

# “A National Playground Both in Summer and Winter”: Civic Groups, Ethnic Organizations, and Tourism Promotion in Revelstoke, BC, 1890-1920

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*In the years leading up to and during the First World War, civic organizations in the railway town of Revelstoke, British Columbia, diversified the economy by establishing a two-season tourist trade based on mountain scenery, outdoor recreation, and spectator sport. Before the war, progressive urban boosters and a mountaineering club well-connected to the province's Public Works department successfully lobbied for a trail and an automobile road to the summit, as well as the establishment of a national park on Mt. Revelstoke. During the war, emphasis shifted to the promotion of winter sports, as residents of Scandinavian origin founded a ski club and organized an annual winter carnival to promote economic development and physical fitness. At a time when the loyalty of non-Anglophone immigrants was under question, and interned enemy aliens were forced to labour on the national park road, these activities also served to demonstrate Scandinavian-Canadians' loyalty and value to Canada.*

*Au cours des années précédant la Première Guerre mondiale et pendant celle-ci, des organismes locaux de Revelstoke, centre ferroviaire de la Colombie-Britannique, ont diversifié l'économie en mettant en place une activité touristique étalée sur deux saisons et fondée sur les paysages de montagne, le plein air et le sport passif. Avant la guerre, des progressistes partisans de l'expansion urbaine et un club d'alpinisme bien branchés sur le ministère des Travaux publics de la province avaient fait pression avec succès pour la construction d'un sentier et d'une route pour automobiles allant jusqu'au sommet du mont Revelstoke, de même que pour l'établissement d'un parc national sur cette montagne. Mais, pendant la guerre, on a plutôt mis l'accent sur la promotion des sports d'hiver, car des résidents d'origine scandinave ont fondé un club de ski et organisé un carnaval d'hiver annuel afin de promouvoir le développement économique et la forme physique. À un moment où la loyauté des immigrants non anglophones était remise en question et où les sujets de pays ennemis internés étaient forcés de*

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*travailler à la route du parc national, ces activités ont également servi à faire la preuve de la loyauté des Canadiens scandinaves et de leur valeur pour le Canada.*

IN THE EARLY months of the First World War, when Canadian governments, industries, and communities were scrambling to direct resources toward the war effort, civic groups and ethnic organizations in the railway town of Revelstoke, British Columbia, were working to establish a two-season tourist trade based on mountain scenery, outdoor recreation, and spectator sport. Revelstoke had been established in the 1880s at the point where the mainline of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) crossed the Columbia River between the Monashee and Selkirk mountain ranges, and it caught the attention of many early railway tourists as they journeyed through western Canada. However, the CPR never developed hotel or resort facilities in Revelstoke, leaving it to area residents to attract tourists to the district. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, various business owners, boosters, and sports enthusiasts used their political connections and Revelstoke's accessibility and scenic mountain terrain to groom and advertise the city as an appealing destination for both summer and winter tourism.

New forms of recreation and the city's proximity to Mt. Revelstoke were important for the success of these initiatives. A trail was first built to the top of Mt. Revelstoke in the expectation that its alpine scenery would attract participants in Canada's fast-growing mountaineering movement. When the popularity of automobile touring appeared likely to draw more visitors, civic boosters shifted their attention to building a parkway to the summit. The mountain's lower slopes were subsequently developed to provide facilities for ski-jumping, the keystone event of winter carnivals that drew many tourists during the slow season. While the trail, touring road, and ski-jumping competitions were part of a larger campaign to promote the Revelstoke district as a tourist destination, and the civic groups that drove these initiatives sometimes explicitly aligned themselves with the city's business interests, non-economic motivations were also important. Early tourism promotion efforts in Revelstoke were interwoven with priorities shaped by pre-war reform movements as well as wartime exigencies, including the "boosting" of the city through good publicity and good roads; the promotion of health and leisure through outdoor recreation; and, in the wartime case of Revelstoke's Scandinavian community, demonstrations of both ethnic solidarity and loyalty to Canada and the British Empire.

While the role of transcontinental railways and government park agencies in developing tourist attractions in western Canada has been well studied, historians are now starting to examine the agency of smaller organizations in establishing and promoting national parks.<sup>1</sup> As John Sandlos observes in his study of Canadian national parks established between 1911 and 1929, civil society "played a critical

1 John Sandlos, "Nature's Playgrounds: The Parks Branch and Tourism Promotion in the National Parks, 1911-1929," and Bill Waiser, "'A Case of Special Privilege and Fancied Right': The Shack Tent Controversy in Prince Albert National Park" in Claire E. Campbell, ed., *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911-2011* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011), pp. 53-87, 103-131.

role in promoting and expanding the national parks system during this period.” “Typically,” he argues, “it was chambers of commerce, local governments, tourism promoters, and recreational groups rather than conservationists that campaigned for the creation of individual parks.”<sup>2</sup> This article examines the goals and methods of three Revelstoke-based organizations—the Mountaineering Club, Progress Club, and Ski Club—that promoted tourism in that district during the Progressive Era and through the First World War. The economic and cultural impacts of the First World War on sport and recreation tourism in Canada have not been explored in detail.<sup>3</sup> As this example shows, wartime conditions could increase the importance of outdoor recreation and also exacerbated divisions between Anglo Canadians and those of continental European background. Bohdan S. Kordan and Bill Waiser have traced how residents of Canada from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire were compelled to labour on construction projects during the war, including tourism infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> Less well known is the way in which the war encouraged others—in this case, the Scandinavian Canadians of Revelstoke—to display their loyalty and cultural and economic contributions to Canada by developing sporting events that were intended to help draw tourists.

### **From Alpine Trail to Automobile Road: Mt. Revelstoke as Tourist Attraction**

The city of Revelstoke began as a CPR bridge construction camp located within the traditional territory of the Interior Salish Sinixt people. In 1886, the embryonic town was described as “lawless, full of drinkers, gamblers, dancing girls, and ‘gunmen with sticky fingers,’” but by the turn of the century Revelstoke was the site of a railway divisional point, had incorporated as a city, and was the service and commercial centre for mining and logging camps in the surrounding district.<sup>5</sup> The 1903 *Yearbook of British Columbia* described Revelstoke as a modern urban centre of over 2,000 residents, with “splendid hotel accommodation, banking, postal and daily mails, and other business facilities; churches, schools, newspapers, societies, and all the advantages of a place much larger.”<sup>6</sup> The *Yearbook* also noted that Revelstoke was “surrounded by magnificent scenery”—scenery that some residents were starting to enjoy through hiking and climbing and would soon attempt to exploit through the promotion of both nature and automobile tourism.

The mountain that loomed immediately behind the city on the east bank of the Columbia was the natural feature that drew the most attention from Revelstoke’s

2 Sandlos, “Nature’s Playgrounds,” p. 59.

3 For example, in *ibid.*; Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); PearlAnn Reichwein, *Climber’s Paradise: Making Canada’s Mountain Parks, 1906-1974* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2014); Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

4 Bohdan S. Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada during the Great War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002); Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946* (Saskatoon and Calgary: Fifth House, 1995).

5 Quotation from Kate Johnson, *Pioneer Days of Nakusp and the Arrow Lakes* (Nakusp: K. Johnson, 1951), p. 62, cited in Paula Pryce, “Keeping the Lakes’ Way”: *Reburial and the Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 55. See also Richard J. Caton, *History of Mount Revelstoke National Park* (Revelstoke: Parks Canada, 1977), p. 7.

6 R. E. Gosnell, *The Year Book of British Columbia and Manual of Provincial Information* (Victoria: Bureau of Provincial Information, 1903), pp. 180, 305.

earliest tourism promoters. Residents were first inspired to explore Mt. Revelstoke's alpine areas by the growing popularity of mountaineering in nearby national parks such as Banff, Yoho, and Glacier. Druggist C. R. MacDonald reached the summit in 1902, and three years later Dominion surveyor and mountaineer A. O. Wheeler encouraged further exploration of the area in his book *The Selkirk Range*. After hiking in the alpine with two friends in the summer of 1906, school inspector A. E. Millar wrote articles about its scenic and recreational value for the Revelstoke newspaper.<sup>7</sup> Millar described the scenery atop Mt. Revelstoke as both picturesque and sublime. Some areas were paintable and park-like: "The central portion is hilly or rolling, covered with short green grass and has clumps of evergreen trees, dotted here and there over the surface, while the slopes are gorgeous with masses of brilliant flowers." Other sections were more dramatic, with "glaciers, deep ravines, high precipices, [and] craggy peaks." Millar suggested the area could be made more accessible to Revelstoke residents and visitors alike if senior levels of government would transfer title to the city and provide funds for a trail.<sup>8</sup>

Revelstoke's outdoor enthusiasts established a mountaineering club to help formalize community use of the mountaintop, and they cooperated with tourism promoters to secure government support for trail construction. Premier Richard McBride offered funding for a trail up the mountain when he met the district board of trade in December 1906. The Revelstoke Tourist Association agreed to help with the cost, and by 1910 a good-quality walking trail extended from the base of the mountain to the summit.<sup>9</sup> While the trail was under construction, A.O. Wheeler—co-founder in 1906 of the Alpine Club of Canada—came back to Revelstoke to promote mountaineering as a recreational activity. He assured his audience, which included government employees, businessmen, and teachers, that making nearby peaks accessible by trail would help draw many climbers to the district. Wheeler's visit inspired the establishment of the Revelstoke Mountaineering Club in 1909.<sup>10</sup>

Revelstoke and its new mountaineering club had close and valuable links to British Columbia's recently established Ministry of Public Works, which was responsible for building and maintaining public roads and trails. Most importantly, the minister was Thomas Taylor, who served as MLA for Revelstoke from 1900 to 1916.<sup>11</sup> Taylor was an enthusiastic supporter of the Canadian Good

7 Revelstoke History Book Committee, *Pioneers of Revelstoke* (Revelstoke: Revelstoke Senior Citizen Association, 1986), pp. 71-72; Caton, *History of Mount Revelstoke*, pp. 8, 31; W. F. Lothian, *A Brief History of Canada's National Parks* (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1987), p. 57.

8 A. E. Millar, "Mountain Park," *Mail-Herald* (Revelstoke), August 4, 1906, p. 1. The federal government owned the land in the railway belt, but the provincial government would provide funding for transportation infrastructure.

9 British Columbia Ministry of Transportation Archives [hereafter MTA], Revelstoke District, box 240, file 965, June to December 1908; Lothian, *A Brief History of Canada's National Parks*, p. 57. This trail was named after Mayor C. F. Lindmark.

10 "Local Alpine Club – Revelstoke Mountaineering Club Organized," *Mail-Herald*, January 9, 1909, p. 1. Reichwein notes that the membership of the Alpine Club of Canada was mostly composed of educated, middle-class Canadians and Americans (*Climber's Paradise*, pp. 29-36).

11 British Columbia Archives [hereafter BCA], Vertical Files, "Taylor, Thomas," pp. 140-147; "B.C.'s First Works Minister is 80 Today," *Province*, February 3, 1945; "B.C.'s First Public Works Minister Dies," *Province*, April 28, 1947; Elections BC website, *Electoral History of British Columbia, 1871-1986*, [http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986\\_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf](http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf) (accessed April 24, 2009).

Roads Association and would double the mileage of public roads in BC during his six years as Public Works minister.<sup>12</sup> Further high-level support came from William Wasborough Foster, Revelstoke police magistrate and founding member of the Revelstoke Mountaineering Club, who was appointed deputy minister in 1910. Foster was an expert climber and would take part in first ascents of Mount Robson in 1913 and Mount Logan in 1925.<sup>13</sup> Another important member of the Revelstoke Mountaineering Club was John Preston Forde, a land surveyor and railway engineer who in 1911 was appointed assistant engineer for Public Works in eastern BC. From 1912 to 1916, Forde would also serve as vice-president of the Alpine Club of Canada.<sup>14</sup>

Hoping to generate publicity and boost alpine tourism, the politically connected members of the Revelstoke Mountaineering Club sought to attract the attention of elite mountaineers. In 1909 club members wrote to Thomas Taylor requesting provincial funding to host a group of British climbers. Forde argued that the club was important “as a money-getter for B.C.”<sup>15</sup> The district government agent (and avid hiker) Robert Gordon similarly assured Taylor that mountaineering had the potential to build the province’s economy: “The experience in the mountain regions of Europe tends to show that Mountaineering is not just the craze of the day, but that it is yet in its very infancy in this country and that it will continue to grow steadily year by year until it will in all likelihood become second in importance to only the greatest of our natural resources.”<sup>16</sup> The provincial government granted the Revelstoke Mountaineering Club \$500 to host the British climbers and also offered additional funding for trail building on Mt. Revelstoke.<sup>17</sup> This would help Revelstoke compete for tourists who were otherwise drawn to the federally funded mountain parks of Alberta and easternmost British Columbia.

Following completion of the hiking trail to the peak in 1910, Revelstoke boosters developed an ambitious plan for an automobile road that would provide less-strenuous access to the summit for progressive local automobile owners and wealthy tourists. In the early 1910s, the growing popularity of automobiles and auto touring amongst wealthy North Americans made an automobile road up the mountain an appealing idea. It would be several decades before park promoters and wilderness advocates would argue that roads and automobiles did not have a place in the centre of parks or at the summit of mountains.<sup>18</sup> Revelstoke boosters’ vision of a scenic touring road may have been influenced by recent road-building

12 R. G. Harvey, *Carving the Western Path: By River, Rail and Road through B.C.’s Southern Mountains* (Surrey: Heritage House, 1999), pp. 72-73.

13 “William (Billy) Wasborough Foster,” *Beyond Nootka*, [http://www.beyondnootka.com/biographies/w\\_foster.html](http://www.beyondnootka.com/biographies/w_foster.html) (accessed January 12, 2015).

14 “In Memoriam – John Preston Forde,” *Canadian Alpine Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2 (1946), p. 285; *Mail-Herald*, April 29, 1911, p. 1; BCA, Vertical File 48, “Forde, John Preston,” pp. 763-764.

15 MTA, Revelstoke District, box 240, file 965, Wheeler to McBride, Forde to Taylor, April 1909, pp. 19-23.

16 MTA, Revelstoke District, box 240, file 965, Gordon to Thomas Taylor, May 1, 1909, pp. 24-25.

17 MTA, Revelstoke District, box 240, file 965, Taylor to Forde, May 12, 1909, p. 26; Thomas Taylor (Minister), “Report of the Minister of Public Works,” in British Columbia Legislative Assembly, *Sessional Papers* (Victoria: William H. Cullin, 1912 and 1913), J36 (1912), P40 (1913).

18 See Paul S. Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005); David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington’s National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

activity in Mount Rainier National Park in Washington State. A road intended for horse-drawn wagons had provided access to the park's subalpine meadows in 1903. Five years later, Mount Rainier became the first American national park to permit automobiles within its boundaries, and visitors were allowed to drive right to the foot of the glacier which capped the summit.<sup>19</sup>

The first proposal for an automobile road that could bring visitors to the alpine meadows of Mt. Revelstoke came from the Progress Club in May 1912. At first glance, such a project may appear surprising to a modern observer, as only seven Revelstoke residents had registered motor vehicles in 1912.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the distance that these early motorists could travel was very limited. The transportation network of the BC Interior consisted of a few railroads and lake steamers supplemented by a limited number of roads that were of questionable quality. Sandwiched between the Monashees and the Selkirks, Revelstoke lacked road connections to any other substantial community and was like an island in its isolation.<sup>21</sup> The CPR effectively had a monopoly on transport in and out of the town.

More specific factors lay behind the push for a scenic touring road than the growing popularity of auto touring and the recent success of Mount Rainier Park. First, such a road would improve access to the mountain for middle-class residents of Revelstoke, whose vacation options were limited. While CPR employees had passes for themselves and their families that enabled holiday travel, those who did not work for the CPR, including business owners and government employees, tended to holiday closer to home, and the alpine lakes and meadows around the summit of Mt. Revelstoke had become a popular destination.<sup>22</sup> Second, a road up the mountain could help draw wealthy tourists who might hire a car for the day or even bring one in aboard the train. Third, an automobile road to the summit of Mt. Revelstoke could be used to leverage other infrastructure and amenities from senior levels of government, such as a park or a connection to a nascent and expanding provincial road network. Politically, a mountain touring road seemed a plausible first step towards other tourism and infrastructure development because of the provincial government's enthusiasm for road building and Revelstoke's close ties to the Ministry of Public Works. By the summer of 1912, the province was planning several scenic touring roads, including one into Vancouver Island's Strathcona Provincial Park and the Banff-Windermere Highway through the Rockies.<sup>23</sup> As William Wasborough Foster stated in a 1912 speech to Alpine Club of Canada campers, the provincial government wanted to make BC's mountain

19 Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, pp. 11, 14, 18, 22.

20 BCA, GR 665, British Columbia – Motor Vehicle Branch, Originals, 1904-1948, Registers of motor vehicle license, 1900-1920, vol. 1, Register numbers 1-1397, 1904-February 1911, and vol. 4, Register 1-1726 to December 1912 expiry date.

21 Cole Harris, "Moving Amid the Mountains," *BC Studies*, no. 58 (Summer 1983), pp. 23, 25; Harvey, *Carving the Western Path*, pp. 53-55; "Wright, Gustavus Blinn," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <http://www.biographi.ca> (accessed April 21, 2009).

22 Caton, *History of Mount Revelstoke*, p. 53.

23 BCA, GR 0075, BC Department of Public Works, vol. 4, Memo for the Minister of Lands from Foster, Deputy Minister of Public Works, August 15, 1911, p. 9; Maggie Paquet, *The BC Parks Explorer* (North Vancouver: Whitecap, 1986), pp. 216-221.

scenery accessible and remunerative by creating “provincial parks to embrace the best of such scenery, and [constructing] motor roads winding through its midst.”<sup>24</sup>

Automobile travel in the early 1910s was closely associated not only with material progress and freedom, but also with wealthy elites that most western Canadian tourism promoters hoped to attract.<sup>25</sup> Leading the call for an automobile road to the summit of Mt. Revelstoke was the Progress Club initiated by the Revelstoke Board of Trade in May 1912. Acting in response to negative aspects of urban industrialism, supporters of the progressive movement in North America argued that, through studies, planning, and state intervention, they could improve the health, morality, and quality of life of citizens. In tandem with the early twentieth-century conservation movement, progressives also encouraged regulation of public land, long-term management of public resources, and the cultivation of healthy, appealing urban areas.<sup>26</sup> In addition to its interest in promoting tourism, the Progress Club supported causes like establishing parks, beautifying the city, equal suffrage, telephone service, and connecting Revelstoke to BC’s emergent road network. By the end of May 1912, 123 residents had paid a dollar each to become club members.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 1:** Early automobile in Revelstoke, ca. 1911.

Source: Image D-04199 courtesy of Royal BC Museum and Archives

After meeting with Progress Club members on his way to Ottawa, Revelstoke MLA and Minister of Public Works Taylor offered provincial funding of \$10,000 towards the cost of the proposed automobile road. He also promised to help establish a park on Mt. Revelstoke.<sup>28</sup> Public Works engineer and mountaineering

24 “Report of the 1912 Camp,” *Canadian Alpine Journal* (1913), p. 132.

25 See G. W. Taylor, *The Automobile Saga of British Columbia, 1864-1914* (Victoria: Morriss, 1984).

26 David Stradling, ed., “Introduction” in *Conservation in the Progressive Era: Classic Texts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), pp. 9-10; Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 261.

27 “Progress Club Take[s] Action,” *Mail-Herald*, October 19, 1912, p. 2; May 15, 1912, p. 1.

28 BCA, GR 0075, BC Department of Public Works, Minister of Public Works Correspondence Outward, vol.

club member J. P. Forde located a route to the summit in July 1912. Similar to the road around Mt. Rainier, the winding road designed for Mt. Revelstoke was intended to give visitors a series of unfolding panoramic views, taking “full advantage of all good view points in the vicinity.”<sup>29</sup> Forde’s report indicates that the road was designed to offer drivers and passengers a visual experience that would change at different elevations, while maintaining the easiest grade possible.

The Progress Club could clean up and modernize the city and solicit funds to build roads and viewpoints on Mt. Revelstoke, but access to the provincial highway network was seen as essential to broader economic development and especially the long-term growth of the tourist trade. Motoring enthusiasts and good road advocates across Canada were lobbying governments for a transcontinental highway in the early 1910s.<sup>30</sup> Revelstoke’s civic leaders hoped that such a highway would run through their city and deliver a steady stream of auto tourists to the proposed summit road. As early as 1912 the Revelstoke Board of Trade identified the lack of automobile access as the “chief drawback to the progress of the town.”<sup>31</sup> That summer, Victoria dispatched surveyor A. E. Cleveland to investigate two possible east-west routes through the mountains: via Revelstoke in the north and Nelson in the south.<sup>32</sup> Having secured provincial funding for a touring road up Mt. Revelstoke, Revelstoke boosters and business owners shifted their efforts towards getting it made into a park—a major tourism attraction that might help steer the anticipated trans-provincial road in their direction.

In August 1912 the Progress Club began pressing Kootenay federal MP, Robert Francis Green, to have Mt. Revelstoke designated a national park.<sup>33</sup> Green supported the idea, writing to the federal Minister of the Interior that it would be worth establishing a park given the province’s financial support for the road and because the top of the mountain “certainly is of no use for any other purposes.”<sup>34</sup> Two months later W. W. Foster, in his capacity as BC’s deputy minister of Public Works, announced that the Dominion government had agreed to establish a park on Mt. Revelstoke and send a surveyor to determine its boundaries. He estimated that the mountain road, which already had four of thirteen miles completed, would cost \$40,000, and he proposed that the provincial government pay half the cost, provided Ottawa and the city of Revelstoke covered the remainder.<sup>35</sup> In July 1913,

6, Memo for the Public Works Engineer from the Minister of Public Works, July 20, 1912, p. 416.

29 MTA, Revelstoke District, box 240, file 965, J. P. Forde, Assistant Engineer, Department of Public Works, Revelstoke, to J. E. Griffith, Public Works Engineer, Victoria, July 29, 1912, p. 44.

30 Daniel Francis, *A Road for Canada: The Illustrated Story of the Trans-Canada Highway* (Vancouver: Stanton, Atkins, and Dossil, 2006), chap. 1.

31 MTA, Revelstoke District, box 240, file 965, H. H. McVity, Secretary, Revelstoke Board of Trade, to W. W. Foster, Deputy Minister of Public Works, Victoria, September 16, 1912, pp. 50-51.

32 MTA, Revelstoke District, box 240, file 965, Thomas Taylor to Thomas Kilpatrick, CPR Superintendent, Revelstoke, August 31, 1912, p. 49.

33 Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], RG 84, vol. 1673, MR2, Mount Revelstoke National Park – History, Establishment, Boundary, J. H. Hamilton, President of the Revelstoke Progress Club, to R. F. Green, MP, Revelstoke, BC, August 17, 1912.

34 LAC, RG 84, vol. 1673, MR2, Mount Revelstoke National Park, R. F. Green to Robert Rogers, Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, September 1912. This application was forwarded to J. B. Harkin, of the Provincial Parks Branch (September 28, 1912).

35 Foster also announced that his department had begun construction of a road from Okanagan Valley to

the Dominion government reserved land for the proposed park, and that September the chief superintendent of Dominion Parks completed a survey of the area. By that time the provincial government had spent \$15,000 on the touring road in the expectation that the Dominion government would make further contributions. The city of Revelstoke had also contributed \$2,000 for a pony trail beyond the summit of the mountain, and the Revelstoke Mountaineering Club had built a cabin at the summit. Over the summer of 1913, 500 people hiked up the mountain and signed the visitor book at the cabin. Revelstoke National Park was officially established in April 1914, with an area of 246 square kilometres.<sup>36</sup> The park was a major victory for Revelstoke's tourism interests. It promised to deliver publicity, jobs, development, and large numbers of tourists, albeit only during the summer months, when the road and trails on Mt. Revelstoke would be free of snow and the high-elevation alpine meadows in bloom.

The first summer tourist season of the national park was at its height when Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914. Canada's entry into the war as a member of the British Empire did not halt tourism-related activities in the district. However, it changed the nature of these activities to reflect wartime anxieties over the loyalty of non-Anglophone immigrants. In fact, there was an impressive degree of continuity in tourism promotion, as newly formed civic groups linked ethnic identity with excellence in outdoor sports and city councillors argued that interned enemy aliens should be put to work on the construction of the summit road.

### **Skiing, Scandinavians, and Sporting Spectacle as Tourist Attraction**

On the day after Britain's declaration of war, an editorial in the Revelstoke *Mail-Herald* argued that national parks served to build strong citizens and preserve the (white) race. Parks, the paper suggested, were particularly important in wartime because they were spaces where men of all classes could improve their physical and mental health, "where boys and men could camp and fish and study nature, where the sick and delicate could find new stores of health in the great out of doors."<sup>37</sup> With Canada's entry into the First World War, government funding for park projects such as the Mt. Revelstoke road was cut dramatically, and directly promoting traditional tourist activities like sightseeing and stays at resort hotels was suddenly seen as wasteful and unpatriotic. However, boosters and business owners in Revelstoke were comfortable promoting outdoor recreation because it was associated with building healthy young Canadian citizens. During the winter of 1914-1915, winter sports gained popularity and prestige as area residents of Scandinavian background drew on their countries' skiing traditions to form a ski club and establish a winter carnival.

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Revelstoke via Mable Lake and Three Valley. See "Revelstoke National Park – Highway To Be Constructed between that City and the Okanagan," *Vernon News*, November 28, 1912.

36 LAC, RG 84, vol. 1673, MR2, Mount Revelstoke National Park, P. C. Barnard Harvey, Chief Superintendent of Dominion Parks (report to the Department of the Interior), September 18, 1913; Memo to Mr. Mitchell, Dominion Parks Branch, Ottawa, October 8, 1913.

37 "Great Value of National Parks," *Mail-Herald*, August 5, 1914, p. 3. This was a review of a government publication on national parks.

In the years leading up to the war, Scandinavians in Revelstoke were well integrated socially, economically, and politically. For example, Swedish-born department store co-owner Charles Frederik Lindmark was elected mayor in 1908-1909.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, divisions between citizens and new immigrants had been exacerbated by an economic downturn in 1913-1914, when thousands of new settlers that Canada had recently recruited faced high unemployment rates.<sup>39</sup> Revelstoke was not exempt from ethnic tensions over access to work. For example, when Frank Veltri, a self-described “old settler,” requested employment on a public works project, he complained, “I just get promises the favored ones are some Swedes that have squatted on a homestead where they have no right as they have had homesteads before around some place.”<sup>40</sup>

At the outbreak of war, an undercurrent of nativist intolerance turned into suspicion of sabotage by enemy aliens. The Revelstoke *Mail-Herald* reported on British Columbians of German origin who had been arrested for suspicious activities. The passage of the War Measures Act in August 1914 required enemy aliens to register with police authorities and led to the internment of about 8,000 Germans and Austro-Hungarians in Canada who were suspected of illegal activities, or who had simply become a burden on their municipalities through unemployment.<sup>41</sup> Norway, Denmark, and Sweden remained neutral during the war, so it was advantageous for newcomers from these countries to indicate clearly whether their loyalties lay with Canada and Britain. As historian Eva St. Jean has pointed out, Swedish-Canadians—some of whom did express pro-German sympathies—were not maltreated by the Canadian state during the First World War, but many felt a degree of social discrimination. She argues that western Canada’s Swedish community “perceived itself to be under attack” and that this “increased its nationalistic fervor.”<sup>42</sup> Scandinavians in Revelstoke faced some discrimination in the early months of the war and therefore felt the need to align themselves publicly with Canada and Britain. In December 1914, a group of sports enthusiasts in Revelstoke, identifying broadly as “Scandinavians,” sought to highlight their contributions to civic life by founding a ski club that would host a winter carnival to promote healthy outdoor recreation and provide a boost to the tourist trade. This was a way for newcomers, primarily from Norway, to celebrate their Scandinavian identity, claim skiing as part of their cultural heritage, and underline their positive contributions to their new country.

The origins of skiing in Revelstoke followed a trajectory similar to that in other mountain towns in the Canadian and American west. Skiing was introduced by Scandinavian immigrants as a practical form of winter transportation for residents

38 Cathy English, curator, Revelstoke Museum and Archives, personal communication, March 16, 2015.

39 James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp. 12-13; Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 208-210.

40 MTA, Revelstoke District, box 240, file 966, sec. 1, Revelstoke District General Matters, Frank Veltri, Revelstoke, to T. Taylor, May 20, 1912.

41 Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War*, pp. 5, 16-29.

42 Eva St. Jean, “From Defiance to Defence: Swedish-Canadian Ethnic Awareness during the Two World Wars,” *American Studies in Scandinavia*, vol. 34 (2002), pp. 58, 65-66.

of mountain regions that saw heavy snowfall. Before 1890, Ole Sandburg, a miner from Sweden, made his own skis to travel the 57 kilometres between Revelstoke and his mineral claim near Albert Canyon.<sup>43</sup> Skiing was both work and leisure, as area residents skied to access mining claims, deliver supplies and mail, and visit neighbours. Social events took place on skis in the form of races and excursions. For Scandinavian immigrants, skiing also eased their transition to a new country.<sup>44</sup>

In Revelstoke, skiing transformed into an organized winter sport relatively early. Revelstoke had the first ski club in western Canada when—as a marker of the growing local popularity of winter recreation—a hiking club known as the Jordan Club was renamed the Revelstoke Snowshoe and Toboggan Club in November 1891.<sup>45</sup> Snowshoes included conventional Canadian snowshoes and “Norwegian snowshoes,” a form of cross-country skis, which the newspaper defined as “thin slats of wood, about three inches in width and 10 feet in length, turned up in front like the bow of a canoe. The feet are fastened to these slats by leather straps in the centre, leaving about five feet clear fore and aft which is not lifted clear of the snow but glides along the surface.”<sup>46</sup> Recreationalists using these early skis carried one pole, not two, to help with steering and forward movement. Members of the Snowshoe and Toboggan Club enjoyed skiing on Mt. Revelstoke in the winter months, as well as summer hikes and dances. One of its first projects was to build a toboggan slide on a slope near downtown Revelstoke.<sup>47</sup> This first Revelstoke ski club had Scandinavian members, but Anglophones from eastern Canada played leadership roles. Boosters, store owners, and hoteliers who stood to profit from winter tourism were drawn to the club. Members included Ontario native Robert Francis Green, a store owner who promoted Mount Revelstoke National Park and winter sports as MP for the riding of Kootenay, as well as English-born Francis B. Wells, who sold sporting goods at his menswear store. Two members of the club were natives of Sweden who had material interests in the tourist trade: store owner (and future mayor) C. F. Lindmark and John Abrahamson, who ran the Central Hotel.<sup>48</sup>

Sport historian Annie Gilbert Coleman identifies two waves of Scandinavian skiers to North America, with the first introducing cross-country skiing to mountain

43 Ruby M. Nobbs, *Revelstoke: History and Heritage* (Revelstoke: [s.n.] 1998), pp. 209-210. Caton, *History of Mount Revelstoke*, p. 7; William Wistanley Bilslund, “A History of Revelstoke and the Big Bend” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1955), p. 177; Revelstoke History Book Committee, *Pioneers of Revelstoke*, p. 145.

44 Jorgen Dahlie, “Skiing for Identity and Tradition: Scandinavian Venture and Adventure in the Pacific Northwest, 1900-1960” in Elise A. Corbet and Anthony Rasporich, eds., *Winter Sports in the West* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1990), pp. 99-111; Annie Gilbert Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), pp. 13-40; Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), pp. 168-176.

45 Chic Scott describes a photo of the Revelstoke Ski Club in 1891 as “the first ski image in Western Canada.” See Chic Scott, *Powder Pioneers: Ski Stories from the Canadian Rockies and Columbia Mountains* (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books, 2005), p. 20. Coleman refers to the first ski association in the United States forming in the same year in St. Paul, Minnesota (*Ski Style*, p. 29).

46 *Kootenay Star* (Revelstoke), November 28, 1891, cited in Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, p. 19.

47 Caton, *History of Mount Revelstoke*, p. 7; Bilslund, “A History of Revelstoke,” p. 176; Nobbs, *Revelstoke: History and Heritage*, pp. 204-205.

48 Nobbs, *Revelstoke: History and Heritage*, pp. 119, 126, 129-130, 204-205, 245.

mining towns in the 1860s and the second bringing new turns, equipment, and ski jumping competitions starting in the 1880s.<sup>49</sup> By the 1890s, professional ski jumping was big business in the northwest United States. As a founder of the Canadian Amateur Ski Association recalled, once Norwegians introduced ski jumping, “each city was competing with the other; building great ski hills; erecting tall towers, and trying for new records. Ski jumpers flocked in from far and near; large salaries were paid; and famous jumpers were bought, sold, and traded.... Big cash prizes were offered, and betting was heavy.”<sup>50</sup>

Soon after the emergence of competitive ski jumping in western North America, skiing started to be seen as more than just a way to earn prize money or a prosaic form of winter transportation. When Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen published his account of crossing Greenland on skis in 1888, he popularized the concept of *Ski-Idraet*: skiing to build character, self-discipline, skill, and endurance.<sup>51</sup> An early proponent of skiing as healthy amateur sport in western Canada was Olaus Jeldness, a Norwegian immigrant and mining engineer, who in 1896 moved from Colorado to Rossland, BC, which was a booming mining town with a brand-new ski club. Jeldness played a leading role in organizing a winter carnival in 1898 that became an annual event in Rossland for the next two decades.<sup>52</sup> These winter carnivals transformed skiing from a practical activity into a form of spectacle, celebrating the survival skills associated with winters in the mountains, raising community spirit, and boosting the economy at a quiet time of year by attracting visitors from afar. Rossland’s winter carnival was one of the earliest in western North America, predating most of its American counterparts by more than a decade.<sup>53</sup> After he retired from racing in Rossland, Jeldness wrote an essay that described skiing as best practised for enjoyment, not for profit. Skiing, he argued, was “associated with nearly all of the folklore of Norway,” but was adaptable to “all snow countries” and had the advantage of being a “clean” activity that offered “good fellowship and companionable sport.”<sup>54</sup> A “clean” sport was untarnished by cash prizes or gambling, and winter carnivals such as Rossland’s were intended to benefit the wider community—including the business community—instead of profiting individual skiers.

These new ideas about skiing as an amateur sport that could benefit citizens through physical fitness, while boosting local economies through tourism, would transform the sport in wartime Revelstoke. In December 1914, when non-British newcomers to Canada faced increasing discrimination and economic uncertainty, Scandinavian immigrants organized a new ski club with the intention of staging

49 Coleman, *Ski Style*, p. 27.

50 H. Percy Douglas, *My Ski-ing Years: The Story of the Start and Development of Competitive Ski-ing* (Montreal: Whitcombe & Gilmour, [1951]), p. 28.

51 E. John B. Allen, *From Skisport to Skiing: One Hundred Years of an American Sport, 1840-1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), pp. 47-62.

52 Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, pp. 19-22; Dahlie, “Skiing for Identity and Tradition,” pp. 100-101.

53 American historians refer to the first winter carnivals with skiing and ski-jumping competitions in 1912-1913. See Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains*, pp. 168-176; Coleman, *Ski Style*, pp. 32-40.

54 Olaus Jeldness, “Skiing, the Royal Sport of the Northlands” (1909), cited in Dahlie, “Skiing for Identity and Tradition,” p. 100.

a winter carnival in the city in February 1915.<sup>55</sup> Most leaders of the club were young newcomers from Norway, but while the club was Scandinavian-led it was not ethnically exclusive, welcoming all skiing enthusiasts and offering beginner lessons.<sup>56</sup> One member promised the *Mail-Herald* that the new Scandinavian ski club's interests were closely aligned with those of the city's boosters and businessmen: "With Revelstoke advertising itself as a tourist centre and mountain resort there is no better means of bringing to outside attention its beauties, position, and advantages than by means of a carnival."<sup>57</sup> In the lead-up to the carnival, businessmen discussed the formation of a new tourist association to highlight "the city as a national playground both in summer and winter." The association would ask CPR officials to "include Revelstoke in its advertising and to assist in diverting to the city the stream of tourists which passes over the main line."<sup>58</sup>

Organized by an ethnic group seeking respectability and acceptance, Revelstoke's first winter carnival combined spectacle, sport, and boosterism. A parade on skis, snowshoes, and toboggans started at the Scandinavian Hall, with all residents having any connection to winter sports whatsoever encouraged to take part. Schools and businesses closed for half the day, and the parade was filmed for publicity purposes. According to the *Mail-Herald*, the event would "present a picture of the joys and health of a Canadian mountain winter to people less favourably placed. It is hoped all these clubs and institutions will respond to the call for an inspiring advertisement of the city as a winter-sports paradise."<sup>59</sup> Contestants travelled from other BC communities to participate in skiing, skating, snow-shoeing, and curling competitions. Scandinavian men won the ski-jumping competitions, while Scandinavian women won the top prizes in downhill and Nordic ski races. In other categories, such as snowshoe, beginner skier, and youth races, non-Scandinavians placed first.<sup>60</sup> The winter carnival was deemed a major success for the visitors it drew and the publicity it generated, and it inspired many residents to take up winter sports and participate in subsequent competitions.<sup>61</sup>

Revelstoke's first winter carnival had been intended to profit the community, rather than the athletes. The judge of the 1915 carnival was Thorliep Iverson, president of the National Ski Association of Western Canada, which had been formed in 1913 by clubs in Camrose and Edmonton.<sup>62</sup> Criticizing the professionalization of ski jumping in the United States, Iverson promoted skiing

55 As Coleman observes, "[S]ki clubs formed to support winter carnivals and wound up becoming local institutions" (*Ski Style*, p. 35).

56 Nobbs, *Revelstoke: History and Heritage*, "The Scandinavians," and "The Ski Club," pp. 210, 240-247; Revelstoke History Book Committee, *Pioneers of Revelstoke*, "The Nelsen (Nilsen) Family" and "The Johnson Family," pp. 310-314; 1911 Census of Canada Indexing Project, <http://automatedgenealogy.com/census11/> (accessed September 4, 2010).

57 "Date is Fixed for Winter Carnival," *Mail-Herald*, December 30, 1914, p. 1.

58 An earlier tourist association helped pay for the mountain trail ("Plan to Form Tourist Association," *Revelstoke Mail-Herald*, January 6, 1915, p. 1).

59 "Skiis [sic] and Snowshoes in Big Parade," *Revelstoke Mail-Herald*, January 30, 1915, p. 8.

60 "Exciting Races at First Winter Sports Carnival," *Mail-Herald*, February 10, 1915, p. 1.

61 *Mail-Herald*, December 4, 1915.

62 "Camrose Ski Club," *Canadian Ski Annual, 1928-1929*, p. 73, Canadian Ski Museum, [http://www.skimuseum.ca/documents/annuals/1928-29\\_pt31\\_pg73-74.pdf](http://www.skimuseum.ca/documents/annuals/1928-29_pt31_pg73-74.pdf) (accessed January 7, 2015). This organization appears to have disbanded by 1920.

as an amateur sport that should be controlled by Scandinavians: “It was considered an insult to offer a Scandinavian money for jumping as it was their one national sport and their great object was to keep it clean. He advised that the management of the ski sports should never be taken out of the hands of the Scandinavians.... To the Norwegian the sport was everything and Revelstoke would have no lack of competitors for all events even if they had to pay their own expenses.” This quote is noteworthy due to the fact that the newly formed ski club had a distinctly Scandinavian leadership, whereas the club established two decades earlier had included a broader range of sports and nationalities. Iverson did not identify who threatened to take skiing out of the hands of Scandinavians—whether it was Americans, Anglophone Canadians, or Canadians whose countries of origin also had their own skiing traditions and styles, adapted from Nordic origins, such as Austria, Germany, Switzerland, or France.<sup>63</sup> Despite urging competitors to pay their own expenses, Iverson emphasized the “business side of the sport,” observing that wartime conditions could permit Revelstoke to flourish as a tourist centre now that wealthy North American recreationalists and sporting enthusiasts could not reach resorts in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe. He advised the carnival organizers to build a bigger ski jump further up Mt. Revelstoke at a point that was accessible by the new automobile road. He predicted that distance records could be broken there and that an influx of paying spectators would more than cover the cost of developing the new facilities.<sup>64</sup>

Following the first winter carnival in 1915, the ski club reached out for support from the city council, regional leaders in the sport, and the CPR. In March 1915, the new ski club elected as honorary members Iverson, Jeldness, CPR vice-president Grant Hall, and sports equipment retailer F. B. Wells. Two months later it held a well-publicized jumping contest at the summit of Mt. Revelstoke, within the boundaries of the new national park. Hall arranged for a professional photographer to record a February 1916 jumping event and for illustrated articles to be published in major Canadian newspapers. In following years, the CPR offered special excursion rates for spectators wanting to attend the winter carnival and brought extra sleeper cars to Revelstoke to accommodate the many spectators who could not find rooms in the city’s overflowing hotels.<sup>65</sup> The railway’s resort hotels at Banff and Lake Louise closed for winter, so this was an opportunity to encourage increased passenger travel.<sup>66</sup> Support for the winter sports spectacle

63 See, for example, Andrew Denning, “Alpine Modern: Central European Skiing and the Vernacularization of Cultural Modernism, 1900-1939,” *Central European History*, vol. 46, no. 4 (December 2013), pp. 850-890.

64 “Like Norway’s Famous Hill,” *Mail-Herald*, February 10, 1915, pp. 1, 4; “Revelstoke Ski Jump is Best in Dominion,” *Mail-Herald*, April 7, 1915, p. 1.

65 “Summer Ski Carnival on Mountain Summit,” *Mail-Herald*, March 13, 1915, p. 1; “Ski Jumping on Mountain,” *Mail-Herald*, May 19, 1915, p. 1; “Ski Sports on Mountain,” *Mail-Herald*, May 26, 1915, p. 1; “None Are Better than Revelstoke Ski Club’s Hill,” *Mail-Herald*, January 29, 1916, p. 2; “Nels Nelsen Breaks Canadian Record at Ski Club Tournament,” *Mail-Herald*, February 12, 1916, p. 1; “Look Out Below! Ninth Tournament; Revelstoke Ski Club,” *Revelstoke Review*, January 17, 1923, p. 1; Nobbs, *Revelstoke: History and Heritage*, p. 212.

66 The Banff Winter Carnival started in 1917, but the Banff Springs Hotel and Chateau Lake Louise would not open for the winter season until the 1970s. See Lauren Wheeler, “‘We Want Pictures so Kodak as You Go’: Promoting Winter Recreation in Banff in the 1920s,” *Past Imperfect*, vol. 15 (2009), pp. 6-35; “History of

was not universal or immediate, however. In 1915, Revelstoke city councillors expressed unease with carnivals and tourism promotion during wartime. In September they passed a grant of \$300 to support the winter sports program of the ski club, but then rescinded the grant in mid-November on the basis that city funds were limited and this was not a necessary expenditure. Arguing on behalf of the ski club, a member told the council “some said the carnival should not be undertaken in war time, but the King’s horse had just won a sweepstake and if the King could take part in sport he thought Revelstoke could. It was the only way the snow could be turned to advantage.”<sup>67</sup>

Although city council was hesitant to designate funds for a winter sport competition early in the war, Scandinavians deemed it important to proceed with the winter carnival. Organizing this event not only boosted the economy in winter, but also highlighted the presence of Scandinavians as a distinct and valuable ethnic community. A Scandinavian club had been founded some time earlier, as evidenced by the hall that served as the starting point for the carnival parade. It seemed that organizing on the basis of a Scandinavian identity had lapsed and was revived during the war, as another Scandinavian Club was formed in Revelstoke in April 1915. In introducing this club, the newspaper highlighted the special contribution that Scandinavian-Canadians had recently made to organizing winter sport tourism in the district: “To their energy and sportsmanlike instincts Revelstoke owes the institution of winter sports, and the possession of the best ski run on the continent; which in all probability will prove important factors in securing for Revelstoke the position of capital of the tourist industry of the mountains.”<sup>68</sup>

In response to growing sentiment amongst Anglo-Canadians against enemy aliens, Scandinavian-Canadians in Revelstoke organized a civic group that both highlighted their ethnic identity and promoted their public and economic contributions.<sup>69</sup> The sinking of the British passenger vessel the *Lusitania* by a German submarine on May 7, 1915, led to anti-German rioting in Victoria and intense anti-German feelings elsewhere in North America. At a Revelstoke city council meeting later that month, one alderman advocated the internment of all Austrians and Germans in the district because they were “a menace to the community.”<sup>70</sup> Such comments spurred Scandinavians to distinguish themselves from other recent arrivals of continental European background and clearly indicate whose side they were on. In June, the Scandinavian Club published a resolution expressing its “deep loyalty to the British Crown at this time both as an association and as individuals who are enjoying the many benefits conferred by

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the Fairmont Banff Springs,” <http://www.fairmont.com/banff-springs/promotions/hotelhistory/>; “History of Chateau Lake Louise,” <http://mountain-resorts.fairmont.com/112/chateau-lake-louise-history>.

67 “Grant to Ski Club is Rescinded by Council,” *Mail-Herald*, November 13, 1915, p. 1.

68 “The Scandinavian Club,” *Mail-Herald*, April 17, 1915, p. 2. This group included more Swedish leaders than the Norwegian-based Ski Club.

69 On the rapid rise of anti-German sentiments in British Columbia, see Peter Moogk, “Uncovering the Enemy Within: British Columbians and the German Menace,” *BC Studies*, no. 182 (Summer 2014), pp. 45-72. On the internment of enemy aliens, see Kordan, *Enemy Aliens*, pp. 5, 16-29.

70 “Council Asks Internment of Alien Enemies,” *Mail-Herald*, May 29, 1915, p. 1.

British citizenship.” Even though “some evil disposed [*sic*] persons have recently circulated reports which might be interpreted to cast some doubt upon the loyalty of some of the members of this association,” the resolution assured Revelstoke residents that all club members were “absolutely loyal subjects of Great Britain.”<sup>71</sup>

Such expressions of loyalty to Canada and the British Empire were timely, in that they helped differentiate Scandinavians from the group of enemy alien internees who were brought to Revelstoke that summer to work on tourist infrastructure under less cooperative circumstances. With the economic downturn and focus on the war effort, funds had run out for the construction of the automobile road to the summit of Mt. Revelstoke. Civic leaders successfully lobbied the federal government to provide internee labourers to continue road work, arguing that the cost would eventually be recovered through increased tourist traffic. Other proposals to profit from the war, such as the construction of a munitions factory, had not materialized, and in the short term Revelstoke would benefit from the hiring of guards and purchases of food, clothing, and other supplies.<sup>72</sup> Scandinavian Club president and former mayor C. F. Lindmark publicly threw his support behind this proposal.<sup>73</sup>

National Parks Commissioner J. B. Harkin visited Revelstoke at the end of July to initiate construction of a camp for internee labourers, and by September 200 Austrians had arrived. Their road work included grading and excavating loose rock and dirt. However, working conditions were poor on Mt. Revelstoke, and little was accomplished. Most of the work had to be done by hand, the steep side hills were unstable, and the men sometimes protested their internment by refusing to work.<sup>74</sup> Snowfall ended the road-building project before Christmas, and the internees were transferred to a work camp in Yoho National Park after building one-and-a-half miles of new road.<sup>75</sup> Revelstoke boosters and business owners urged the federal government to return the internees the next summer. City clerk W. A. Gordon forwarded a resolution representing “practically all the voters in Revelstoke and the vicinity” including both the Liberal and Conservative associations and the Board of Trade, requesting that the internment camp be reopened and the automobile road up Mt. Revelstoke completed.<sup>76</sup> They argued that the parkway was useless as a tourist attraction if it did not go all the way to the summit and that the work needed be done during the snow-free summer months.<sup>77</sup>

Although city councillors could not convince the Parks Branch to continue work on the touring road during the war, construction progressed on the ski jump

71 “Scandinavians Are Loyal,” *Mail-Herald*, June 12, 1915, p. 1.

72 “Infantry Guards and Army Service Corps Arrive,” *Mail-Herald*, August 28, 1915, p. 1.

73 “Alien Internment Camp for Revelstoke Park,” *Mail-Herald*, July 17, 1915, p. 1.

74 A wooden walking cane given to the mayor in 1916 by Austrians who had worked on the mountain road suggests that not all prisoners of war were poorly treated in Revelstoke. See Aaron Orlando, “Mt. Revelstoke Auto Road Milestone Centennial Gathering,” *Revelstoke Times Review*, August 27, 2012.

75 LAC, RG 84, vol. 190, file MR 176, Mount Revelstoke National Park – Utilization of Prisoners of War; Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, pp. 16-19, 21-22.

76 LAC, RG 84, vol. 190, file MR 176, Mount Revelstoke National Park – Utilization of Prisoners of War, W. A. Gordon, City Clerk, Revelstoke, to J. B. Harkin, Ottawa, July 5, 1916.

77 Kordan, *Enemy Aliens*, pp. 159-160, from LAC, RG 84, vol. 190, file MR 176, Municipal Resolution, re: establishment of Revelstoke Internment Camp.



**Figure 2:** Line-up for the seven-mile race at Revelstoke Winter Carnival, 1916.  
 Source: Revelstoke Museum and Archives, P1012

thanks to the work of volunteers and private donations. After 1915, when jumping competitions were held on a small hill at the base of Mt. Revelstoke, the ski club leased land farther up the mountain to build a better jump. Volunteers from the ski club cleared, levelled, and graded land to the right pitch, did rock work, constructed cribbing below the jump, and cleared an area where the skiers would land. Their goal was to create a jump that could break Canadian and world records. Even without this landscaping and construction, the hill was remarkably suitable for jumping. In his memoir of skiing in Canada, H. Percy Douglas commented that Revelstoke’s “great mountain-side needed no artificial tower, little grading, and had an unlimited approach and run-out and a natural contour. This combination of conditions made possible jumps of over 200 feet, equal to the best on United States hills. Their hill was a freak of nature. No one had ever seen one like it anywhere else.”<sup>78</sup> During the war, Revelstoke had gained both tourist infrastructure—some progress on the parkway and a ski jump—and an annual, well publicized winter carnival. The park and road had been set in motion before the war by mountaineers and progressive boosters. Wartime conditions that affected the identity, security, and respectability of distinct groups of European newcomers to Canada also resulted in contributions to tourist infrastructure and events: in one case through forced labour and in another by those who displayed their willing contribution to the cultural and economic betterment of the community.

### Conclusion

After the war, work continued on the parkway and ski hill, and both increased in popularity. In 1920, the jumping hill was absorbed into an expanded Mount Revelstoke National Park, and the National Parks Service helped the ski club improve and maintain the jump and landing area. In the early 1920s Mt. Revelstoke became the hill on which to establish new world records, and the hundreds of spectators who were drawn to jumping events each year kept

<sup>78</sup> Douglas, *My Ski-ing Years*, pp. 28-29.



**Figure 3:** Crowd watching ski jumping at Mt. Revelstoke, 1919.  
 Source: Image A-08989 courtesy of Royal BC Museum and Archives

restaurants, hotels, and other services busy during the low tourism season in western Canada.<sup>79</sup> During the early and mid-1920s, the tourist value of the winter sporting spectacle on the lower slope of Mt. Revelstoke was at least equal to that of the alpine areas around the summit, largely due to slow progress on the 18-mile automobile road to the summit, which was completed in 1927. After the road was opened to the public, it quickly became the city's most popular summer tourist attraction. Revelstoke lacked a road connection to Banff until 1940, but many tourists who travelled across Canada by railway during the summer months stopped in Revelstoke and hired a car to take them up the mountain.<sup>80</sup> The road and park also gained publicity as favourite stopping points for royal visitors who

<sup>79</sup> Lothian, *A Brief History of Canada's National Parks*, pp. 57-59; "All Skiing Records Broken," *Revelstoke Review*, February 10, 1921, p. 1. See also "The Big Hill and World Records," *Sliding, Gliding and Soaring: A History of Skiing in Revelstoke, British Columbia*, [http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/histoires\\_de\\_chez\\_nous-community\\_memories/pm\\_v2.php?id=story\\_line&lg=English&fl=0&ex=00000397&sl=3024&pos=1](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/histoires_de_chez_nous-community_memories/pm_v2.php?id=story_line&lg=English&fl=0&ex=00000397&sl=3024&pos=1).

<sup>80</sup> "Roads and Highways," *Encyclopedia of BC*, <http://knowbc.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/ebc/Books/Encyclopedia-of-BC/R/Roads-and-Highways> (accessed September 8, 2014). See, for example, "Revelstoke is Big Loser by Not Having Auto-Road Connection with Outside Points," *Revelstoke Review*, June 20, 1918, p. 1. This article was based on an interview with an automobile tourist.

toured Canada by rail, including the Prince of Wales, who was the guest of honour at the 1927 road-opening ceremony.<sup>81</sup> Ultimately the automobile road to the summit of Mt. Revelstoke proved a more popular and enduring tourist attraction than Revelstoke's ski jumping facilities and winter carnivals. The National Parks Service held international competitions and installed a chairlift and rope tow in the 1950s, but, ironically, construction of the Trans-Canada Highway—the tourist route first anticipated by the Progress Club in 1912—cut through the lower ski runs in the late 1950s and effectively scuttled the plan to expand skiing facilities in the park.<sup>82</sup>



**Figure 4:** Entrance arch welcoming visitors to Mount Revelstoke National Park and the completed tourist parkway in 1927.

*Source:* Revelstoke Museum and Archives, P1735. The author thanks curator Cathy English for providing this photograph.

As elsewhere in the mountains of western Canada, two very powerful parties shaped the tourist trade in Revelstoke during the early twentieth century: the Canadian Pacific Railway, which provided year-round access to the city, and the National Parks Branch, which publicized and funded the development of tourist amenities. Their roles in developing summer nature tourism are widely recognized by Canadian historians, but the contributions of smaller, local civic group actors have not received attention commensurate with their significance. In Revelstoke, the Mountaineering Club, Progress Club, and Ski Club initiated and pushed for park establishment, better automobile access, and a distinctive winter festival. Construction of a road to Mt. Revelstoke's summit and the establishment of Mount Revelstoke National Park were both facilitated by close linkages between the Mountaineering Club and British Columbia's department of Public Works, as well as district MLA Thomas Taylor's position as minister. The Progress Club

81 Lothian, *A Brief History of Canada's National Parks*, pp. 57-58.

82 BCA, *Revelstoke Centennial Tournament of Champions* (March 8-9, 1958), pp. 29-30; "The Decline of Jumping and the Opening of a New Era on Mt. Mackenzie," *Sliding, Gliding and Soaring*; "Big Bend Highway," *Encyclopedia of British Columbia*.

sought economic development and diversification by promoting tourism and automobile access. Its efforts helped secure a national park with a scenic parkway, but were insufficient to achieve its larger goal of having Revelstoke connected to BC's nascent highway network. Civic groups continued promoting Revelstoke to tourists during the war, as a destination for participating in healthy summer and winter mountain sports and for enjoying the winter carnival as competitors or spectators. As before the outbreak of war, the motivations and goals of many who promoted tourism during wartime were more complicated than the simple desire for profit. Concerns about ethnicity and citizenship were thrust to the forefront as the result of patriotic sentiments and deep suspicions expressed by many Anglo-Canadian British Columbians. For Scandinavian residents of Revelstoke, organizing a winter carnival based around their traditions of skiing and other healthy sports provided a way to display publicly an ethnic identity distinct from other continental Europeans, while also demonstrating their loyalty and value to the community and Canada more generally. In making the carnival a recurring event, they transformed skiing from a practical way of getting around in a snowy mountain region into a sporting spectacle and one of western Canada's first winter tourist draws.

The early development of recreational tourism on the slopes and summit of Mt. Revelstoke demonstrates locally based civic groups and ethnic organizations playing crucial roles in initiating tourism-related projects and impelling them forward—the kind of grassroots roles too often overlooked in histories of tourism that focus narrowly on big, powerful players in the industry. Civic groups frequently worked in concert with boosters, municipal governments, and business and political elites. On occasion they cooperated with major players in the tourism industry, such as railway companies and government agencies at the federal and provincial levels. Certainly many tourism promoters in Revelstoke were driven by the profits to be gained from selling goods and services and had a general desire for prosperity in their new and developing city. Yet, as shown here, a wider range of motivations were in operation throughout the period between 1890 and 1920. A high degree of tourism-mindedness was displayed by various groups, some comprised of established, well-connected Anglo-Canadian citizens and others of recent immigrants who were concerned about their standing in wartime Canada. Revelstoke residents seem to have shared an early and widespread recognition that tourism could play a significant, long-term role in their community, shaping not only its popular public image and its social and economic relations with other parts of Canada, but also social and economic relations within the city and surrounding district. By accounting for the agency and myriad motivations of these types of smaller civic and ethnic organizations that have helped establish and promote Canada's tourist attractions, historians of tourism can gain a fuller, more nuanced understanding of how some Canadian communities built and maintained reputations as tourist destinations without sustained top-down involvement by powerful corporate or state actors.