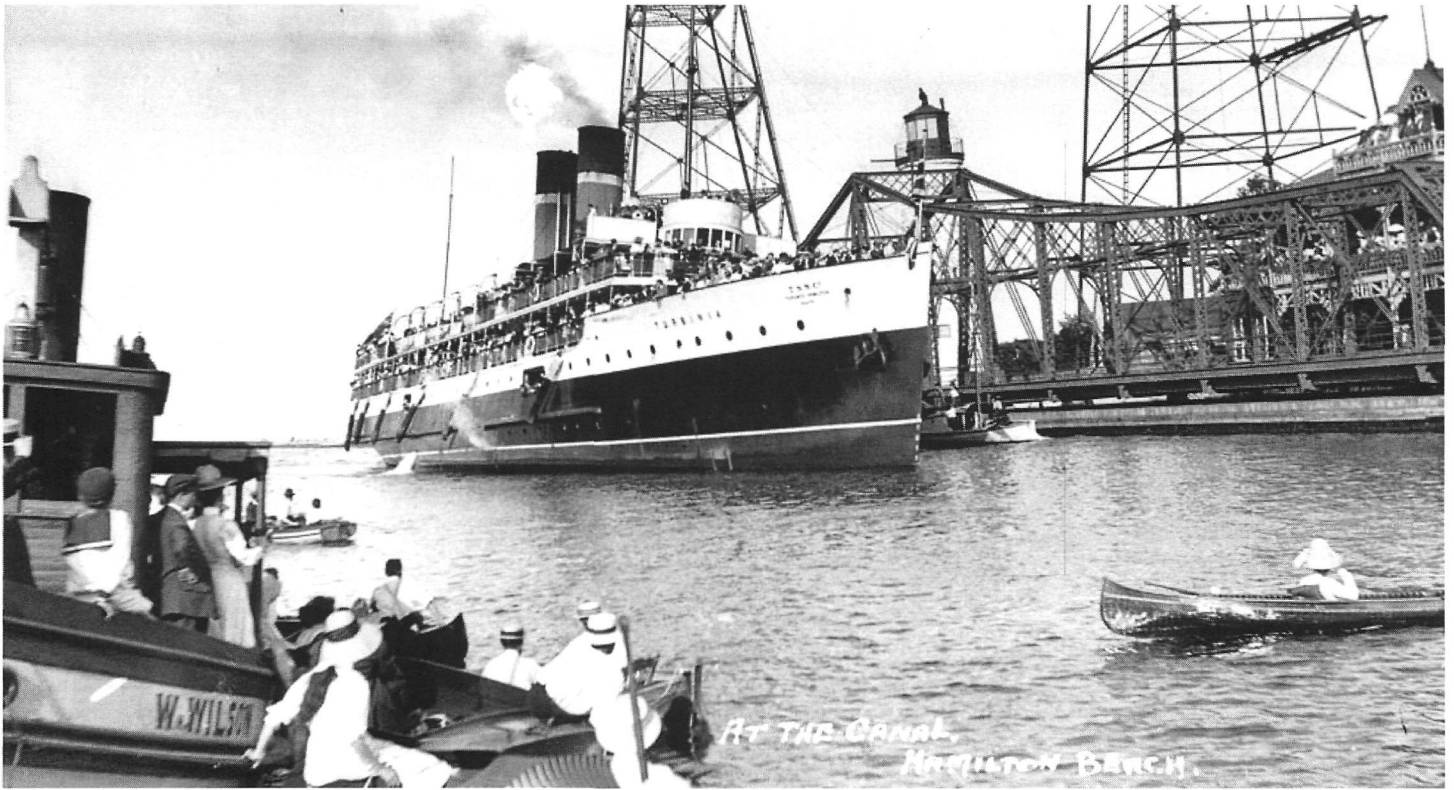
The summer residents desire to have a little aristocratic village all by themselves, and to that end try to make it appear that the soil is not fit for anything else. In the eyes of the exclusive people it is preposterous to imagine that the beautiful clean sandy bottom, or the shallow water along the shore, is at all adapted for wading purposes, and that John Smith’s children from the city should be allowed to wade there; it is absurd to suppose that Peter Brown’s children from the city could find any healthful pleasure in digging and rolling in the clean sand along the shore; it is utterly nonsensical to suppose that James Jones’ wife and family from the city could find any amusement in a picnic on sandy soil in summer months; it is outrageous to imagine that companies of people from the city could discover any rational pleasure in sitting under the shade or walking about, by daylight or moonlight, in a locality where the soil is principally sand!<sup>49</sup>

It would be wrong to conclude, however, that the city’s elite had succeeded in establishing the beach as an exclusive resort. The older community of fishers and market gardeners had not been completely displaced. Although the number of fishers using the beach as a base had declined since 1880, by 1897, 15 boats, requiring 30 men, still hauled in \$11,000 worth of perch, pike, pickerel, and bass, representing about 8% of value of the Lake Ontario fishery. Moreover, those outside the elite still had been able to find spaces on the beach for rowdier and less genteel play. Indeed, the policies introduced on the canal reserve in 1895 suggest that the federal government lands had remained open to a wider public, tolerant of the popular amusements provided by the ramshackle photograph galleries and ice cream booths. The appointment of a police constable for the beach in the 1880s, initially paid for by local residents and then by the township, suggests further that the elite felt the need to protect their “ideal” community against subversive elements. Large crowds had continued to visit the beach on long summer weekends throughout the 1880s and the early 1890s, as had been the case before the city leased land in the area. A far less exclusive “shack town” community had emerged just south of the elite summer residences, in and around the twenty-two-acre tract of beach land controlled by one of the original families of the beach, the Dynes.<sup>50</sup>

“Vulgar invaders” threatened to grow even more numerous with the construction of a radial electric railway between Hamilton and the beach. Summer residents of the beach foresaw that electric streetcars — much less comfortable but much less expensive to ride than the steam railway — would make the beach even more accessible to a far less exclusive group of Hamiltonians. Streetcars could be expected to increase the number of daily visitors to the beach strip throughout the summer. At the same time as they rejected annexation, therefore, the beach



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**Figure 4:** *Vulgar invaders: the steamer Turbinia loaded with passengers, stopping the Burlington Canal. The corner of the yacht club can be seen in the far right of the picture, behind the swing bridge. Ca. 1900-1910.*  
Source: Andrew Merrilees Collection, National Archives of Canada. PA 193354.

elite unsuccessfully opposed plans to construct the Hamilton and Toronto Radial Electric Railway across the beach strip.<sup>51</sup> The opening of the new line in 1896 eroded what little hope there may have been of creating a socially exclusive beach resort. In 1897, the more prestigious method of travel, by steam railway, was unavailable to those travelling to the beach. Soon the electric street railway was carrying two million passengers a year to the beach, with its streetcars most crowded during the summer months.<sup>52</sup> In 1912, an estimated 20,000 people visited the beach on the Queen's Birthday; five years later a crowd of 30,000 visited for its Dominion Day celebration (Figure 5).<sup>53</sup> Beyond making it possible for more Hamilton residents to visit the beach on weekends, the less expensive street railway allowed those "of moderate means" to "go and live by the water." Beginning at the turn of the century, people began to build or acquire "pretty bungalows and villas" to serve as their own summer cottages.<sup>54</sup>

The changing social nature of the beach strip as a recreational space in the era of mass transit is suggested by other changes in its built environment. No extensive resort hotel was built to replace the old Ocean House after it burnt to the ground and its site remained vacant and untended for several years. The stately Royal Hamilton Yacht Clubhouse continued to provide an exclusive social centre for the city's elite, but when it burned

to the ground in 1915, club members chose to relocate their clubhouse across the bay on the city's waterfront rather than rebuild on the beach. In their place new attractions sprang up, like the small amusement park running in 1903 under the Canada Amusement Company, which by World War I operated a ferris wheel and a merry-go-round.<sup>55</sup>

As their resort was being transformed, elite summer residents sought to retain some social and political control over the area. A "beach protective committee" formed in 1898 proved rather ineffective, and residents found themselves having to defend their opposition to annexation and the street railway. A merchant broker from Hamilton named Alfred Powis, opened a 1901 community meeting by "regretting that a wrong impression had gone abroad that the beach residents were a very selfish lot" when in fact, they were "public spirited men, whose aim is to popularize the beach."<sup>56</sup> They even, he suggested, were willing to reconsider some form of annexation, if it meant that the beach would be better managed. In the years following the rejection of the first proposal, the city of Hamilton had apparently devoted less money to the beach, and instead focussed on the development of other parks for community recreation within the city's limits. While part of the reason for this neglect may have been to demonstrate the folly of rejecting city control, it probably also had to do with a jurisdictional dispute between two city agencies.



*Figure 5: Vulgar invaders: the crowded beach strip. This image was used on a postcard for the city of Hamilton during the 1920s. Source: Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library, FWHABE-30, #01214.*

Those Hamilton citizens with investments on the beach, including Powis who rented out cottages, did not anticipate or welcome this neglect of the beach community by the city.<sup>57</sup> They were also increasingly unhappy that Saltfleet township was more interested in collecting taxes than in spending money on services for the beach. As early as 1900, a *Spectator* journalist concluded that,

Most people now . . . would be glad if some authority or other were charged with control and responsibility in connection with not only street watering and lighting, but the more serious matter of fire protection, not to say anything of attention to sanitary requirements.<sup>58</sup>

Support for annexation nevertheless remained quite limited. Summer residents, the *Spectator* observed, were still determined to ignore the rights of Hamilton's citizens to enjoy a beach that the city had

acquired for the very purpose of affording citizens generally enjoyment of casual waterside outing . . . and not merely for

the lucky owners of lots who have their lawns and spreading verandas all to themselves.<sup>59</sup>

Many permanent and summer residents sought some way other than annexation to get the services they wanted. In 1907, local residents convinced the provincial government to create a special government, an appointed commission of not less than two and not more than five members, which would establish and administer health, park development, policing, public utilities and other regular municipal policies.<sup>60</sup> The beach residents had won independence from both the township of Saltfleet and the city of Hamilton, from whom the commission took control of the leases, offering owners the opportunity to purchase, or renew the leases on, their property. However, residents did not get complete control over the future development of their community; the provincial government stipulated that the new beach commission should undertake a number of projects, including the establishment of a public park. In January 1909, the chair of the new commission indicated that the provincial government was particularly anxious to move ahead with the project, creating a public park for the people of Hamilton and the surrounding county.<sup>61</sup> Still, some summer residents continued to complain that monies raised by the commission should not be

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spent on public parks for the benefit of others; they had to be reassured that the purchase of property for parks was supported by the sale of other properties to leaseholders — and not their property taxes.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the commissioners assured beach residents that carefully controlled parks development would enhance their property values nearly one hundred percent.<sup>63</sup>

The development of parks land under the auspices of the beach commission represented a significant recognition of the public's right to the benefits of the beach strip. Although summer and permanent residents of the beach acquired a government to serve their own particular interests, they also had to agree to expand the space available on the beach for public recreation. The final shape of that public space, however, appears to have been consistent with an older vision of what were considered to be the beach's recreational purposes. Rather than provide facilities for informal, inclusive activities, like picnic grounds, ice cream stands, baseball diamonds, or an amusement park, the new park plans featured an elaborate promenade, and a six-plank wooden walkway lined with street lamps and little pagodas where pedestrians could stop, rest, and contemplate the bay in a sedate manner. This genteel public space stood in stark contrast to more popular places of beach recreation elsewhere: the bathing beaches, which continued to attract large numbers of visitors anxious to swim and picnic, the amusement park, the Dynes Hotel which hosted competitive sports, and the filtering basins on the south end of the beach that provided a swimming area. However much the social elite sought to control the nature of beach development, the increasing number of less affluent Hamiltonians who frequented the beach ensured that the beach would continue to be a place of recreational diversity.<sup>64</sup>

To some extent, then, those summer residents who had sought to control beach development to create an exclusive community, and those Hamilton politicians who increasingly hoped to ensure some appropriate recreational space for the general public, both seemed to have achieved some victories by World War I. Yet the victories on both sides were to be short lived. The future of the beach as a recreational space would be dramatically altered by three related developments: increasing levels of water and air pollution, the expansion of its permanent residential community in response to a housing shortage in Hamilton, and the continuing attraction of the beach strip as a transportation bridge between the Niagara peninsula and Toronto, now for the use of automobiles and trucks. These developments, rather than the deliberate policy of a social elite, threatened to close the heritage of the people against them.

### **“Paradise Lost?”**

The continuing demographic and industrial expansion of Hamilton placed increasing pressure on the bay, which had long been used as a sink for residential and industrial wastes. By the 1920s, a gravity-based, water carriage sewer system connected most city homes to the bay, and efficiently transported faecal matter and industrial waste, much of it untreated, directly into its waters. Ten private sewer outlets in addition to many public ones threatened the quality of the bay's water. In 1925, beach residents complained of oil washing ashore, and the press re-

ported that “Those who chose the bay for bathing were coated in oil when they came out and had to resort to the lake to wash it off.”<sup>65</sup> A consulting firm conducted the first study of the impact of sewage disposal on the waters of the bay in 1923, and found that they were relatively clear near the canal, with a count of 300 *coliform* organisms per 100 millilitres.<sup>66</sup> In 1947, after an industrial boom generated by World War II, the bay's *coliform* count had reached unacceptable levels of more than 2290 per 100 millilitres. By 1958 the figure was 11,500 per 100 millilitres.<sup>67</sup> Because Lake Ontario frequently was quite cold, the warmer waters of the bay always had been more attractive for swimming. After World War I, continuing pollution gradually undermined the quality of the bay even for water-based recreation, the only use considered acceptable there; even after being treated it could not be used for drinking.<sup>68</sup>

The lakeside waters on the other side of the beach strip, from which the city's water supply flowed, had lower *coliform* counts generally than the bay, but water quality nevertheless concerned city engineers greatly. In 1923, Hamilton's Board of Health reported that in the preceding two years, the number of times *b coli* was found in the city's drinking water had jumped from 9 to 72 times.<sup>69</sup> These counts, monitored by the city's municipal laboratories, increased steadily in the three decades after 1935.<sup>70</sup> In 1964, a sanitary survey of the western end of Lake Ontario concluded that the major source of this pollution came from the bay.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, the location of heavy industry along Hamilton's in-filled southeastern shoreline polluted the air as well, bringing the smoke and grime of the city to the beach community.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, the beach became increasingly unattractive as a tourist resort, just as the automobile facilitated more distant vacationing.

While its appeal as a vacation spot on the water's edge waned, the beach emerged as an attractive location for permanent residences, particularly during the housing shortages that followed both World Wars.<sup>73</sup> For people of modest means, the area's natural resources also provided pothunters with cheap and accessible means to feed their families on the fish and game abundant in the area.<sup>74</sup> As early as 1920, observers noted the increasing number of cottages that were being converted to year-round use. “Tax-harried citizens,” one journalist remarked, were attracted by the fixed tax rate and low assessments that summer residents had insisted upon.<sup>75</sup> Although some efforts were made to regulate construction on the beach, its heritage as a place for summer cottages also resulted in less stringent standards being applied to the structures than in the city.<sup>76</sup> The permanent beach community, which likely never exceeded 200 during the nineteenth century, reached over 1000 immediately after World War I, more than 2000 after World War II, and over 3000 by the early 1950s.<sup>77</sup> The expansion of the local school reflected the growth of a permanent community; whereas 45 children sat in a one-room schoolhouse during World War I, by the early 1950s, a new school finally opened to accommodate 450 students.<sup>78</sup> The permanent community strained the limited resources of the beach commission, making it even less likely to be concerned about park development for the people of Hamilton.

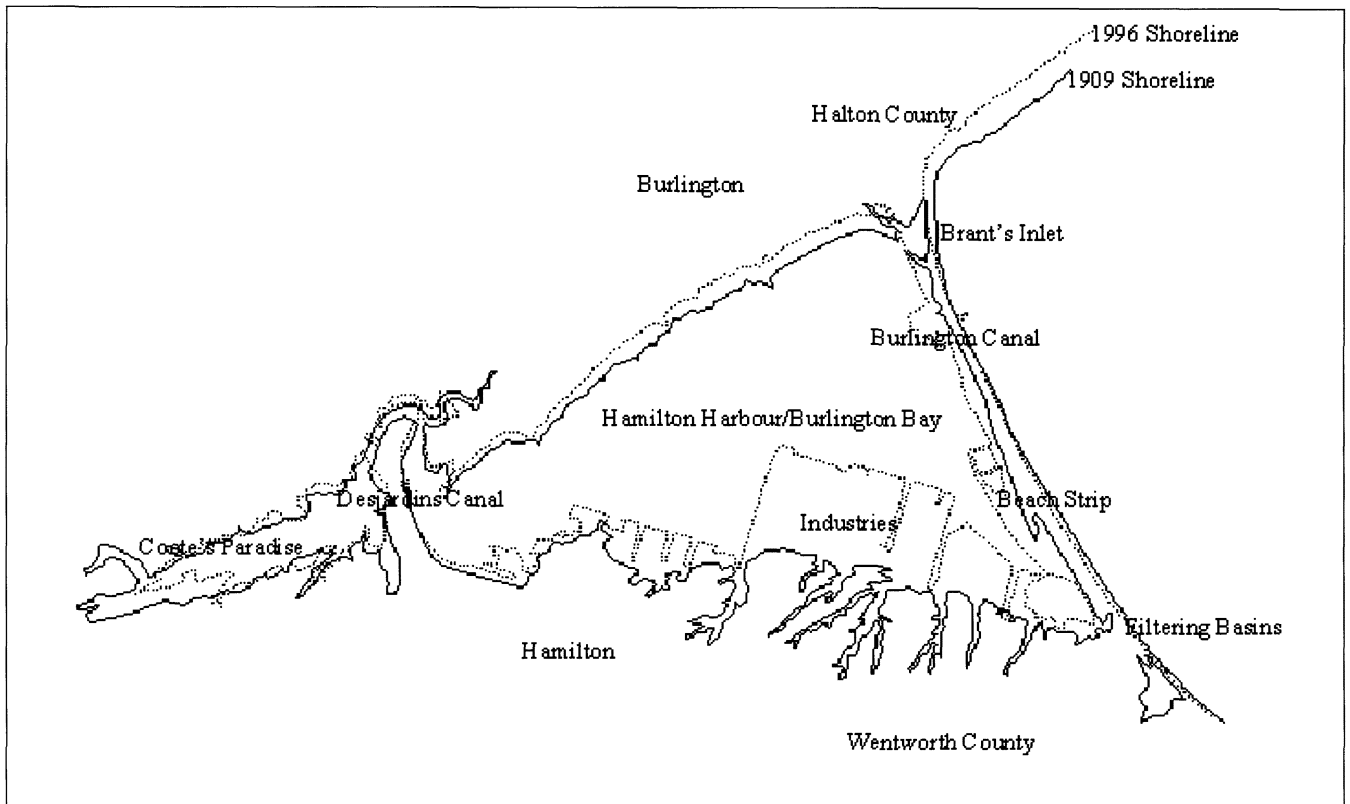
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The growth of the permanent population on the beach also was stimulated by road development and the rise of motor car transport. The completion of a bascule bridge across the canal and the paving of the beach road in the early 1920s accommodated an increasing number of automobiles and trucks.<sup>79</sup> By the early 1950s, 2000 cars and transport trucks were estimated to be crossing the narrow beach strip road every hour during the summer months, causing tremendous bottlenecks for Niagara–Toronto traffic. The need to raise the bridge for the steadily increasing number of ships entering Hamilton Harbour further disrupted traffic, creating traffic jams and delays for motorists. Increased traffic created headaches and opportunities for beach residents. The beach was no longer home to fishers, but by the early 1950s, six grocery stores, four gas stations, and twelve licensed restaurants served beach residents, vacationers, and people journeying between Toronto and Niagara. The development of the automobile, therefore, altered the way in which the beach strip was perceived, and stimulated new kinds of activity in the community.

At the same time, heavy traffic stimulated interest in a more convenient crossing of the beach strip, particularly one without the interruptions created by the bascule bridge over the canal. The city of Hamilton and the province of Ontario worked together to

construct the first Burlington Bay Skyway Bridge, which opened in 1958. Ninety-three beach properties were expropriated to facilitate the construction of the 8000-foot bridge towering 210 feet above the beach community. Large ships travelling along the newly developed St. Lawrence Seaway could pass easily into the harbour without interrupting the flow of traffic along the Queen Elizabeth Way. The mammoth project reduced the lot size of many bayside residents who remained in the area, cutting them off completely from the bay's shore. It undermined local businesses that had served travellers and further reduced the attractiveness of the beach as a place for healthy, outdoor recreation.<sup>80</sup>

In just thirty years, a region whose recreational purposes had been long contested, ceased to be perceived as a significant recreational space at all. Elite and middle-class vacationers abandoned the beach, leaving behind a marginalised, increasingly working-class community. While the cooling lake breezes continued to blow, few thought of the beach as a healthy or restorative area (Figure 6). By the 1960s, local community groups like the Burlington Beach Property Owners Association began documenting the industrial fallout that seriously damaged the homes and health of area residents.<sup>81</sup> The beach increasingly was viewed by passers-by and by some residents as an environ-



**Figure 6: Map Showing Changes in the Hamilton Harbour Shoreline, 1909 and 1996.** Sources: *This map is based upon: Canada. Department of Militia and Defense, Geographical Section, General Staff, No 2197. Topographic Map. Ontario. Hamilton Sheet, No. 33, 1907-1909. 1:63360; and Canada. Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. Canada Centre for Mapping, Hamilton/Burlington Ontario. 1:50,000 (Canada. Sheet 30 M/5 Ed. 9).*

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mental disaster area, not a “breathing place” where Hamilton residents could escape the heat and pollution of the city.

The construction of the Burlington Bay Skyway Bridge (Figure 7) prompted a reconsideration of the way in which the beach was governed, and led, finally, to the annexation in 1957 by Hamilton of the beach community south of the Halton county line.<sup>82</sup> This was hardly the same space that Hamilton politicians had been so anxious to control in the nineteenth century, nor did recreation have much to do with the final annexation decision. Nevertheless, over the next two decades, Hamilton and Burlington politicians and officials began to revive the idea that the beach was an important recreational space.<sup>83</sup> In a 1973 *Spectator* article, “Is the Beach Strip a Paradise Lost?,” the area’s demise was blamed on the Skyway bridge. Its author pondered about the fate of the beach strip, wondering “whether or not it has a future as anything but an even bigger transportation corridor.”<sup>84</sup> Many Hamiltonians shared this concern, including the Hamilton Regional Conservation Authority which developed *Project 36*, intended to transform Hamilton’s residential beach community into one large recreational space.<sup>85</sup> Echoing the sentiments of

summer residents of the 1890s, the Conservation Authority concluded that the beach strip could not support adequate year-round housing. Its report observed that open space on the beach strip was poorly distributed and unattractive; to some extent this was an inheritance of the decision by the city to privatize the area in the nineteenth century (Figure 8). It argued that water level fluctuations and the technical and economic infeasibility of installing a sanitary sewer system on the beach were problems which had “now reached critical proportions.”<sup>86</sup> In proposing to transform the area into one large public park to be enjoyed by the citizens of Hamilton, the Conservation Authority stated,

the Beach strip is unique and strategically located, and is particularly suited for beach activities, boating, fishing and for viewing the steel plants and harbour activities.<sup>87</sup>

To create this park, the Conservation Authority championed the building of a tunnel under the canal to accommodate future automobile traffic and eliminate the railway line across the



**Figure 7:** *Paradise Lost?: the construction of the first Burlington Skyway Bridge, 1958, which was opened to traffic later the same year. Source: Broe's Studio. Courtesy of Dominion Bridge Company Limited, National Archives of Canada, PA-138903.*



**Figure 8:** *Paradise Lost?: the beach strip amusement park in the 1950s. As a residential community developed, the park continued to operate. The line up of cars suggests the traffic congestion developing along the strip before the building of the Skyway Bridge. Source: Lloyd Bloom photographer. Courtesy of Gage Park Studios, Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections.*

beach strip. The Authority also proposed that the provincial and city governments finance the gradual acquisition of homes and properties in the area, private property that local politicians had helped create nearly one hundred years earlier.<sup>88</sup>

### **Conclusion**

By 1980, when the Official Plan endorsed by Hamilton city council designated the beach for parkland and recreational purposes, the history of the beach had come full circle.<sup>89</sup> One hundred years earlier, the city of Hamilton had ensured public control over the unique beach strip area. They acquired control of the remaining land on the beach, and sought to restrict the property rights of, and marginalise, the small residential community that had already developed on the beach. City politicians promptly handed real control over to those who could afford to lease or sublease the land, who were anxious to create an exclusive community of private summer residences. Both this social elite, and other Hamiltonians, valued the beach strip as a recreational space distant from the dirt and disease of their industrializing city. Social class definitions of, and conflicts over, what kind

of recreational space was desirable and appropriate shaped the development of the beach strip community from the 1870s through World War I.<sup>90</sup> The social elite that sought to build an exclusive and sedate resort were challenged by some middle- and working-class Hamiltonians who fought for public open spaces away from the dirt and congestion of the city, where they could engage in a variety of active and passive recreational activities. Beginning after World War I, and particularly following World War II, the dirt and congestion of the city transformed the beach strip, making it less desirable as a recreational space for the social elites and then for all other social classes. Gradually, the social elite and then others abandoned the strip, looking for more distant retreats from the city. In their place, a permanent, residential community, which had remained small and marginal throughout the recreational era, expanded. Those who settled on the beach valued it as a relatively inexpensive place to live, even if market gardens and the fishery could no longer offer a living. Environmental change altered the class nature of the beach strip, and redefined the beach as a space on the edge of the city, with no particularly special recreational attributes.

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By the 1970s, a renewed interest among middle- and working-class Hamiltonians in local, outdoor recreation, generated demands for more public space. While their specific recreational interests might differ, they could agree on the value of creating open spaces, and, in spite of the towering skyway bridge, could see the potential value of the beach strip as a base for fishing, boating, cycling, or nature walks.<sup>91</sup> Local politicians responded, and sought to purchase and tear down flood-damaged beach homes in the 1970s to make way for parkland. They faced resistance from beach dwellers, who had inherited the private property claims and rights that the city had fostered in the area after the 1870s. The public's claim to the beach remained secondary to private property owners, who challenged the city's plans, and suggested an alternative vision of their community.

The meaning of the beach strip as a recreational and as an urban space continues to be subject to multiple meanings, and continues to be contested, in the context of social and environmental change. Rather than creating a parkland devoid of human habitation, since the 1970s local residents have insisted that the city explore ways of revitalizing recreation, ensuring public access to the beach, and sustaining the small but vital permanent community that continued to call the beach home.<sup>92</sup> How this will be accomplished remains to be negotiated. Yet the recent creation of historic plaques marking the history of the beach strip for the Hamilton Beach 175th Anniversary Project shows a spirit of cooperation between city administrators, planners, and beach dwellers as members of the Beach Preservation Committee, local historians, and representatives from the city work together to tell the history of the area. Today summer visitors to the beach strip are welcomed by little flower gardens along the streets created and maintained by the Hamilton Beach Garden Club. They aim to keep the beach a place of beauty. What had been, "for many years, an endangered species, living under the axe of city plans" is beginning to blossom once again as a place of outdoor recreation along the water's edge.<sup>93</sup>

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Arts Research Board of McMaster University for financially supporting this research.

### **Notes**

1. There had been significant flooding in 1943 as well. On this problem in the area, see Manon Ames, Joan Pikor and Robert Mendelson, *Preserving the Residential Character of Hamilton Beach* (n.p. 1982), 46–70; and Moore, George and Associates, *Hamilton Beach Flood Study* (n.p. 1987).
2. The City of Hamilton Planning Department, *1969 Official Plan for the Beach Strip* (np, 1967).
3. For an overview, see L.D. McCowell, J.L. Pilkor, and W.M. Cain. *Hamilton Beach in Retrospect. Report of the Hamilton Beach Alternate, Community and Historical Project* (np, 1981), 45 ff. ; "Is the Beach Strip a Paradise Lost?", *Hamilton Spectator* [hereafter *Spectator*] 26 May 1973.
4. "Switch on the Beach." *Spectator* 16 April 1983.
5. Paul Wilson, "Beach Strip Sale of Empty Lots Signals of a Fine future for the Area." *Spectator* 22 June 2000.

6. *Reconnaissance Report on Development of Hamilton*, October 1917, 68. Noulan Cauchon Papers. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa. MG 30 v.1 f.38
7. *Reconnaissance Report on Development of Hamilton*, 55.
8. Brenda S. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17. See also 6–17 for a fine overview of the contested nature of urban spaces.
9. Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828* (Edinburgh: Cadell & Company, 1829), 253.
10. A map of the area done just the year before identified the extent of development around the canal piers. It included 11 dwellings, 2 barns and stables, a tavern, 4 warehouses, and 2 sawpits. See, John Goessman, *Map of the Survey of Sundry Lots on Burlington Beach in the District of Gore*. 15 December 1827. Lloyd Reeds Map Collection, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University, Hamilton Ontario.
11. See John C. Weaver, *Hamilton* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1984).
12. On the history of the harbour, see Mark Sproule-Jones. *An Historical Profile of Hamilton and its Harbour*. Research Unit for Urban Studies, Occasional Report No. 3 (1986); For histories of Hamilton generally, see Weaver, *Hamilton*; Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975); C.M. Johnston, *The Head of the Lake* (Hamilton: Wentworth County Council, 1958).
13. "Beach Once Haven for Smugglers," *Spectator* 15 July 1946, cites the observations in 1844 of Peter Carroll, whose Rock Bay mansion on the north shore of the bay afforded a panoramic view of the beach strip. He had recommended very early on that some arrangement should be made to clear the path for the surveying and formal development of the area. A land surveyor and road builder, Carroll would become a highly successful fruit farmer and a director of the Great Western Railway and board member of the Gore Bank. His name is memorialized by the "Carroll's Point" landmark found across the bay from the Desjardins Canal. See also William F. Johns, "The Historical Evolution of Hamilton Beach." (1945 reprint) *Wentworth By-gones* 2 (1960), 34.
14. "The Fishery Act and the Fishermen at the Beach." *Spectator* 15 November 1858; United Province of the Canadas, Sessional Papers (1860) #12, *Report of Superintendent of Fisheries*, 31 December 1859; *Census of Canada*, 1861 and 1871.
15. A good description of the beach households in this period, the location of fishing stations, and the presence of beach market gardens is found in the microfiche collection of the *John William Kerr Diaries*. Letter to Robert Chisholm, Chairman of the Hamilton Finance Committee, 1 August 1874, vol 6, 491–504. Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library.
16. *Census of Canada*, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901; "Hamilton Beach Scene of Extensive Fishing." *Spectator* 5 September 1919.
17. "Pleasure Seeking." *Spectator* 28 June 1860; "Burlington Beach Garden Pleasure Grounds." *Spectator* 19 May 1858; "Recreation." *Spectator* 18 July 1859. Cf. numerous examples from Brant Museum, *Diaries of Captain Thompson* 1854–1886, 26 August 1858, 15 June 1859, 14 August 1861, 17 June 1864, 1 July, 10 August 1868, 25 August 1869, 29 July 1870, 15 August 1871.
18. "The Civic Holiday: The Beach and Oaklands." *Spectator* 3 August 1865.
19. See, for example, "Pic-Nic." *Spectator* 29 June 1870, 1 July 1870; "Excursion." *Spectator* 16 October 1871.
20. The petition and Order in Council are reprinted in "The Beach History: How Burlington Beach Became Tyrannical." *Burlington Gazette*, 13 April 1899.
21. *Ibid.*
22. On leasing of the beach land, and creating a standing committee to oversee the planning and surveying of parks lots on the beach strip, see *Hamilton City Council Minutes*, 23 November 1874, 797; 12 April 1875, 777; and 7 June 1875, 805. Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library.
23. *Thompson Diaries*, 27 May, 1 June, 1874.
24. "Beach Trains." *Spectator* 11 July 1881.

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25. "The Beach History." *Burlington Gazette*, 13 April 1899; Thompson Diaries, 2 July 1874.
26. "Campers at the Beach." *Hamilton Herald* [hereafter *Herald*] 10 August 1892. Perhaps this is the same group of tents identified by McCowell et. al. (p. 18) from an undated August 1888 *Spectator* article entitled "Canvas City at the Beach: Camping at the Beach has Attained Unprecedented Popularity this Season—Over 20 Large Wigwams Decorate the Waterfront."
27. Thirty-one of the names listed have been record-linked to the *City of Hamilton Directory, 1893–4* (Hamilton: Griffin & Kinder, 1893). They include lawyers, the president of the local gas company and its foreman, grocers, merchants, the manager of a local newspaper, bookkeepers, accountants, and men with other non-manual types of occupations. Seven of the campers come from families listed in *The Toronto, Hamilton and London Society Blue Book: A Social Directory, Edition for 1900* (Toronto: Wm. Tyrrell & Co, 1900).
28. Saltfleet Township, *Assessment Rolls* (1890); "Who Is Over at the Beach." *Spectator* 26 June 1895. For those just south of the canal, a 1/4 acre of land was valued on average at \$700. Fire insurance maps provide details on the types, locations, and names of the various buildings constructed along the beach strip, see, for example, Chas. E. Goad, *Burlington Beach, Wentworth and Halton Counties Ontario*, 500 feet: 1 inch (Toronto and Montreal, July 1900).
29. *The Toronto, Hamilton and London Society Blue Book: A Social Directory, Edition for 1900*.
30. "Who Is Over at the Beach." *Spectator* 26 June 1895; record-linked to *The Toronto, Hamilton and London Society Blue Book*, city directories, and 1881 and 1891 manuscript census records.
31. John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). This work devotes a number of chapters to the summer residence ideal. See also Roy I. Wolfe, "The Summer Resorts of Ontario in the Nineteenth Century." *Ontario History*, LIV (1962), 149–60. In his useful overview of suburban Canada, Larry McCann briefly mentions the "seasonal migration of wealthy local residents" to outlying areas, "Suburbs of Desire: The Suburban Landscape of Canadian Cities, c. 1900–1950." in Richard Harris and Peter J. Larkham, eds. *Changing Suburbs: Foundation, Form and Function* (London: E & FN Spon, 1999), 114.
32. Quotations from Thomas Trotter, cited in Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1939*, 42.
33. "Summer at the Beach." *Herald* 26 June 1895.
34. On the "frontier of monarchy," consult H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), 1–47.
35. "Concerning the Beach." *Herald*, 1 March 1895.
36. "The Local Legislators." *Spectator* 4 August, 1 September 1885, "The Beach." *Spectator* 17 June 1880, "Burlington Beach." *Spectator* 7 May 1881.
37. This building was located in the canal reserve, see Staunton and Franks. *Plan of Burlington Beach Situate in the Counties of Halton and Wentworth in the Province of Ontario, 1877*. 1 inch:200 feet. Lloyd Reeds Map Collection, Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University, Hamilton Ontario.
38. The prefix "Royal," granted to only three clubs in Canada, had decided social advantages for club members visiting distant places. On the history of the RHYC see, Harry L. Penny, *One Hundred Years and Still Sailing: A History of Hamilton Yachts, Yachtsmen, and Yachting, 1888 to 1988*. *Centennial Yearbook* (Hamilton: Royal Hamilton Yacht Club, 1988).
39. "Summer at the Beach." *Herald* 26 June 1895. On the social tone of the area in this period see Dorothy Turcotte, *The Sand Strip* (Burlington: Stonehouse Publications, 1987), 21–27; Brian Henley, "In 1883, the Beach Strip was widely famous." *Spectator* 26 July 1997; McCowell, et al, *Hamilton Beach In Retrospect*, 16–20.
40. "Of Interest To Beach Residents: Old Buildings To Be Removed From The Canal Reserve." *Spectator* 18 April 1895; "Improvements At The Beach: Buildings To Be Removed By The Interior Department." *Spectator* 9 May 1895; "Clearing The Canal Reserve: Buildings Must Be Removed By May 18." *Spectator* 10 May 1895. A diagram of the location of buildings around the southern canal piers is found in Hamilton City Engineers Office. *Plan Showing Proposed Changes at Burlington Beach*, 2 April 1897. See also E. Barrow, Ass. City Engineer, *Map Showing Lots on North Side of Canal*, 5 September 1892. Lloyd Reeds Map Collection, Mills Library, McMaster University. This map identifies a tract of reserved land on the bayside just north of the canal piers to be kept open by city corporation.
41. "Bathing In The Canal: Saltfleet Council To Be Asked To Stop This Objectionable Practice." *Spectator* 15 June 1895.
42. "More Land For The City: Squatters Compelled To Give Up Property On The Beach." *Spectator* 26 April 1895.
43. "Settling The Beach Claims: The Williams Case Before Hon. A.S. Hardy at Toronto." *Spectator* 12 February 1895; "Another Beach Dispute." *Spectator* 18 February 1895; "More Land For The City: Squatters Compelled To Give Up Property On The Beach." *Spectator* 26 April 1895; "Other Cases Settled: More Beach Property Awarded To The City By Commissioner Hardy." *Spectator* 3 May 1895; "Acreage Of The Beach." *Spectator* 7 August 1895.
44. "The City and the Beach." *Spectator* 8 October 1895. Emphasis ours.
45. "The Beach." *Spectator* 24 August 1895.
46. "The Ocean House is No More." *Spectator* 20 July 1895. The paper noted,
 

The flames shot skyward and quickly licked up the building. It was a beautiful spectacle. The people enjoyed it, although they regretted to see the only first class hotel at the beach destroyed. Had the fire occurred at night it would have surpassed any illuminations the regatta committee [of the RHYC] could have provided.

The paper noted that the 50–60 guests at the hotel were mostly yachtsmen.
47. "Want to be Annexed." *Spectator* 20 July 1895; "Beach Annexation." *Spectator* 31 July 1895; "The Beach." *Spectator* 2 August 1895; "Annexation of the Beach." *Spectator* 7 August 1895; "Annexation of the Beach." *Spectator* 18 October 1895.
48. "That Troublesome Beach." *Spectator* 10 October 1895; "Will Oppose Annexation." *Spectator* 13 November 1895; "To Defeat Annexation." *Spectator* 5 February 1896; "Beach Annexation: The City Council Will Discuss The Important Question." *Spectator* 24 February 1896; "In Favour of Annexation." *Spectator* 25 February 1896; "Oppose Annexation." *Spectator* 29 February 1896; "Beach Bill Withdrawn." *Spectator* 17 March 1896.
49. "The Beach Bill." *Spectator* 25 February 1896.
50. "Burlington Beach." *Spectator* 7 May 1881; "Beach Police." *Spectator* 3 June 1881; Archives of Ontario, MS 468, Saltfleet Township Minutes, 17 June 1889.
51. Brian Henley, "Beach residents opposed streetcars." *Spectator* 1 August 1997.
52. "Second of the Radials." *Spectator* 1 September 1896.
53. McCowell, 19–22.
54. See, for example, an ad for Bennett & Thwaites builders who were advertising cottages for as low as \$2,500 in "Our Beach." *Spectator* 25 May 1912; *Burlington Beach Commission Minutes*, 20 May 1911 and 24 July 1911 record the filling in of swamp land on the north-west part of the beach strip north of the canal for the Kenmore Park Company survey. Within a year the BBC noted the great number of cottages being built in the area, 13 June 1912. Special Collections (Microfilm), Hamilton Public Library.
55. The *Annual Financial Statements of the Burlington Beach Commission* show that the Canada Amusement Company leased the land for \$250 per year. For a history of the amusements as told by a former general foreman who ran the park in the 'seventies, see, <http://www.ches-bucto.ns.ca/~ak621/CEC/ClosPark.html>; See also Stewart Brown, "On the Beach. You Don't have to be Foolish to Have Fun – But it Helps." *Spectator* 16 July 1977, and "Death Knell for Rides on the Beach Strip." *Spectator* 3 April 1978; Turcotte, 32; McCowell, 21.
56. "Annexation or Incorporation." *Spectator* 4 June 1901.
57. For Powis's property, see "Beach House to Rent." *Spectator* 24 April 1902. While part of the reason for this neglect may have been to demonstrate the folly of rejecting city control, it probably also had to do with a jurisdictional dispute between two city agencies. The newly created board of parks man-



## *Shaping of Burlington Beach, 1870s–1980s*

- agement, and the city council's harbour committee each claimed the right to collect and spend the small amount of money derived from the beach leases.
58. "Who Runs the Beach." *Spectator* 21 August 1900; "Mean to Go Ahead." *Spectator* 12 May 1900.
  59. "Who Runs the Beach." *Spectator* 21 August 1900.
  60. McCowell, 23–24; *Burlington Beach Commission Records, Minutes*, 10 September 1907.
  61. *Burlington Beach Commission Records, Minutes*, 14 January 1909.
  62. *Burlington Beach Commission Records, Minutes*, 13 June 1912.
  63. "Beach Plans were Approved." *Spectator* 22 August 1910.
  64. This would not stop elite residents from grumbling about what was going on, especially on the issue of Sunday activities — one of the few times of the week that Hamilton's working people had any leisure. In June 1912 one Beach Commissioner complained about beach visitors playing baseball on Sunday. A few years later, Sir John Gibson complained to the Burlington Beach Commission about people who "were in the habit of coming to the beach on Sunday and making themselves objectionable." *Burlington Beach Commission Minutes* 13 June 1912, 11 August 1915.
  65. "Oil Bath." *Spectator* 4 June 1925. "Polluting Bay." *Spectator* 31 March 1925; "Bay Pollution." *Spectator* 22 June 1925; "Bay Pollution." *Spectator* 4 May 1926.
  66. *A Consolidated Report on Burlington Bay*, n.p.; see also Gore, Naismith & Storrie, *Report on Sewage Disposal*, and E.R. Gray, *Report on Sanitary Intercepting Sewers, Pumping Stations and Drainage required in the city of Hamilton for co-ordination with an adequate system of Sewage Disposal* (Hamilton, Ontario, 1923).
  67. *A Consolidated Report on Burlington Bay* (Hamilton, 1958), n.p. See especially Chapter 4 "Sanitary Conditions," and Chapter 6 "Industrial Water;" Ontario Water Research Commission, *Water Pollution of Sewer Outfalls and Tributary Streams to Hamilton Bay* (Ontario Water Resources Commission, 1967); "Hamilton Bay a Sewer – OWRC." and "Our Polluted Bay." *Spectator* 24 May 1969.
  68. This point was made in *A Consolidated Report on Burlington Bay*, which determined that "The sanitary condition of the Bay should therefore be considered from the point of view of its use as a bathing and recreational body, and in its effect on the purity of the city's water supply," which was drawn from the lake. (n.p.) For an analysis of problems with swimming in Hamilton, see Ken Cruikshank and Nancy B. Bouchier. "Dirty Spaces: Environment, the State and Recreational Swimming in Hamilton Harbour, 1870–1946." *Sport History Review*, 29 (1998), 62–63.
  69. *City of Hamilton 1922–1923 Annual Report of the Board of Health* (Hamilton, 1923), 15. Hamilton Public Library, Special Collections, RG Series B.
  70. Hamilton, Department of Municipal Laboratories. *A Sanitary Survey Study of the Western End of Lake Ontario* (Hamilton: Department of Municipal Laboratories, 1964), 2.
  71. *A Sanitary Survey Study of the Western End of Lake Ontario*, 5.
  72. For a chronicling of incidents of pollutants destroying beach community homes, see McCowell, et. al., *Hamilton Beach in Retrospect*, 54–57.
  73. On similar trends in unplanned and affordable housing development elsewhere, see Richard Harris, *Unplanned Suburbs. Toronto's American Tragedy, 1900 to 1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); on housing development in Hamilton, see Michael Doucet and John Weaver, *Housing the North American City* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).
  74. A good description of the fishing and hunting activities of a small community at the southernmost end of the beach is found in Cheryl MacDonald, ed., *Memories of Van Wagner's Beach and Parkview Survey* (Hamilton: Parkview Survey and Van Wagner's Beach Heritage Association, 1995), 80–85. For a broader analysis of the historical debate over such subsistence activities, see Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, "Sportsmen and Pothunters: Environment, Conservation, and Class in the Fishery of Hamilton Harbour, 1858–1914." *Sport History Review* 28(1) May, 1997, 1–18; For a portrait of how squatters in another area of the bay subsisted on its natural resources, see *Idem.*, "The War on the Squatters: Hamilton's Boathouse Community and the Re-Creation of Recreation on Burlington Bay, 1870–1940." *Labour/Le Travail* (forthcoming).
  75. "Beach Cottages." *Spectator* 19 April 1920; "Beach Cottages are in Demand." *Spectator* 8 April 1930; "Great Demand for Beach Cottages." *Spectator* 26 March 1931.
  76. Doucet and Weaver, *Housing the North American City*.
  77. "Winter at Beach." *Spectator* 23 October 1920; McCowell, 24; Beach Scrapbooks, vol. 2, Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library.
  78. "Burlington Beach Honours the Beach Bungalow School." Home and School Association, September 1952.
  79. See, Robert J. Hanley, "Motor Cars Ended an Era Along the Beach." *Spectator* 24 April 1954; John C. van Nostrand, "The Queen Elizabeth Way: Public Utility Versus Private Space." *Urban History Review* XII(2)(October 1983), 1–23.
  80. McCowell, 33; "History of Burlington Bay James N. Allan Skyway" prepared as part of a series of text panels for Burlington Beach Anniversary Committee.
  81. McCowell, 32.
  82. On the Burlington annexation of the lands north of the line in 1964, see Clare Emery Machan, *From Pathway to Skyway. The Story of Burlington*, 1997 edition (Burlington: Burlington Historical Society), 46.
  83. *Official Plan for the Beach Strip*, 1967.
  84. "Is the Beach Strip a Paradise Lost?" *Spectator* 26 May 1973.
  85. McCowell, 34–35, 46–54; Hamilton Region Conservation Authority, *Project 36, The Beach Strip* (Hamilton, 1974).
  86. *Project 36, The Beach Strip*
  87. *Project 36, The Beach Strip*. See also P.E. Wade, *The Halton-Wentworth Waterfront Study, Volume 1: Concepts for Waterfront Development* (Hamilton: Waterfront Co-Ordinating Committee, 1974), 144–52.
  88. North of the Burlington canal, the city of Burlington delayed but never gave up on its plan for a parkland and today, three decades later, it is evicting the last of the residents living north of the canal whose leases have expired, to clear the land for park development. The fate of homes in the Burlington north end of the beach are still in the courts today and homeowners who lease their land have managed to delay their evictions through legal wrangling. On developments, see *The Post* 2 October 1985; "Beach Strip Tenants Get Lease Reprieve." *Spectator* 21 August 1998, "Burlington Beach Residents Must Go." 8 December 1999, "Technicality Delays City's Eviction of Beach Cottages," 8 November 1999, "Beachers Hope for Reprieve." 22 February 2000,
  89. City of Hamilton Planning and Development Department, *City of Hamilton Official Plan* (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1980). Compare this to the earlier, City of Hamilton Planning Department, *1969 Official Plan for the Beach Strip* (Hamilton: City of Hamilton, 1969), which still emphasized the residential future of the beach.
  90. For a thoughtful discussion of historical work on elite, middle-class and working-class recreation in the Anglo-American world, see Steven A. Riess, "From Pitch to Putt: Sport and Class in Anglo-American Sport." *Journal of Sport History*, 21 (1994): 138–85.
  91. Similarly, Andrew Hurley notes how working-class and middle-class citizens in Gary, Indiana might agree on the value of a recreational area for quite different reasons. Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), particularly 67–75, 92–93, 102–3.
  92. Manon Ames, Joan Pilkor and Robert Mendelson. *Preserving the Residential Character of Hamilton Beach* (July, 1982).
  93. Robert Howard, "A Little Club Grows on Our Beach." and "A Little Garden of their Own." *Spectator* 14 July 2000.