

Cars and Cottages

The Automotive Transformation of Ontario's Summer Home Tradition

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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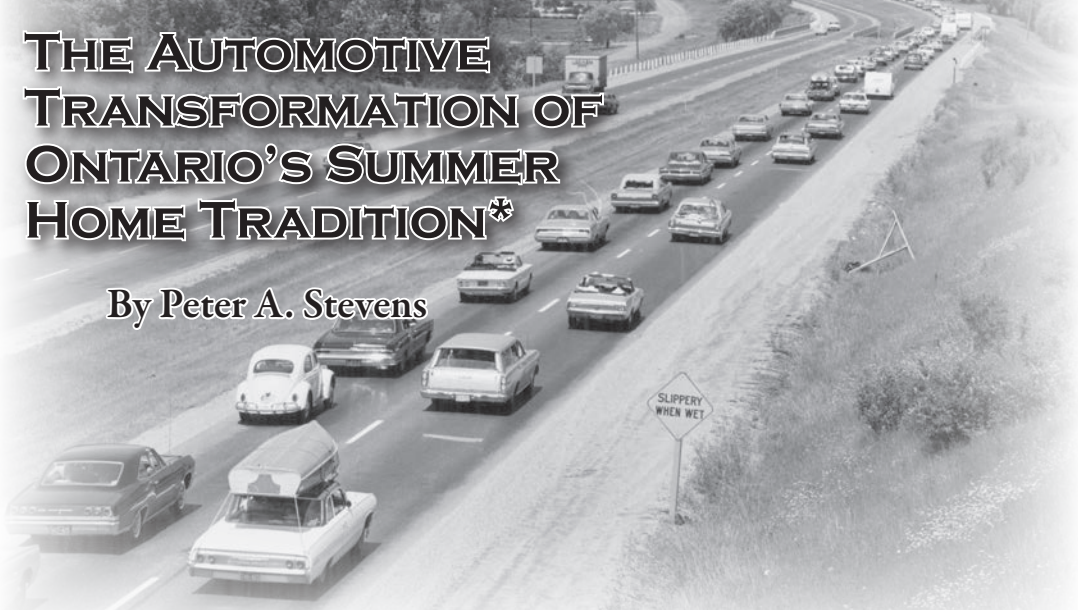
Résumé de l'article

Dans la société ontarienne, l'automobile, comme l'habitude d'aller passer l'été au chalet, jouent un rôle important, un rôle qui cependant n'a guère fait l'objet d'études approfondies. Dans cet article nous examinerons comment l'automobile a influencé et transformé cet usage social, notamment en facilitant l'expansion aussi bien sociale que géographique. L'extension du réseau routier, qui rendait plus accessibles de nouvelles régions de la province, les commodités du voyage en automobile, ont fait que la coutume de passer l'été au chalet, longtemps réservée à une élite, est peu à peu devenue un phénomène de masse. Les formes de la vie au chalet se sont alors transformées, celle-ci devenant à la fois plus privée et plus simple. Une autre conséquence importante est le changement d'orientation de la politique gouvernementale au sujet des résidences d'été, une politique qui s'adressait jusqu'alors autant aux citoyens américains qu'aux habitants de l'Ontario. Finalement, à la surprise même de beaucoup de ceux qui passent l'été au chalet, l'automobile a changé de nombreux aspects de la vie dans les lieux de résidence d'été, que ce soit l'atmosphère sociale, l'environnement naturel ou même les débats politiques. Si l'on doit reconnaître qu'elle a permis la démocratisation de l'usage de passer l'été au chalet, il faut aussi rendre l'automobile responsable du développement de certains aspects moins plaisants de la vie au chalet aujourd'hui.

CARS AND COTTAGES

THE AUTOMOTIVE TRANSFORMATION OF ONTARIO'S SUMMER HOME TRADITION*

By Peter A. Stevens



In the mid-1950s, workers from the Ontario Department of Highways blasted away pine trees and granite and built the first paved highway between Port Severn and Parry Sound.¹ Hope Miller, then a girl of thirteen, remembers her family being “ecstatic” at the opening of this new road. The Millers owned a summer vacation home on Sixmile Lake, a mid-sized body of water situated near Georgian Bay, just inland from the mouth of the Severn River. To get to the

cottage, her family drove more than 170 miles from the town of Ayr, where Hope’s father was a banker. But the new highway cut their travel time considerably, for it ran right past Sixmile Lake and eliminated a treacherous seven-mile drive along winding, overgrown backroads. Thanks to modern highways and the automobile, a journey that once had been arduous was now substantially easier. Suddenly, Hope recalls, it seemed as though they were “just a hop, skip, and a jump away” from

* Thanks to Dimitry Anastakis, Steve Penfold, Craig Heron, and anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. I also appreciate the feedback from participants at “The Car in History: Business, Space, and Culture in North America,” a conference held at the University of Toronto, 19-21 May 2005, at which an earlier version of this article was presented. Finally, thanks to Daniel Rohloff for technical assistance.

¹ Originally known as Highway 103, this road joined up with Highway 69 and passed through Foots Bay before continuing northward to Parry Sound. The road now forms the northern-most stretch of Highway 400. See Ontario. Department of Highways. *Annual Report* (1957), 91-92.

Abstract

Automobiles and summer cottages both play important roles in Ontario society, but neither of them has received much attention from scholars. This article examines how the automobile reshaped and reoriented the practice of summer cottaging. Particularly following the Second World War, the automobile served to expand cottaging both socially and geographically. Highway construction opened up new parts of the province to cottage development, while the advantages of automobile travel helped to transform cottaging from an elite activity into a mass phenomenon. Cars changed the nature of cottage life, making it more private and informal. They also led to a striking reversal in government policies, which historically had catered as much to Americans as to Ontarians. Finally the automobile influenced many aspects of cottage country, from its social atmosphere to its natural environment and its political disputes. Ultimately, the car democratized cottaging and, at the same time, fashioned some of the less pleasant features of cottage life.

Résumé: Dans la société ontarienne, l'automobile, comme l'habitude d'aller passer l'été au chalet, jouent un rôle important, un rôle qui cependant n'a guère fait l'objet d'études approfondies. Dans cet article nous examinerons comment l'automobile a influencé et transformé cet usage social, notamment en facilitant l'expansion aussi bien sociale que géographique. L'extension du réseau routier, qui rendait plus accessibles de nouvelles régions de la province, les commodités du voyage en automobile, ont fait que la coutume de passer l'été au chalet, longtemps réservée à une élite, est peu à peu devenue un phénomène de masse. Les formes de la vie au chalet se sont alors transformées, celle-ci devenant à la fois plus privée et plus simple. Une autre conséquence importante est le changement d'orientation de la politique gouvernementale au sujet des résidences d'été, une politique qui s'adressait jusqu'alors autant aux citoyens américains qu'aux habitants de l'Ontario. Finalement, à la surprise même de beaucoup de ceux qui passent l'été au chalet, l'automobile a changé de nombreux aspects de la vie dans les lieux de résidence d'été, que ce soit l'atmosphère sociale, l'environnement naturel ou même les débats politiques. Si l'on doit reconnaître qu'elle a permis la démocratisation de l'usage de passer l'été au chalet, il faut aussi rendre l'automobile responsable du développement de certains aspects moins plaisants de la vie au chalet aujourd'hui.

the family cottage.²

This anecdote serves as a reminder that in Ontario as elsewhere in North America, few aspects of twentieth-century society remained unaffected by the car. The automobile ushered in new agricultural practices and reduced the isolation of farming communities; it transformed urban life by accelerating suburbanization and the spatial reorganization of cities; and it enabled people from all backgrounds to expand their horizons by hitting the road and exploring other parts of the continent. As both a symbol and a provider of personal mobility and individuality, the automobile is unrivalled, and it has left its imprint on everything from our social behaviour, to our cultural practices, to our natural environment. While some critics have assailed the automobile for its alleged homogenizing influence on North American culture,³ Hope Miller's story illustrates the importance of studying the car's effect on specific places. Far from being simply an agent of uniformity, the automobile also could

² Personal interview with Hope Jenkins, née Miller (pseudonym), 14 August, 2004.

³ For one recent example, see Jane Holtz Kay, *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take it Back*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 65-7.

strengthen local or regional identities by giving new momentum and new directions to established cultural practices.

The impact of the car on Ontario society is a surprisingly undeveloped subject, considering the automobile's importance to the province's economy, and to Ontarians' way of life. The Ontario government is responsible for one of the largest road systems in North America, and since 2004, the province has surpassed even Michigan as a producer of automobiles.⁴ For the most part, however, scholars have yet to show us in what ways, if any, Ontario's experience with the automobile has been distinctive, at least from a social and cultural perspective.⁵ By examining the car in relation to one of the more characteristic fixtures on the province's landscape—the summer cottage—the present article represents a modest step towards a deeper understanding of Ontario's par-

ticular automotive experience.

On a representational level, the comparisons between automobiles and vacation homes are readily apparent. Historically, both cars and cottages addressed the deep-seated conviction in North America that urban people had a need to get out of the city and into the great outdoors.⁶ Just as cottages had long been viewed as sanctuaries from urban diseases and vice, automobiles were seen as a means by which urban families could retreat into safe and healthy rural environments. More generally, both cars and cottages are powerful status symbols. Much as owning a car—or at least the right make of car—is taken as an indication of one's wealth and prestige, owning a vacation home signifies that one has enjoyed some social and material success. But cars and cottages also are related on a functional level, since automobiles were the primary means by which twen-

⁴ *Toronto Star*, 2 February, 2005, C3; and *The Globe and Mail*, 28 November, 2006, B3. In 2003, Ontario had 230,600 kilometres (143,288 miles) of roads, putting it ahead of every Canadian province but Saskatchewan, and every American state except Texas and California. For a breakdown of the kilometrage of Canada's road network, by province, see Transport Canada, *Transportation in Canada 2003: Annual Report*, Table A7-1, available on the Transport Canada website at <www.tc.gc.ca/pol/en/report/anre2003/add/ta71.htm>. For the comparable American data, see U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, *Highway Statistics 2003*, Table HM-10, available on-line at <www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/ohim/hs03/htm/hm10.htm>.

⁵ Exceptions include Steve Penfold, "Are we to go literally to the hot dogs?: Parking Lots, Drive-ins, and the Critique of Progress in Toronto's Suburbs, 1965-1975," *Urban History Review* 33 (Fall 2004): 8-23; and G.T. Bloomfield, "No Parking Here to Corner?: London Reshaped by the Automobile, 1911-1961," *Urban History Review* 17 (October 1989): 139-58. My analysis has particularly benefited from Stephen Davies, "Ontario and the Automobile, 1900-1930: Aspects of Technological Integration," (Ph. D. Dissertation, McMaster University, 1987); and Stephen Davies, "Reckless Walking Must be Discouraged: The Automobile Revolution and the Shaping of Modern Urban Canada," *Urban History Review* 17 (October 1989): 123-38.

⁶ Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed., (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982); George Altmeyer, "Three Ideas of Nature in Canada, 1893-1914," in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 11:3 (August 1976): 21-36; and Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 29-35.

tieth-century North Americans got to vacation homes. It is this connection that I would like to focus on here.

Cottagers generally have escaped attention from historians who are studying the social impacts of the automobile. The reason for this, I suspect, is that as groups of motorists go, cottagers defy easy categorization. The fact that they travel out of town for recreational purposes suggests that one should think of them as tourists. Certainly, government tourism officials and the permanent residents of resort towns often refer to cottagers as 'tourists'; however, cottagers themselves shun this label. Historians too have been reluctant to classify cottagers as tourists, and have left them out of discussions of auto-tourism.⁷ Another approach would be to treat cottagers as commuters, for in rushing to and from their vacation homes each weekend, they resemble nothing if not suburbanites travelling between home and work. The comparison seems even more appropriate given that cottage communities function as satellites of large cities in much the same way that suburban municipalities do. To date, however, few scholars have commented on the parallels between holiday communities and suburbia.⁸

Following much of the literature re-

lated to tourism and suburbanization, this article interprets the automobile not simply as a neutral form of transportation that facilitated cottagers' vacations, but rather as an active force that fundamentally shaped and organized their vacation experiences. My general contention is that where Ontario cottaging is concerned, the automobile was a mixed blessing. The car deserves recognition for having driven the democratization of cottaging, but likewise, it must bear responsibility for having fashioned some of the less pleasant features of cottage life. On balance, however, the car's overall importance to cottaging is undeniable. The automobile determined not only the social and geographic scope of cottaging, but also the flavour and physical layout of Ontario's cottage communities. In essence, if one wishes to understand the internal dynamics of Ontario's popular cottaging phenomenon, one must begin with the automobile.

Cottaging Before The Automobile

Ontario's summer home tradition long predates the advent of the automobile. As early as the 1850s, wealthy Toronto residents had established sum-

⁷ For example, Warren Belasco makes just a passing mention of cottagers, while John A. Jakle explicitly excludes them altogether. Marguerite S. Shaffer defines tourism in a way that likewise excludes cottagers. See Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945*, (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1979), 63-6; Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America*, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), xiii; and Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 11.

⁸ One exception is sociologist S.D. Clark, who notes that some of the suburbs that grew up outside Toronto following the Second World War actually were old cottaging communities in which seasonal buildings were converted to year-round use. See Clark, *The Suburban Society*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 12, 29-30.

mer homes at several locations close to the city. Some erected cottages on Lake Ontario at various points between Toronto and Hamilton. Others went east to the St. Lawrence River, where they joined wealthy Americans in building summer places on the Thousand Islands. A small number even built cottages at inland locations such as Rice Lake, near Peterborough, and Charleston Lake, just east of Kingston. During the next few decades, cottaging grew in popularity and expanded into other areas, partly because wealthy Americans came to view Ontario's wilderness as the perfect spot for owning vacation property. By the

1870s, cottaging communities had taken root not only in places like the Kawarthas near Peterborough and Grand Bend on Lake Huron, but also in more distant locations, such as the district of Muskoka, and on the Thirty Thousands Islands of Georgian Bay. Before long, cottages had started to appear even in the relative wilds of Northern Ontario. By the turn of the century, for instance, Lake Temagami, just outside Sudbury, was attracting tourists from Toronto and the United States. Likewise, in north-western Ontario, the region surrounding Kenora and Lake of the Woods was emerging as a summer playground for people from the neigh-



A crowd transfers from train to steamboats at Muskoka Wharf Station, 1900. Prior to the advent of the automobile, cottaging was concentrated on large lakes that were serviced by mass transportation. Library and Archives Canada, PA-068436 (detail)

bouring province of Manitoba.⁹

Like other travellers of this time period, Ontario's early cottagers were reliant upon mass transportation. They typically got to their summer homes via train and steamship—a journey that often consumed the better part of a day. Cottagers going to Georgian Bay in the 1880s, for instance, first had to endure a lengthy train ride north from Toronto. At Midland, they transferred to a steamboat, which spent up to eight hours dropping off cottagers at islands on the way to PARRY SOUND.¹⁰ Similarly, in 1906, getting to Temagami involved a train ride that lasted ten hours from Toronto, fifteen hours from Detroit or Buffalo, and twenty-four hours from New York or Chicago.¹¹ In

some cases, tourists constituted a secondary market for transportation companies already hauling timber and other freight. In other cases, tourists themselves were the sole reason for a transportation company's existence. The most interesting example of this latter phenomenon was the *Portage Flyer*, a train that carried vacationers from Peninsula Lake, near Huntsville, to an adjacent body of water, the Lake of Bays. With a total track length of just one and one-eighth miles, the *Portage Flyer* enjoyed the dubious distinction of being the shortest commercial railway in the world.¹²

Travelling to cottage country by rail and steamship tends to get romanticised nowadays,¹³ but at the time, it could be te-

⁹ Roy I. Wolfe, "Recreational Land Use in Ontario," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1956); Roy I. Wolfe, "The Summer Resorts of Ontario in the Nineteenth Century," *Ontario History* 54 (1962): 149-61; Ken Cruikshank and Nancy B. Bouchier, "The Heritage of the People Closed Against Them': Class, Environment, and the Shaping of Burlington Beach, 1870s-1980s," *Urban History Review* 30 (October 2001): 40-55; Bruce W. Hodgins and Jamie Benidickson, *The Temagami Experience: Recreation, Resources, and Aboriginal Rights in the Northern Ontario Wilderness*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), chapters 6 and 9; Claire Elizabeth Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 86-95 and *passim*; Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), chapters 3 and 5; Geoffrey Wall, "Recreational Land Use in Muskoka," *Ontario Geography* 11 (1977): 11-28; Elaine A. Boone, "From Hot Streets to Lake Breezes: The Development of Tourism in Muskoka, 1860-1930," (Master's thesis, Laurentian University, 1992); Greg Halseth, *Cottage Country in Transition: A Social Geography of Change and Contention in the Rural-Recreation Countryside*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), esp. 69-77; Heather Robertson and Melinda McCracken, *Magical, Mysterious: Lake of the Woods*, (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, Inc., 2003); Dean Robinson, ed., *From Walker's Folly to Fabulous...: 75 Years of Oakwood, 1922-1997*, (Stratford, Ontario: Oakwood Park Association, 1997); Enid Mallory, *Kawartha: Living on These Lakes*, (Peterborough: Peterborough Publishing, 1991); Christie Bentham and Katharine Hooke, *From Burliegh to Boschink: A Community Called Stony Lake*, (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2000); Sally Gibson, *More Than an Island: A History of the Toronto Island*, (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1984).

¹⁰ Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, 70-1, 78-9.

¹¹ Hodgins and Benidickson, *Temagami Experience*, 110.

¹² Susan Pryke, *Huntsville: With Spirit and Resolve*, (Huntsville, Ontario: Fox Meadow Creations, 2000), 61-5, 90-1, 130-1; Niall MacKay, *By Steam Boat & Steam Train: The Story of the Huntsville and Lake of Bays Railway and Navigation Companies*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., Ltd., 1982).

¹³ In some cases, vehicles from the steam era have had a second life years after first being mothballed. A restored steamboat, the *Segwun*, now operates as a tourist attraction on Lake Muskoka, while the newly-refurbished *Portage Flyer* now is a popular feature at Muskoka Heritage Place in Huntsville.

dious, exasperating, and uncomfortable. Mass transportation placed travellers at the mercy of corporations, and tied them to fixed routes and set timetables of arrival and departure. It forced passengers to interact with strangers, and it could involve delays and inconveniences that were beyond travellers' own control.¹⁴ On some routes, railway companies enticed tourists with Pullman cars and express trains,¹⁵ but most cottagers still faced multiple transfers en route to their destinations. People heading to summer homes on the Lake of Bays, for instance, had to transfer back and forth from train to steamboat a minimum of three times. Some vacationers also experienced additional discomforts, such as seasickness.

Drawbacks of this sort notwithstanding, railways and steamship lines were essential to early cottaging, for they were the only means by which people could move with relative speed and comfort from metropolitan areas to Ontario's hinterland. Just as important, however, these modes of transportation influenced both the spatial arrangements and social dynamics of early cottaging colonies. For one thing, since steamboat operations required a great deal of traffic in order to be financially feasible, the construction

of cottages was limited to large bodies of water that were capable of supporting sizeable tourist populations. Smaller and more remote lakes remained undeveloped. As well, travel by railway and steamship restricted cottaging to an elite segment of the population, for it involved time and money that most of the population could not afford. Though American industrialists were prominent among them, not all of these early cottagers were millionaires: many were doctors, lawyers, or members of other upper-middle class professions. Even so, in an age when paid vacations were not yet widespread, cottage ownership remained the preserve of an affluent, leisured class of people.¹⁶

Notably, the first summer residents in what is now cottage country didn't stay in cottages at all; rather, they stayed in full-service resort hotels that often were owned by the very same transportation companies that had brought them there. Attracting members of high society from cities in Ontario and the United States, these resorts were bastions of civilization plunked down in the middle of Ontario's wilderness. Semi-formal attire and gentility were *de rigueur*, and recreation was the order of the day. Guests indulged in an array of activities, from sailing and

¹⁴ Jakle, *The Tourist*, chapter 4; Brendan O'Brien, "Memories: Cottage Life at the Turn of the Century," in *SummerTimes: In Celebration of 100 Years of the Muskoka Lakes Association*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., Ltd., 1994), 123-5; Jessie Featherstonhaugh Garratt, *My Happy Years at Lake of Bays*, (Orillia: Thomson Seyffer Graphics, 1988), 4-7; Muldrew Lakes Cottagers Club, *A History of Muldrew Lakes: A Centennial Project*, (Waterloo, Ontario: Muldrew Lakes Cottagers Club, 1966), 79-81.

¹⁵ Hodgins and Benedickson, *Temagami Experience*, 100; Pryke, *Huntsville*, 89.

¹⁶ Hodgins and Benidickson, *Temagami Experience*, 118; Jasen, *Wild Things*, 123-4; Wolfe, "Summer Resorts of Ontario," 156-9. It certainly wasn't the price of land that restricted cottaging to the wealthy. In Muskoka, for example, the government was selling land for as little as one dollar per acre. See Wall, "Recreational Land Use in Muskoka," 18-19.

water-sports, to lawn bowling, golf, and tennis. Fishing was a favourite activity for some visitors, while others passed their time relaxing on the magnificent verandas that adorned most resorts. Evenings were marked by elaborate dinners and formal dances, suggesting that these fashionable watering places were as much about meeting the right people as they were about communing with nature.¹⁷

This atmosphere of comfort and leisure carried over to Ontario's first cottage colonies, which sprouted up around resort hotels beginning in the 1870s. Several factors contributed to the rise of these colonies. One was the increasing willingness of the federal and provincial governments to sell off Crown land for recreational purposes. Another was the crowded conditions at Ontario's tremendously popular resort hotels. With the demand for rooms sometimes outstripping the supply, some guests found themselves sleeping in tents. Privately-owned cottages thus emerged as favourable alternatives for summer visitors who were seeking guaranteed accommodation and a little privacy. As a further advantage, private summer homes released vacationers from their dependence on unfamiliar hotel staff, and enabled them to bring their own domestic servants with them from the city for the duration of the

summer.¹⁸

On the whole, though, there was considerable continuity between Ontario's nineteenth-century resort hotels and the province's early cottages. The latter were close to the former, both physically and stylistically. For the owners of Ontario's first summer homes, the change in accommodation did not mean a lowering of standards. Particularly on the St. Lawrence River and in Muskoka, the 'cottages' that many of these people erected actually were waterfront mansions that rivalled the resorts in terms of their ostentation. And since mass transportation remained the only feasible way into cottage country, early cottagers built their summer homes just a short distance away from the resorts, which served as ports-of-call for steamboats and water taxis. Furthermore, these early summer homes often functioned like outbuildings of the resort hotels proper. A common atmosphere of leisure and formality obtained at both locations, and cottagers frequently returned to the resorts to use recreational facilities, to visit friends, or to attend dances and other gatherings. For both social and practical reasons, then, resort hotels formed the nucleus of Ontario's early cottage colonies.¹⁹

In sum, cottaging in Ontario prior to

¹⁷ Wolfe, "Summer Resorts of Ontario," 157-9; Wall, "Recreational Land Use in Muskoka," 17-18, 23-4; Gerald Killan, *Protected Places: A History of Ontario's Provincial Parks System*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press Limited in association with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 1993), 48-51. Resort hotels in Georgian Bay, though hardly ramshackle affairs themselves, took pride in being more rustic—and therefore more 'authentic'—than their counterparts in places such as Muskoka and the St. Lawrence. See Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, 89-95.

¹⁸ Cameron Taylor, *Enchanted Summers: The Grand Hotels of Muskoka*, (Toronto: Lynx Images, 1997), 38-39; Jasen, *Wild Things*, 76-79, 116-26; Wolfe, "Summer Resorts of Ontario," 157-59.

¹⁹ Boone, 'From Hot Streets to Lake Breezes,' chapter 2; Jasen, *Wild Things*, 76-9, 123-4; Wolfe,

the age of mass automobility was shaped in large measure by the necessities of railway and steamboat travel. Geographically, cottage colonies were limited to lakes and rivers that either were on pre-existing transportation routes, or were large enough to attract transportation companies that specifically catered to tourists. Cottage development typically concentrated around large resort hotels, which served as transportation hubs for steamship lines. Socially, cottaging was restricted to wealthy élites, since they alone could afford the time and money that it cost to travel to cottage country. As well, because the journey into the Ontario wilderness was relatively long and trying, families generally remained at the cottage for the duration of the summer. The cottages themselves were large, well-appointed manors staffed by domestic servants. For the people who summered in them, cottage life offered high culture and society amidst the natural beauty of the great outdoors. This atmosphere of wealth, exclusivity, and prestige was transformed, however, with the coming of the automobile.

The Automobile Comes to Cottage Country

Automobiles appeared in cottage country at a fairly early date. Vacationers began driving cars to some of the

resort hotels in Muskoka by as early as the first decade of the twentieth century, for example.²⁰ Similarly, in 1913, Eric Grier drove his RC Hupmobile from Toronto to Stony Lake in the Kawarthas—a trip that took thirteen hours and featured numerous stops to change flat tires.²¹ As Grier's experience suggests, people who drove their automobiles to the cottage during this period did so mainly to prove that they could, not because the trip was particularly fast or convenient.

Initially, the abysmal state of Ontario's roads ensured the continued success of cottage country's railway and steamship companies. Even after the First World War, long-distance automobile travel remained slow and aggravating throughout Ontario, since many of the province's trunk roads were little more than rutted gravel laneways.²² Worse yet were the access roads that led from the main thoroughfares to inland lakes: rough, narrow, and frequently impassable, these backroads were the downfall of many motoring cottagers. In 1923, when Brendan O'Brien was a lad of fourteen, his parents decided to drive to their summer home in Muskoka. Years later, O'Brien recounted the ordeal:

I well remember our getting stuck in the mud at a swampy section of the road between Foots Bay and Gordon Bay. We were there for what seemed like an eternity, up to our knees in mud and pushing the car

"Summer Resorts of Ontario," 157-59; Wall, "Recreational Land Use in Muskoka," 19; Hodgins and Benidickson, *Temagami Experience*, 115-21; Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, 55, 78, 87-89.

²⁰ O'Brien, "Memories," 117-18.

²¹ Bentham and Hooke, *From Burliegh to Boschink*, 57.

²² Ian M. Drummond, *Progress Without Planning: The Economic History of Ontario from Confederation to the Second World War*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 264-68; Pryke, *Huntsville*, 167.

Muskoka Road, 1918. So long as Ontario's roads remained poor, few people travelled to their summer homes by automobile. Archives of Ontario, Acc. 15808-88

with everything we had, all the while being attacked by swarms of mosquitoes and blackflies. On the trip home the car had trouble climbing the steep winding hill just south of Gravenhurst. With the continuous use of low gear and much pushing we finally reached the top, only to find the radiator boiling over violently, which of course necessitated a search for water. This trip to Muskoka, via Beaverton, took us almost a day in each direction!²³

Not surprisingly, few cottagers enjoyed adventures of this sort. So long as Ontario's road system remained unimproved and unreliable, the railway and steamship companies could count on receiving the business of most cottagers.

Nevertheless, there was mounting evidence during the 1920s that Canada was becoming a nation of motorists. Particularly in Ontario, the auto industry blossomed after Canadian firms became branch plants of the major American companies. Over the course of the 1920s, Canada developed into the world's second-largest producer of automobiles. More than forty percent of all Canadian-made vehicles were exported, but



even so, by 1927, Canada had the third-highest rate of automobile ownership in the world, following only the United States and New Zealand. Ontario alone accounted for nearly half of the motor vehicle registrations in all of Canada. In 1931, for example, Ontario had 562,216 registrations, or roughly one vehicle for every six people in the province.²⁴

²³ O'Brien, "Memories," 119. For similar accounts of cottage country road conditions during the interwar years, see Garratt, *My Happy Years at Lake of Bays*, 47; Bruce M. McCraw, *See You Next Summer: Postcard Memories of Sparrow Lake*, (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., 1988), 6; and Nellie Crichton, *Muskoka, A Reflection*, (privately published, 2001), 7, 13, and 15.

²⁴ James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1998), 129-30 and chapters 3-5; Donald F. Davis, "Dependent Motorization: Canada and the Automobile to the 1930s," in *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21 (Fall 1986): 106-20; Tom Traves, "The Development of the Ontario Automobile Industry to 1939," chapter 12 of Drummond, *Progress Without Planning*; David Siegel, "Provincial-Municipal Relations: A Case Study of Roads," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1983), chapter 1. The 1931 figures for Ontario are calculated from the population and motor vehicle registration statistics listed in Tables A2-14, and T147-194a, and T147-194b of the *Historical Statistics of*

The growing popularity of the automobile forced the Ontario government into action. In 1915, the province created a Department of Highways, which began an extensive highway-paving program following the First World War. By the mid-1920s, the province was building highways at the rate of 200 miles per year. Over the course of the decade, the miles of paved roads within the Provincial Highway System rose from a negligible quantity to just over twelve hundred. The pace slowed only slightly during the Great Depression, since highway construction was one of the main tasks assigned to relief workers. By 1940, Ontario had a total of some 7,300 miles of provincial highways, 2,100 of which were paved.²⁵

Much of this highway construction came at the behest of tourists from the United States. Americans had the highest rate of automobile ownership in the world, and they were eager to travel anywhere their cars could take them, including Canada.²⁶ When the provincial

government conducted a traffic census in 1913, it found that a quarter of the cars on Ontario's roads bore American license plates.²⁷ This large American presence helped to shape the priorities of the Department of Highways. For example, the province's first concrete highway, which opened between Toronto and Hamilton in 1917, was built in part to lure visitors from the U.S. During the 1920s, American tourists were an important reason behind the construction of the Ferguson Highway, which ran north into the Canadian Shield. Several more provincial roadways were built during the 1930s, including a highway between Huntsville and Whitney, which opened up Algonquin Provincial Park to motorists; and North America's first superhighway, the Queen Elizabeth Way. In both cases, the province's wish to attract American tourists was a motivating factor.²⁸

Nor were Canadian motorists immune from the travel bug. In Ontario as elsewhere, consumers were enticed by

Canada, 2nd edition, available online at the Statistics Canada website, <www.statscan.ca>.

²⁵ Drummond, *Progress Without Planning*, 264-70; Davis, "Dependent Motorization," 120-27; Edwin C. Guillet, *The Story of Canadian Roads*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), ch. 12; Peter Oliver, *G. Howard Ferguson: Ontario Tory*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 202-4, 339-41; John T. Saywell, *'Just Call Me Mitch': The Life of Mitchell F. Hepburn*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 109, 145, 186; Ontario. Ministry of Transportation and Communications. *Footpaths to Freeways: The Story of Ontario's Roads*, (Downsview, Ontario: Ministry of Transportation and Communications, 1984), 68-69, 73-81; Ontario. Ministry of Highways. *Annual Report* (1918), 9-10; Ontario. Ministry of Highways. *Annual Report* (1921), 9 and 20; Ontario. Ministry of Highways. *Annual Report* (1922), 10, 40; Ontario. Ministry of Highways. *Annual Report* (1932), 38; Ontario. Ministry of Highways. *Annual Report* (1942), 18.

²⁶ Flink, *Automobile Age*, 129; Jakle, *The Tourist*, 202-5.

²⁷ Figures calculated from statistics in Ontario. Public Roads and Highways Commission. *Report of the Public Roads and Highways Commission of Ontario, 1914*, (Toronto: King's Printer, 1914), 100-5.

²⁸ Ontario. Ministry of Transportation and Communications, (1984), 68-69, 77; Robert Stamp, *QEW: Canada's First Superhighway*, (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1987); Guillet, *Story of Canadian Roads*, 156, 161-62; Davis, "Dependent Motorization"; and Killan, *Protected Places*, 64-66.

automobile advertisements, which often showed families zooming along in their cars through idealised rural landscapes. The rural emphasis in car ads served a dual purpose: it identified the countryside as the best place in which to test the capabilities of the automobile, and it also suggested that the car was a promoter of health that could whisk people out of dirty, congested cities and into the clean, open air of the country. In short, the advertising of the day argued that touring by car was a wholesome, healthful, and exciting activity. Many Ontarians were receptive to this message, and they took to the road alongside their counterparts from the United States. The result was a thriving tourism trade that featured the same sort of municipal campgrounds and roadside cabin camps that were appearing all over North America during the same period.²⁹

But if it was country air and a break from city life that one was after, nothing in Ontario could surpass the summer home. The records of the Department of Lands and Forests reveal that the newfound automobility of the 1920s also fuelled a surge in cottaging. The Department had been leasing and selling Crown land to aspiring cottagers in

more or less the same way since the turn of the century. Within provincial parks, individuals could obtain 21-year leases at an annual rate of ten dollars per acre. Outside of provincial parks, they could purchase Crown land for as little ten dollars an acre, or twenty dollars an acre if the property was on an island. To receive a patent on the land, individuals generally had to construct a cottage worth at least \$500 within eighteen months of purchase; otherwise, they forfeited their claim. Cottagers also absorbed all related surveying costs.³⁰

Originally, the Department of Lands and Forests had assumed, quite rightly, that people travelled to their summer homes by train. The land that it offered for sale invariably was located near a railway terminus, and indeed the transportation companies themselves helped to promote the Department's cottaging program. But as more and more roads penetrated Ontario's wilderness, the program's orientation changed from railroads to automobiles. The Department's surveyors were kept busy mapping out cottage lots adjacent to new thoroughfares. Between 1921 and 1931, the number of cottages in Rondeau Provincial Park rose from 60 to 268 — growth that Lands and Forests

²⁹ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*; Roy I. Wolfe, "The Changing Patterns of Tourism in Ontario," in Edith G. Firth, ed., *Profiles of a Province: Studies in the History of Ontario*, (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967), 173-77; Davies, "Ontario and the Automobile"; Davies, "Reckless Walking Must Be Discouraged"; Pryke, *Huntsville*, 86, 158-61.

³⁰ Ontario. Department of Lands, Forests and Mines. "Information re Sale and Location of Public Lands," (Toronto: King's Printer, 1908), 14; Ontario. Department of Lands, Forests and Mines. "Information re Sale and Location of Public Lands," (Toronto: King's Printer, 1912), 12-13; Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests. "Summer Homes for Tourists, Campers and Sportsmen," (Toronto: Department of Lands and Forests, 1930), esp. 42, 51-55, 62; R.S. Lambert with Paul Pross, *Renewing Nature's Wealth: A Centennial History*, (Toronto: Department of Lands and Forests, 1967), 295-96, 312, 366, 425-28.

attributed to improved highways in the area. Similarly, the Department's 1939 *Annual Report* noted,

a remarkable increase in the number of interested inquiries for cottage sites has been the result of the opening of new roads into the watered areas of the North. A large number of these inquiries have been from American citizens, which affords striking evidence that the building of roads in these areas has been fully justified.³¹

This evidence suggests how the car was beginning to transform Ontario's summer home tradition. Whereas railway and steamship travel served to restrict cottaging to concentrated areas on large bodies of water, automobile travel facilitated cottage development even on small, isolated lakes. The construction of Highway 35 through Haliburton brought cottaging to numerous areas that were inaccessible by mass transportation, for instance.³² Of course, these early highways were far from perfect. They passed through the centre of every town, and usually had just a single lane in each direction, which meant that a drive to the

cottage was neither direct nor fast. And as we already have seen, the access roads that led from highways to cottage colonies left much to be desired. But compared to mass transportation, the automobile offered flexibility, comfort, and privacy. Cottagers who travelled by car could select their own routes and could proceed at their own pace. Unlike those who travelled by rail and steamboat, they didn't have to deal with crowds of strangers, and they were no longer burdened by having to transfer from one mode of transportation to another. The advantages of the automobile would not be fully realised until the postwar period, when superior cars and better roads would make it relatively easy and enjoyable to drive to the cottage. Still, there was ample proof during the interwar years of the automobile's capacity to ease cottagers' travels and to spread cottaging geographically.³³

Yet the automobile did not impact all regions of the province equally. As such, it reinforced regional differences within cottage country. For instance, the Thirty

³¹ Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests, *Annual Report* (1925), 9; Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests, *Annual Report* (1927), 9; Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests, *Annual Report* (1939), 11; Killan, *Protected Places*, 53.

³² Tatley, *Steamboating on the Trent-Severn*, 166; Ed H. Devitt and Nila Reynolds, "Echoes of the Past' Resounding in the Present: A Brief Illustrated General History of a Central Region in Southern Ontario formed by Two Muskoka and Ten Haliburton Townships," (Kitchener, Ontario: Aljon Print-Craft Ltd. Letter service, 1980), 33.

³³ In part, road improvements in cottage country came in response to lobbying from cottagers themselves. In 1934, for example, 150 members of the Muskoka Lakes Association met with government officials to demand the paving of roads from Port Carling to Bracebridge and Gravenhurst. See University of Waterloo Archives and Special Collections, Muskoka Lakes Association Fonds GA 100 File 188, "The Muskoka Lakes Association: Then and Now" [1962], 15. Notably, the Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA), the province's most important road lobby group, was silent on the question of roads for cottagers. Dominated by agricultural interests, the OGRA was adamant that when it came to road building, the needs of farmers should take precedence over the desires of tourists and city dwellers. Comments to this effect pervade the proceedings of OGRA annual meetings, which are available at the Archives of Ontario (hereinafter AO).

Thousand Islands area on upper Georgian Bay had long been distinguished from inland cottaging regions on account of its unique geography. With summer homes scattered throughout an archipelago, vacationers could only get to their cottages by using boats—a fact that no amount of highway building was going to change. Access roads to the shores of Georgian Bay would eventually be built during the 1950s and '60s, but in many ways, the Thirty Thousand Islands would remain cut off from North American car culture. The Islands thus were exempted from the interwar flood of middle-class tourists, and they remained the preserve of an elite class of cottager. In this part of Ontario's cottage country, the automobile was notable in its *absence* rather than its presence.³⁴

Georgian Bay was an exception, however. Elsewhere, the car began to democratize cottaging during the interwar years, although for the working class in particular, barriers to cottage ownership remained. The impact of the automobile was perhaps most apparent in the Kawarthas, where most steamboat

operations had collapsed by the end of the 1920s. In contrast, in the province's more fashionable resort areas, which were somewhat more distant, steamship companies flourished during the twenties. But even so, the sight of cottagers arriving in handsome motorcars became increasingly common. As early as 1931, the C.N.R. began cutting back on its passenger service to Muskoka, citing competition from the new highways.³⁵ In many affluent families, a chauffeur joined the team of domestic servants who staffed the cottage for the duration of the summer. But apart from those workers who were in the employ of wealthy cottagers, the automobile did not introduce many working people to the cottaging lifestyle. Although the 1920s saw the appearance of working-class resorts on places such as Lake Simcoe, Georgian Bay, and Lake Erie,³⁶ cottage ownership generally remained out of reach for workers during the interwar period. At a time before paid vacations had been extended to working people, few labourers had enough time or money to own a summer home.³⁷

³⁴ Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, 93-94; 123-24, 150-55.

³⁵ Tatley, *Steamboating on the Trent-Severn*, ch. 5; Tatley, *Steamboat Era in the Muskokas*, vol. 2, 181, and chs. 2 and 6.

³⁶ Wolfe, "Changing Patterns of Tourism in Ontario."

³⁷ Workers typically toiled for nine or ten hours a day, six days a week during the interwar years; they did not receive paid vacations until 1944, as is discussed below in note 52. Though a comprehensive account of working-class spending patterns in interwar Ontario has yet to be written, regional studies from throughout North America demonstrate that even during the supposedly prosperous 1920s, many—and possibly even most—blue-collar families still had difficulty affording even basic necessities, let alone luxuries such as automobiles and vacations. See Craig Heron and Steve Penfold, *The Workers' Festival: A History of Labour Day in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 258; Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), ch. 6; Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), ch. 2; Eleanor A. Bartlett, "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929," in *BC Studies* 51 (Autumn 1981): 3-62; Frank Stricker, "Affluence for Whom?—Another

For members of the middle class, however, it was a different story. The economic prosperity of the 1920s, especially in the United States, made cottage ownership possible for growing numbers of professionals. As roads opened up new parts of Ontario, the families of academics, clergymen, small businessmen, and other professionals quickly purchased inexpensive waterfront property.³⁸ These new cottage owners still were moderately well off, but the cottage communities that they built were rather different from those of their wealthier forerunners. In general, their summer homes were less grandiose, and the overall atmosphere was more informal. In contrast to those cottagers who travelled via mass transportation, these newer cottagers did not have to spend extended periods of time mingling in public. Instead, they travelled to their summer homes in the privacy of their own vehicles, which eliminated the need to interact with strangers. Additionally, the vacation communities that emerged on previously inaccessible lakes lacked the resort hotels, golf

courses, and social customs that lay at the centre of more established cottaging areas. Consequently, in places served exclusively by the automobile, cottage life assumed a more inward-looking, private focus. While these new cottaging areas certainly didn't lack a sense of community, the emphasis was more on relaxing with one's extended family than on making the right social connections. In other words, as private transportation became the dominant means by which people got to their summer homes, cottaging itself became a more private and informal activity. This trend would become even more pronounced during the postwar years, when the automobile democratized cottaging even further.³⁹

Postwar Booms: Highways and Cottaging

By the end of the Second World War, Ontario's highway system was once again in need of an overhaul. Ten years of depression followed by five years of war had left the province's roads in a state of disrepair. True, some stretches of highway

Look at Prosperity and the Working Classes in the 1920s," in *Labor History* 24:1 (Winter 1983): 5-33; and Craig Heron, "The Workers' City: The Remaking of Working-Class Hamilton, 1890-1940," (unpublished manuscript). For a slightly more optimistic interpretation of working-class leisure patterns during the interwar years, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, second edition, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 229-36.

³⁸ For the periods prior to the Second World War, no quantitative data exist that would enable one to categorize Ontario's cottager population according to social class. However, the increasingly middle-class nature of cottaging during the interwar years is amply demonstrated by the records and memoirs produced by cottagers themselves, which often identify cottage owners by their occupation. For example, see Muldrew Lakes Cottagers Club, *A History of Muldrew Lakes*, revised edition, (Orangeville, Ontario: Cline Publishing, 1978); Babs Sennett, *Cawaja: Memories of Cottaging on Georgian Bay*, 3rd edition, (Toronto: privately published, 1999). Toronto dentist William Frederick Rattle provides a representative account of middle-class cottaging during the interwar years in his unpublished manuscript, "Thirty Summers at Lake of Bays, [19]19—[19]49," located in the Baldwin Special Collections Room, Toronto Reference Library.

³⁹ Wolfe, "Changing Patterns of Tourism in Ontario."



A cottager and his car on the access road to Sixmile Lake, 1953. Following the Second World War, cottagers abandoned mass transportation in favour of the private automobile. Photo courtesy of G. Crombie.

building program that eventually provided Ontario with an impres-

had received attention under the work relief programs of the 1930s, and a few others had seen improvements because of their importance to the war effort. But much of the system comprised unsurfaced highways that had been built in the 1920s, and had received little maintenance since. Even the fully-paved Queen Elizabeth Way, which had opened with much fanfare in 1940, had been reduced to a crumbling roadway thanks to convoys of trucks carrying war *matériel*.⁴⁰

A shortage of concrete and steel made new highway construction impossible during the immediate postwar years. But in 1950, when these materials were available once again, the Department of Highways announced a colossal highway-

sive network of modern, limited-access freeways. Included in this program were a host of projects that Ontarians now take for granted: an improved and expanded Queen Elizabeth Way; Highway 401, stretching from the Michigan border all the way to Québec; engineering marvels such as the Burlington Skyway, which eliminated the worst bottleneck between Toronto and Hamilton; and new highways throughout northern Ontario, including the Trans-Canada Highway, which was a joint venture between the federal and provincial governments. Together, these various projects raised the total mileage of Ontario highways by some twenty-seven percent between 1950 and 1970.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ontario. Department of Highways. *Annual Report*, (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1935-1946); Stamp, *QEW*; Guillet, *Story of Canadian Roads*, 193-99.

⁴¹ *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 23 February 1950, 1, 2, 4; *Toronto Daily Star*, 23 February 1950, 2-4.; Ontario. Department of Highways. *Annual Reports*, (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1950-1970), Ontario. Ministry of Transportation and Communications (1984), 79-95; David Monaghan, "Canada's New Main Street: The Trans-Canada Highway as Idea and Reality, 1912-1950," (M.A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1996), esp. 65-104; Larry McNally, "Roads, Streets, and Highways," in Norman R. Ball, ed., *Building Canada: A History of Public Works*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 51-54; Guillet, *Story of Canadian Roads*, 226-29.



Three men take a break while building a simple cottage at Sixmile Lake, 1953. The postwar boom made cottage ownership possible for a wider portion of the general population. Photo courtesy of G. Crombie.

In Ontario as in other parts of North America, this postwar highway construction simultaneously reflected and facilitated profound social changes. Canada had long since relinquished its status as the world's second-largest producer of automobiles,⁴² but there was no question that Canadians, like Americans, were rapidly adopting a lifestyle that re-

volved around the automobile. In southern Ontario, the population was exploding. Young families were flocking to new suburbs, where dispersed communities and poor transit service made residents increasingly dependent upon the private automobile. The result was a steep hike in the rate of car ownership.⁴³ But there also were other factors that necessitated a

⁴² By 1939, Canadian production had fallen to fifth place world-wide, after the United States, Britain, France, and Germany, respectively. Flink, *Automobile Age*, 151-52.

⁴³ In 1941, Ontario had roughly one car for every six people; in 1951, the figure was one car for every five people; and by 1961, there was roughly one car for every 3.5 Ontarians. Statistics adapted from Ontario. Registrar General. *Vital Statistics for 1950*, (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1952), 12; Ontario. Registrar General. *Vital Statistics for 1971*, (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 197[3?]), 13; Ontario. Department of Transport. *Annual Report, 1965-66*, (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1966), 22. On suburban growth, see Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 54-72; Clark, *Suburban Society*; John R. Miron, *Housing in Postwar Canada: Demographic Change, Household Formation, and Housing Demand*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988); Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960*,

modernized highway system. During the 1950s, auto manufacturers began producing larger, faster, and heavier cars, and the trucking industry overtook the railroad as North America's chief means of moving freight. If people and goods were to be moved between population centres quickly and safely, then governments felt that they had little choice but to design and build new highways that were capable of supporting these increasingly demanding motor vehicles.⁴⁴

And then there were the American tourists to keep in mind. It was over the course of the 1930s that Canadian governments had first come to view tourism as a true industry, as a form of big business that had considerable influence vis-à-vis the country's balance of payments. Thus, during the Great Depression and the Second World War, the Ontario government had gone to great lengths to advertise the province to prospective tourists from the United States. These promotional efforts paid off following the war, as Americans headed north in record numbers.⁴⁵ The

need for tourist-friendly highways thus took on even greater importance during the postwar years than it had before. For this reason, therefore, one of the more notable of Ontario's postwar highway projects was Highway 400, a new four-lane highway that led from Toronto to the tourist regions farther north. This 'Holiday Highway,' as the government later referred to it, had the same features as Ontario's other new freeways — wider and more numerous traffic lanes, better interchanges, and by-passes that skirted urban areas. Highway 400 greatly improved the drive to cottage country, and significantly reduced travel times. Increased volume meant that bumper-to-bumper traffic remained the norm on weekends during the summer months, but nevertheless, a person could drive from a house in southern Ontario right to a summer home in Muskoka in just a couple of hours. Even a few years earlier, travelling to the cottage with such speed and such convenience had been inconceivable.⁴⁶

During the postwar years as before,

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 129-30; Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁴⁴ Flink, *Automobile Age*, 281-87; K.J. Rea, *The Prosperous Years: The Economic History of Ontario, 1939-75*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 58-65.

⁴⁵ Karen Dubinsky, "Everybody Loves Canadians: Canadians, Americans, and the Post-World War II Travel Boom," in *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America*, ed. Shelley Baranowski and Ellen Furlough (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 320-47. Contrary to what many historians have suggested, the postwar North American tourism boom was not a result of consumers' 'pent-up' demand for travel; rather, it largely was a product of the state-sponsored tourism promotion that occurred during the Great Depression and the Second World War. On this point, and to compare Ontario's promotional efforts with those of other Canadian governments, see Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the 'Holiday Highway,' see Ontario. Ministry of Transportation and Communications. (1984), 88-91. Also see Eric Hutton, "Portrait of a Superhighway," in *Maclean's Magazine* 72:26 (19 December 1959), 22-23 and 42-46; and Hugh Garner, "A Day in the Life of a Superhighway," in *Star Weekly*, 30 July 1960, 2-4.

road building contributed to a significant expansion of cottaging. To expedite land sales, the Department of Lands and Forests curtailed its practice of selling individual parcels of land on an *ad hoc* basis. Instead, it began laying out entire cottaging subdivisions and selling lots as part of a registered plan. As Table A makes clear, the annual sales of Crown land for cottaging purposes continually reached new heights during the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s.⁴⁷ But in fact, Table A gives us only a partial picture of Ontario's postwar cottaging boom, since the sale of Crown land accounted for only a fraction of the province's total inventory of summer homes. In light of this fact, Table B includes both cottages that originated out of the Department of Lands and Forests and those that came from the private sector. The Table is based on the most reliable statistics that the government had at the time, but one still must treat it with caution. The figures in Table B derive from Ontario Hydro's records of seasonal hydro hook-ups, and they are low estimates at best, since many cottagers were either unable or unwilling to bring electricity to their summer homes. This caveat notwithstanding, Table B helps to illustrate the dramatic postwar increase in the number of cottages in Ontario.⁴⁸

The collapse of the mass transportation companies was another sign of the automobile's ascendancy in cottage

country. On the Trent-Severn Waterway, which includes the extensive cottaging region of the Kawarthas, the combination of new roads and the Great Depression had essentially ended the steamboat era even prior to the Second World War. For steamboat lines elsewhere, the situation was only marginally better. In Temagami, steamboat service came to an end in 1944, although passenger service on diesel-powered vessels continued into the 1960s. Muskoka's steamship companies nearly went bankrupt during the Depression, but their fortunes improved during the Second World War. With gasoline rationing making long-distance car trips impossible, cottagers reverted to rail and steamship travel. But after the return of peacetime, cottagers abandoned mass transportation permanently. Muskoka's steamships continued to run for a few years longer, mainly as excursion boats for tourists. But even this business disappeared with the proliferation of cheap powerboats during the 1950s. In 1954, the C.N.R. ended its service to the Muskoka Wharf terminal, and four years later, steamboats stopped plying the waters of Muskoka. As for the *Portage Flyer*, the venerable little railway that had been serving the Lake of Bays since 1905, it too lasted several years as a tourist attraction before ceasing operations in 1959. For more than seventy years, mass transportation had played an important

⁴⁷ Also see Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests. *Annual Report* (1940-72); Ontario. Ministry of Natural Resources. *Annual Report* (1972-70); Lambert, *Renewing Nature's Wealth*, 427-28.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of using these Ontario Hydro statistics as a measurement of the number of cottages in Ontario, see Ontario. Department of Tourism and Information. *Analysis of Ontario Cottage Survey* (Toronto: 1971), 69-71.

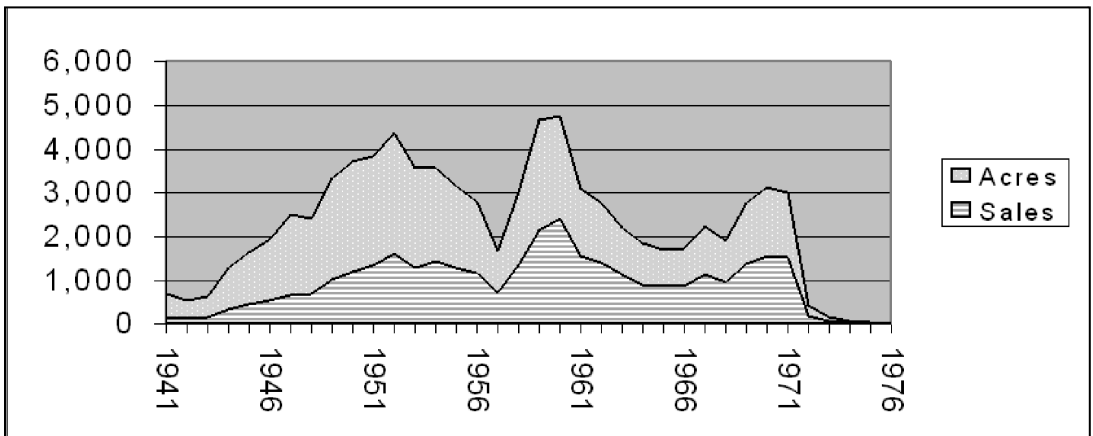


Table A: Summer Resort Land Sales, 1941-1976. Sources: Ontario, Department of Lands and Forests, *A Statistical Reference of Lands and Forests Administration* (1959), 78; Ontario, Department of Lands and Forests, *Statistics, 1972: A Statistical Reference of Lands and Forests Administration* (1972), 113; and Ontario, Ministry of Natural Resources, *Statistics 1976* (1976), 66. After 1976, Summer Resort Lands Sales became so insignificant that they no longer were listed separately in the Ministry of Natural Resources' records.

role in determining the location and social character of the province's cottage communities; but henceforth, that role would be played almost entirely by the private automobile.⁴⁹

Yet it was no small paradox that by displacing mass transportation, the automobile opened up Ontario's wilderness to the masses. Whereas the growth of cottaging during the 1920s had extended cottage ownership mainly within the middle class, the postwar boom brought cottage ownership within reach even of some workers. A 1968 survey revealed that clerical workers and skilled or unskilled labourers constituted nearly one quarter of Ontario's cottage owners [See Table C.]. Managers and other profes-

sionals still predominated in terms of raw numbers, but compared to earlier periods, when they had represented almost the entire cottage-owning population, their relative importance had declined substantially. By the late 1940s, Crown land was selling for forty-five dollars an acre for island lots and thirty cents per foot of waterfront frontage on mainland lots.⁵⁰ Though these prices certainly were higher than the rates from the interwar years, they still were low enough that people of relatively modest means could afford to purchase some waterfront property. Take Ted Flanagan, for instance. In 1951, Flanagan was a sixteen-year-old camp counsellor working at a Kiwanis summer camp on Muskoka's Oxbow Lake when

⁴⁹ Tatley, *Steamboating on the Trent-Severn*, ch. 5; Tatley, *Steamboat Era in the Muskokas*, vol. 2, chs. 7-9; Richard Tatley, *Northern Steamboats: Timiskaming, Nipissing, and Abitibi*, (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1996), ch. 5; MacKay, *By Steam Boat & Steam Train*, 30-2; *Huntsville Forester*, 19 March 1959, 3; 18 June 1959, 1; 9 July 1959, 3; 13 August 1959, 3; 5 November 1959, 1; and 12 November 1959, 3.

⁵⁰ Ontario, Department of Lands and Forests. "Cottage Sites on Crown Lands in Ontario," [1944?], a copy of which located at the Toronto Reference Library.

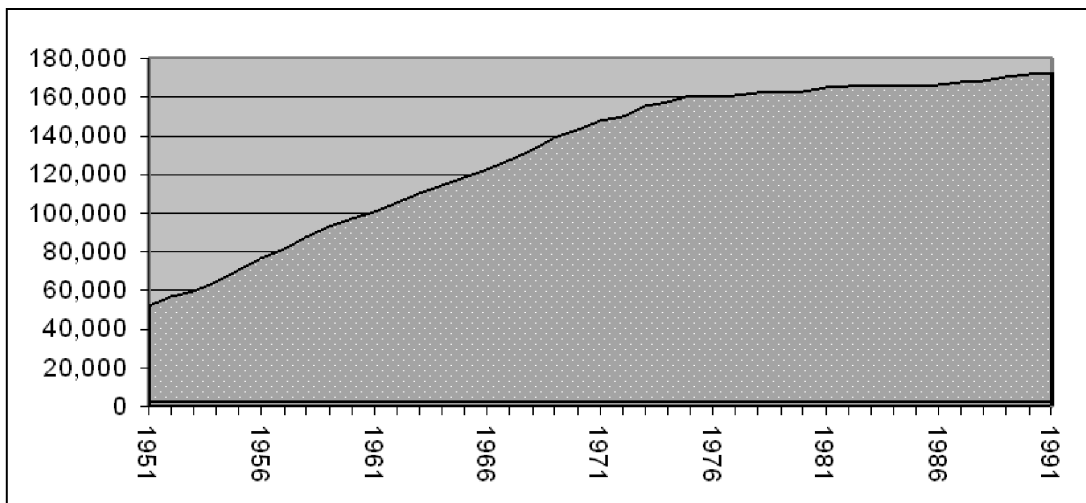


Table B: Ontario Hydro Seasonal Residential Contracts, 1951-1991. Sources: Ontario. Department of Tourism and Information, Statistical Handbook 1966, 17; Statistical Handbook 1968, 22; Statistical Handbook 1970, 27; Ontario. Ministry of Industry and Tourism, Statistical Handbook 1972, 31; Statistical Handbook 1975, Table 34; Ontario. Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Statistical Handbook 1983, 57; Ontario Hydro, Statistical Yearbook 1981, 93; and Ontario Hydro, Statistical Yearbook 1991, 195.

he learned that the government was selling cottage property on the opposite side of the water. The province refused to sell the land to a minor, so Flanagan's grandmother purchased the land on his behalf for the grand sum of just \$500.⁵¹ Land prices this low made cottage ownership affordable even for members of the working class, especially at a time of growing unionization, rising incomes, and paid vacations for labourers.⁵²

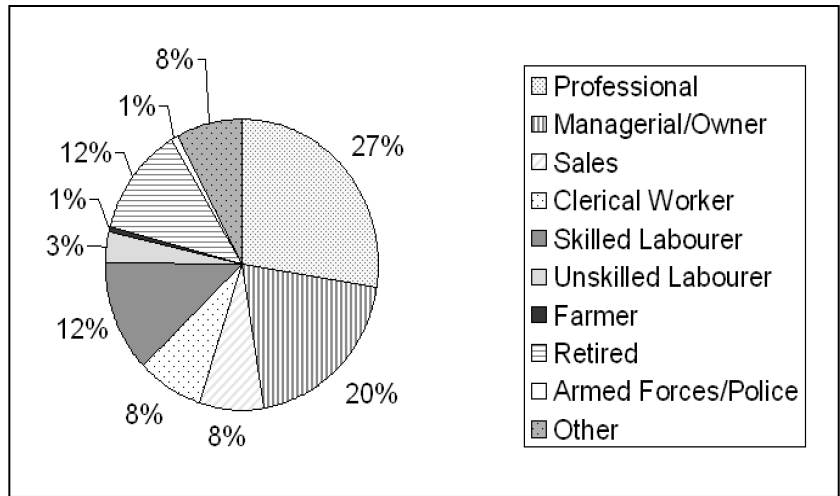
Just as important as the low price of

land was the easy access that the automobile provided. During the steam era, travelling was such a production that people generally stayed up at the cottage for months at a time, and often the entire summer. In contrast, the modern highways and advanced automobiles that appeared after the Second World War enabled a person to visit cottage country for the weekend, or even for the day. And so, whereas the wealthier cottagers from earlier time periods would have hired

⁵¹ Personal interview with Ted Flanagan (pseudonym), 29 July 2003.

⁵² Ontario workers were guaranteed a minimum of one week of paid vacation time per year following the passage of the Hours of Work and Vacations with Pay Act in 1944. Most workers soon received more than this legal minimum, however, as firms extended longer vacation periods to their white-collar employees, and industrial unions won concessions at the bargaining table. By the early 1960s, most workers were entitled to two full weeks of paid vacation time, a standard that the Ontario government entrenched via new legislation in 1966. *Labour Gazette* (April 1949), 407-15; (August 1951), 1078-87; (September 1951), 1216-27; (August 1952), 1039-53; (July 1954), 1012-17; (August 1954), 1128-33; (September 1957), 1103-12; (August 1958), 837; (October 1958), 1159-62; (July 1963), 553; (October 1966), 564-65 and 594-96; (April 1967), 232-33; and (July 1977), 293. For an overview of working-class spending and leisure habits during the postwar era, see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 269-72.

Table C: Ontario Cottage Owners by Occupation, 1968. Source: Adapted from Ontario Department of Tourism and Information. Analysis of Ontario Cottage Survey, (Toronto: 1971), 8.



crews of workers to build their summer homes for them, the new cottagers of the postwar years often built

their cottages themselves. For example, after Hank Richards purchased land on Sixmile Lake in the early 1950s, he built his cottage piecemeal by going up to the lake on weekends with his friends.⁵³

Needless to say, most of these postwar cottages were a far cry from the grand summer homes that had preceded them; indeed, many were little more than shacks with open rafters and exposed walls. The absence of building regulations in many cottaging areas meant that people could put up whatever they wanted, so long as it cost at least the \$500 required by the province. To compound matters, many of the people who built their own cottages had

little previous construction experience, and the structures that they produced often were architecturally unsound.⁵⁴ Some people purchased prefabricated cottages or built summer homes using kits that were available through lumberyards. Others simply built a one-room dwelling and then gradually added new rooms as their families grew and their financial circumstances improved.⁵⁵ Likewise, the *décor* in most postwar cottages also was very modest. Cottagers from earlier periods would have been too embarrassed to fill their summer homes with discards from the city, but in most postwar cottages, second-hand furnishings were standard.⁵⁶

⁵³ Personal interview with Hank Richards (pseudonym), 16 August 2004.

⁵⁴ Personal interview with John Robertson (pseudonym), 21 July 2003.

⁵⁵ Richards interview.

⁵⁶ For example, a publication from the early-twentieth century advised cottagers that “The interior of a bungalow may very easily be made or marred by the furniture that is put into it. Above all avoid the cast-offs for the permanent home.” By contrast, an upscale magazine from the post-Second World War era took for granted that most cottage *décor* was pre-used: “Most of the furniture in the average cottage has already seen long and honorable service at the city house. It’s the obvious and cheapest way to furnish a cottage.” Henry H. Saylor, *Bungalows: Their Design, Construction and Furnishings, with Suggestions also for Camps, Summer Homes and Cottages of Similar Character*, 2nd ed., (Toronto: The Copp Clark Company, 1913), 148; and *Canadian Homes & Gardens* 34:8 (August 1957), 53.

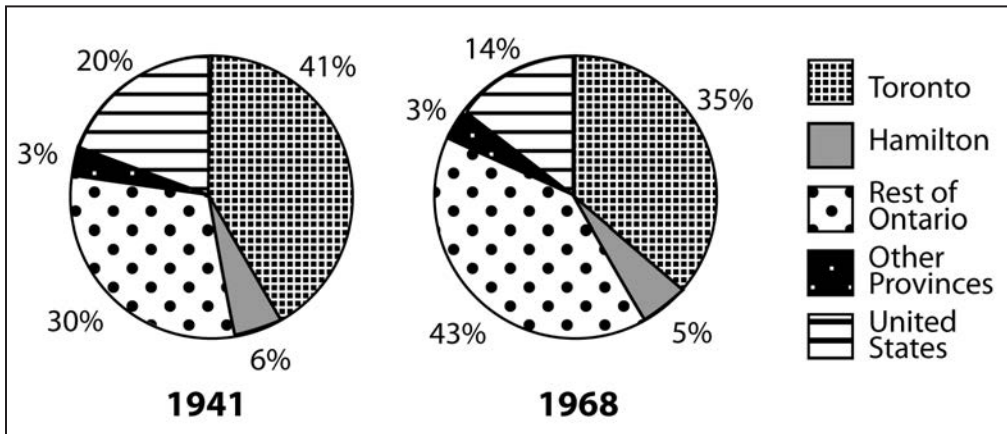


Table D: Ontario Cottage Owners by Place of Residence, 1941 and 1968. Sources: Adapted from Roy I. Wolfe, "Summer Cottagers in Ontario," *Economic Geography* Vol. 27 (1951), 17; and Ontario. Department of Tourism and Information. Analysis of Ontario Cottage Survey, (Toronto: 1971), vi.

The simple accommodations and the do-it-yourself attitude of many postwar cottagers only reinforced the patterns that the automobile had set in motion. Specifically, cottaging became a completely informal and increasingly private activity. As mentioned, cottaging areas served by the automobile lacked the steamboats, the resort hotels and the air of sophistication that had fostered a quasi-public atmosphere in earlier cottaging areas. Moreover, postwar cottage life was saturated with work: most cottagers were too busy renovating rooms, fixing docks, and improving their property to have much time for socializing. Apart from the annual regatta and the occasional wiener roast with neighbouring families, most postwar cottagers were just as happy to keep to themselves and to absorb the natural surroundings. Tellingly, this increasingly private orientation of cottage life was reminiscent of North America's postwar suburbs, where the au-

tomobile also had encouraged an inward-looking lifestyle that revolved around the home and the nuclear family.⁵⁷

In addition to influencing the social atmosphere of postwar cottaging, the car also affected where cottagers came from. Historically, the province's cottagers generally had been residents of the large metropolitan areas in Ontario and the United States. This was partly because the wealthy, leisured class tended to be concentrated in these urban areas, but also because it was only in large cities that one could easily catch a train destined for cottage country. For people in smaller cities and outlying areas, the journey to the summer home involved additional transfers and was therefore that much longer. But the new cars and highways of the postwar years made cottage country easily accessible even to people living outside the city. Consequently, the big metropolitan areas lost some of their relative stature as sour-

⁵⁷ Owram, *Born at the Right Time*; Harris, *Creeping Conformity*, 35 and 163; Clark, *Suburban Society*, 192-94; and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

es of cottagers. Table D demonstrates that between 1941 and 1968, the proportion of cottagers both from Toronto and from the United States fell. Conversely, the proportion of cottagers who were from the Rest of Ontario—that is, neither Toronto nor Hamilton—grew by thirteen percent.⁵⁸ These changes suggest that the automobile did not democratize cottaging only with respect to social class, but also with respect to geography. Thanks to the car, cottaging grew to encompass more people from more diverse socio-economic backgrounds and from more parts of the province. Originally, Ontario's summer home tradition had been fairly narrow in its scope, but due to the automobile, it had expanded into a cultural institution that truly was of provincial significance.

The upshot of the democratization of cottaging was that many people in Ontario began to view cottage ownership not as a privilege, but as a birthright. This sense of entitlement was evident in Ontarians' reactions to the changing market conditions of the late 1960s. During the two decades after the Second World War, the automobile helped to sustain the impression that Ontario's wilderness was infinite. As long as new roads could be pushed through to previously inaccessible lakes, it seemed that the province had a never-ending supply of cottage land. This illusion was reflected by the consistently low land prices that had

enabled people from all social classes to become cottage owners. But of course, Ontario's wilderness was *not* infinite, and by the mid-1960s, the Department of Lands and Forests was running out of waterfront property in southern Ontario. With the demand for cottages still high, the Department abandoned its time-honoured approach to land sales and began selling its remaining lands by means of public auction. Cottaging-hopefuls would gather in a school gymnasium somewhere and then try to outbid each other on parcels of waterfront land that few of them had even seen.⁵⁹ How things had changed from a decade earlier, when would-be cottagers had been able to investigate personally each parcel of land that the government had for sale, and then casually make their way to the local lands office to put down money on the property of their choice!

With the supply of available cottage land diminishing, many Ontario citizens started to ask pointed questions about the province's cottaging program. If a shortage of cottage land was developing, didn't the government have an obligation to ensure that what little land remained went to Ontarians? Ought not the province meet the recreational needs of its own people before entertaining the desires of foreigners? In short, shouldn't the Ontario government stop selling cottage land to Americans?⁶⁰ Given that these

⁵⁸ Some of this growth may have encompassed cottagers who lived within the Greater Toronto Area, but not Toronto proper. We have no way of knowing, however, since the sources do not indicate whether Toronto's suburban areas are included as part of Toronto, or as part of the Rest of Ontario.

⁵⁹ Roy MacGregor, *A Life in the Bush: Lessons From My Father* (Toronto: Viking, 1999), 269-72.

⁶⁰ Bruce Kidd, "Summertime and No Place to Play," in *Canadian Dimension* 7 (August/September 1970): 7-8; and Douglas Marshall, "Where Has All Our Best Land Gone? Guess," *Maclean's* 83 (October 1970): 29-32.



Looking north on Highway 400 at the beginning of the Canada Day long weekend, 1967. Even with bumper-to-bumper traffic, the automobile made travel to the cottage easier and more comfortable than ever before. Archives of Ontario, RG 14-151-21-28, no. 9498-F.

concerns arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Canadian nationalism was at an all-time high, it is not surprising that they found a receptive audience at Queen's Park. In 1971, the province adopted a new policy concerning cottage lands. Rather than selling Crown land outright, the government instead would lease it for thirty-year terms. Moreover, Ontarians would receive preferential treatment: a given piece of Crown land would be made available, and if, in a year's time, no Canadians had agreed to lease it, then and only then would American applicants be considered. Under the circumstances, this policy change effectively barred Americans from purchasing Crown land for the purposes of building a summer home.⁶¹

In a rather roundabout way, then, the automobile contributed to a striking reversal of provincial policy with respect to American vacationers. Historically, people from the United States had always been an important part of Ontario's summer home tradition. Indeed, their presence had been encouraged, not only through strategic highway building, but also through the promotional efforts of the Ontario Department of Tourism. So long as the province had an abundance of land for sale, and so long as the domestic demand for summer homes was relatively small, American cottagers were seen as a good thing in Ontario. But when a shortage of waterfront land dovetailed with an upsurge of Canadian nationalism, Americans became the odd ones out. Of course, people from the United States still could purchase cottage land from the private sector, but where Crown land was concerned, they were out of luck. Hence, the automobile may have reduced some of the social and geographical barriers to

⁶¹ Ontario. Department of Lands and Forests, "A Report on the Disposition of Public Land for Cottage Purposes in Ontario, Other Canadian Provinces and Neighbouring States," located in AO RG 1-348 Acc. 15806 Box 2 file 8511-8. Also see the related correspondence and memoranda in AO RG 1-348 Acc. 15806 Box 2 file 8513.4. This policy was reversed in 1979, when the province once again began selling Crown land, and abandoned all restrictions related to the nationality of applicants.

cottage ownership, but it also gave rise to a new barrier, one that was based on citizenship.

Implications of a Car-Based Cottage Culture

Democratization was the most obvious effect that the automobile had on cottaging, but there were other consequences as well. A cottage culture that revolved around the automobile had undeniable appeal, but it also had numerous shortcomings. One must emphasize, for example, that to say that the automobile *democratized* cottaging is not to suggest that it *equalized* cottaging.⁶² Even during the postwar years, when Ontario's summer home tradition was at its most egalitarian, only 11% of Ontario families owned a summer cottage, although up to 40% of the population had access to cottages through friends and family,⁶³ and others had the option of renting. In other words, it would be folly to imply that cottaging became anything close to a universal experience. Indeed, it was precisely

because cottage ownership was limited to a small portion of the population that the summer home continued to be such a powerful status symbol.

But even for those people who did have the fortune of owning a summer home, the automobile had some significant drawbacks and repercussions. Despite assumptions to the contrary, the automobile was not an inert piece of equipment. As Ruth Schwartz Cowan explains in her history of domestic technology, "Tools are not passive instruments, confined to do our bidding, but have a life of their own... We try to obtain the tools that will do the jobs that we want done; but, once obtained, the tools organize our work for us in ways that we may not have anticipated."⁶⁴ For cottagers, the automobile was, in essence, a tool, and its job was to convey them to the summer home. But upon further analysis, it becomes clear that the automobile also defined and organized cottage life in ways that few cottagers expected.

For example, a big part of cottaging's

⁶² Joseph Interrante makes some similar observations with respect to the automobile and mass-produced goods more generally. See "The Road to Autopia: The Automobile and the Spatial Transformation of American Culture," in *The Automobile and American Culture*, ed. David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), 101, 104.

⁶³ AO RG 1-348 Acc. 24697 Box 6 File 8519.6.1, A33-A34, Draft of Land Use Committee Report, "New Planning Act: Candidate Policy Statements," (June 1981); AO RG 1-46-1 Acc. 22409 Box 2 File 2-39, Memo, Simkin to Defries, 12 March 1975. Beginning in the late 1960s, the scarcity of available land led cottage prices to skyrocket, thus making cottage ownership more and more into a privilege of elites once again. See Greg Halseh, "The 'Cottage' Privilege: Increasingly Elite Landscapes of Second Homes in Canada," in C. Michael Hall and Dieter K. Müller, eds., *Tourism, Mobility and Second Homes: Between Elite Landscape and Common Ground*, (Clevedon, Buffalo and Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2004), 35-54.

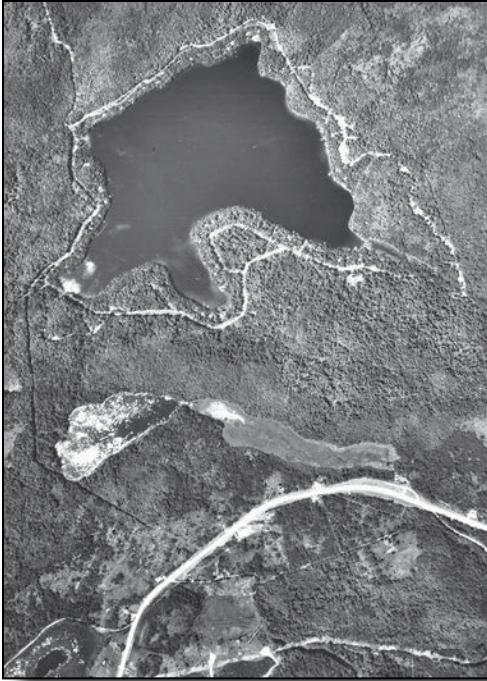
⁶⁴ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), introduction (quotation from 9). For application of this idea to the automobile, see Davies, "Reckless Walking," 123. Also see Mark S. Foster's criticism of the assumption "that technology was inherently neutral" in his article, "The Automobile and the City," in Lewis and Goldstein, eds., *The Automobile and American Culture*, 24-26.

appeal was that it supposedly enabled people to get away from the meetings, time commitments, and other obligations that were part of everyday urban life. However, cottagers' dependency on the automobile meant that roads became a constant bone of contention between cottage owners and local governments. Many cottagers, much to their own surprise, found themselves attending meetings, organizing ratepayers' associations, and wading into the murky depths of small town politics. In theory, access roads were to be taken over by local municipalities once they had been brought up to a certain minimum standard; in practice, however, municipalities did everything they could to avoid assuming new financial responsibilities. As a consequence, cottagers often poured money into access roads year after year, only to be told that the roads were not yet up to standard. Once local governments did finally agree to assume a certain access road, they often neglected it, much to the chagrin of cottage owners. Thus, one implication of a car-dependent cottage culture was that cottagers were forever battling local municipalities, which were quite eager to tax cottagers, but were rather less enthusiastic when it came to providing services.⁶⁵

Access roads also encouraged a linear pattern of cottage development that had numerous disadvantages. In most of

Ontario's inland cottaging areas, summer homes were built to circle the lake in a single ring along the waterfront. On the one hand, this pattern of development provided all cottages with private lake access; but on the other hand, it meant that the density of cottage communities was very low. With backlot development prohibited in many areas, and with summer homes often separated by woodlots, cottage country could be an alienating place, since interacting with one's neighbours required considerable effort. Women in particular sometimes found cottage life to be a source of boredom, melancholy, and frustration. In many families, mothers and their children moved up to the cottage for July and August, while fathers drove up on weekends and during their vacation periods. At a time when two-car households still were rare, however, this arrangement stranded mothers at the cottage, since the automobile was in the city with their husbands for most of the week. Without a vehicle, wives had no way to get into town to buy groceries, run errands, or visit friends. Instead, they were stuck at a relatively secluded cottage, where they had few opportunities to socialize with other adults. One lonely woman, who described herself as "a cottage convict serving a life sentence," argued that "the happiest part" of cottaging "is when it's over." No doubt, many other cottage mothers would have

⁶⁵ For example, see Sixmile Lake Cottagers' Association Archives, blue binder entitled "Correspondence, 1940-1948," T.B. McQuesten, Minister of Highways, to Maj. A.C.W. Horne, President, Crooked and Sixmile Lake Association, 19 March 1942, as well as related correspondence; Simcoe County Archives E2 B2 R2A S8 Sh5 file 999-07, "Petition to Council from Sturgeon Bay Residents,"; and Simcoe County Archives E4 B1 R2B S3 Sh3 file 997-96, "Township of Tiny: Clerk's Records. Petition sponsored by the Thunder Bay Beach Cottagers' Association, 1947."



Aerial photograph showing the access road ringing Harp Lake, just east of Huntsville, with Highway 60 to the south, 1969. The automobile brought cottaging to small, previously inaccessible lakes, but it also encouraged low-density development that had numerous disadvantages. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 69-4516 23-205 (detail).

agreed. The automobile often is credited with having ended the isolation of rural life at the start of the twentieth century. How ironic, therefore, that the car also fostered a cottage culture in Ontario that reproduced a similar sort of isolation.⁶⁶

The fact that most cottages were dispersed in a single ring around lakes also

had implications with respect to utilities. Since it was far too expensive to bring public utilities into such low-density areas, most cottagers were forced to draw their water from the lake and to dispose of their wastes using a septic system. Unfortunately, however, the runoff from septic systems ran straight back into the lake, thus disrupting the ecosystem and potentially poisoning everyone's drinking water. In the event that a cottage owner failed to keep his or her septic system working properly — a surprisingly common occurrence — neighbouring cottagers had few mechanisms by which to bring the offender into line, other than moral suasion. The private automobile thus encouraged a pattern of development that necessitated the private provision of certain utilities, and offered little protection of the public trust.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Quotation from *Chatelaine*, June 1947, 27. Similar examples of mothers feeling stranded and isolated at the cottage are provided in Phyllis Lee Peterson, "Summer's No Time to Be a Housewife," in *Star Weekly Magazine*, 18 June 1960, 1-11 and 37; personal interview with Claire Graystone (pseudonym), 1 August 2003; personal interview with Michelle Stansbury (pseudonym), 13 August 2003; and personal interview with Dale and Nancy Smith (pseudonyms), 26 August 2003. On the automobile as an antidote to rural isolation in the early twentieth century, see Davies, "Ontario and the Automobile," ch. 5; Flink, *Automobile Age*, 132-40, 152-57, and 189-90; Reynold M. Wik, "The early Automobile and the American Farmer," in Lewis and Goldstein, eds., *The Automobile and American Culture*, 37-47.

⁶⁷ On the environmental problems associated with septic systems, see Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), ch. three; Pollution Probe, "Keep it Clean: A Manual for the preservation of the Cottage Environment," (Toronto: Pollution Probe at the University of Toronto, [1971?]); Ontario. Ministry of the Environment. "Ontario's Cottage Pollution Control Program, 1970-71: Private Systems Detection and Abatement," (1972).

And then there was the question of whether the automobile was even compatible with nature at all. In the United States, a backlash against the automobile's penetration of natural areas contributed to the rise of the modern wilderness movement. For Aldo Leopold and other activists, it was the very *absence* of technology such as the automobile that made the wilderness special and worthy of protection. Closer to home, concerns that too much development would spoil the wilderness led the Ontario Division of Parks to restrict road building and to remove all cottages from provincial parks beginning in 1954. From time to time, cottagers also demonstrated a similar ambivalence towards the automobile. For example, the Miller family, who we encountered at the beginning of this article, patently refused to build an access road to their summer home on the grounds that road access would detract from the simplicity and rustic charm of cottage life. Instead, the Millers chose to park their car at a marina and then accessed their cottage via motorboat. Obviously, there was some fuzzy thinking here, since motorboats were scarcely less technological than automobiles. But on some level, perhaps, these reservations over road access indicated a suspicion on the behalf of some cottagers that the automobile created as many problems as it solved. Behind the democratization of cottaging lay the possibility that the auto-

mobile, the very vehicle that had enabled unprecedented numbers of people to get out into Ontario's wilderness, was itself helping to destroy that same wilderness. This was a possibility that few cottagers dared to address.⁶⁸

The automobile may have been responsible for the democratization of cottaging, but it also had other implications that most cottagers had not foreseen — access road politics, ratepayers' associations, private utilities, health risks, social isolation, and environmental problems, to name several. All of these matters became definitive aspects of Ontario's summer home tradition, and all derived, either directly or indirectly, from cottagers' dependence on the automobile. For cottagers themselves, the advantages of car-based cottage developments clearly outweighed the disadvantages, a fact borne out by the continued popularity of cottaging today. Whether such developments were in the best interest of society more broadly, however, is another question.

Conclusion

The automotive transformation of Ontario's summer home tradition had several components. First and foremost, the automobile democratized cottaging, however incompletely. By accelerating travel, by freeing vacationers from the inconveniences of mass transportation, and by opening up new areas for

⁶⁸ Paul S. Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002); Nash, *Wilderness*, 204-5 and ch. 11; Killan, *Protected Places* 84-95; Jenkins interview. For a rare critique of the building of roads in cottaging and wilderness areas, see Russell J. Rutter, "Back Off the Road," in *Huntsville Forester*, 5 October 1950, 4.

development, the automobile made cottaging possible for a wide spectrum of people. Though only a small minority of Ontario's population actually came to own a summer home, the car nevertheless converted cottage ownership from a privilege of élites into an option for the masses. Particularly during the two decades immediately following the Second World War, the automobile entrenched cottaging as a definitive feature of the province's collective identity.

Second, the car, through its influence on various government policies, shaped the national origins of Ontario's cottage-owning population. Though American citizens had been among the province's first cottagers, their presence became especially notable following the advent of the automobile. As Americans' affection for car travel developed into the stuff of legend, the Ontario government wooed Americans not only through aggressive tourism promotion, but also by building a highway system that largely catered to the needs of American auto-tourists. Consequently, American citizens came to form a large and influential minority amongst Ontario cottagers. By the late 1960s, meanwhile, the automobile had brought cottage development to most parts of Ontario, and had put cottaging within reach of unprecedented numbers of Canadians. As the availability of cottaging property began to diminish, however, many Ontario citizens started to question the wisdom of selling Crown land to non-Canadians. In the early 1970s, amidst an atmosphere of heightened Canadian nationalism, the provin-

cial government adopted a new cottaging policy that explicitly discriminated against Americans on the basis of their citizenship. Thus, the automobile can be seen to have 'Canadianized' Ontario cottaging during the decades following the Second World War, albeit in a somewhat circuitous fashion.

Third, the automobile turned cottaging into an increasingly informal and private pursuit. Before the advent of the car, cottaging had been a semi-formal, quasi-public activity, since resort hotels, social connections, and the necessities of group travel served to bring cottagers together. But the automobile displaced these elements of cottage life and put new emphasis on privacy and the nuclear family. Not only did cottagers come and go in their own private vehicles, but the low density of car-based cottaging areas discouraged social exchanges between neighbours. Cottaging areas that had been opened up by the automobile didn't necessarily lack a sense of community, but their social cohesion came very much in spite of their spatial layouts. On the other hand, as public interactions became less frequent, there was no longer any need for proper attire and strict social conventions. The privacy afforded by the automobile enabled people to relax and to adopt a more casual approach to cottage life.

Finally, and less tangibly, the automobile influenced and organized cottaging in countless ways that were unanticipated by most cottagers. The automobile was not a neutral instrument, and in cottage country as elsewhere, it shaped the human experience in curious and

unintended ways. By adopting the automobile as a means of getting to the summer home, cottagers unwittingly made decisions concerning myriad aspects of cottage life. Hence, when it came time to consider things like the infrastructure, the social atmosphere, and the natural environment of cottage communities, cottagers discovered that their choices were limited. In effect, the decisions had already been made for them by virtue of their car dependency. Many of the more disagreeable aspects of cottage life — access road politics, water pollution, the distance from shops and services, the potential for boredom — were part and parcel of a cottage culture that revolved around the automobile.

The automobile thus occupies a central but ambivalent place in the history of Ontario cottaging. Unlike railways and steamboats, the private automobile was able to transform cottaging into something of a mass activity; but, in common

with these earlier forms of transportation, the car imposed limitations on the cottage communities that it created. Chief among them was the fact that car ownership became a prerequisite for cottaging. Getting to the cottage without a car became not only impossible, but unthinkable. Cottagers' dependency on the automobile had many implications. Some, as we have seen, became clear right away; others, I would argue, have yet to make themselves felt. Despite having been a catalyst for Ontario's cottage culture historically, the automobile might yet become an impediment to that culture. At a time when global oil reserves are shrinking, and the long-term prospects seem dim for North American automobility, the forecast appears to be bleak for activities, such as cottaging, that are predicated on the car.⁶⁹ Cottaging in Ontario has a long and colourful past, but given its current orientation towards the automobile, its future must be seen as uncertain.

⁶⁹ Indeed, shrinking oil reserves already seem to be altering people's attitudes towards cottaging. For example, a recent survey by Royal LePage Real Estate Services Ltd. found that if gasoline prices continued to rise, 23% of Canadian cottage owners would consider reducing their number of trips to the cottage, while 12% would consider selling their cottage outright. *The Globe and Mail* 6 June 2007, B9.