

A-2 SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY

A-2.1 Local History

As recent as six thousand years ago, vast ice sheets covered the majority of Canada. As the glaciers receded, vegetation slowly appeared along the coast of British Columbia; it had been deposited in this region in seed form via wind, tide, and birds.

First Settlement—It is difficult to determine when human life found its way to the Sunshine Coast however evidence of recent aboriginal life suggests in the form of artifacts that these Indian villages date back to antiquity. These coastal Indians, a fishing community, traditionally lived in communal lodges with some lodges holding several related families; these lodges consisted of cedar bough gable-roofed structures held up with walls of wide planks laced to upright posts. The lodges were governed by a manager know as “Old Man” whose word was the law. In 1873 the Canadian government signed a treaty with the Indians that bought the Sechelt reserve into effect.

Discovery—On June 16, 1792 Captain Vancouver of Britain came to the Vancouver Islands and claimed this area for Britain. This accomplishment opened the door and Europeans began coming to the Sunshine Coast by prospect of furs, gold, fish and timber. In time, Vancouver became a city and this attracted even more people to the west coast of Canada. In 1886, George Gibson, a new resident of Vancouver, fashioned a sloop and sailed across the Strait of Georgia to Nanaimo. On May 23, 1886 he was returning home to Vancouver when strong winds blew him and his sons across the mouth of Howe Sound. They crossed over to the bay, inside the headland and after carefully upon walking the land, they concluded that this would be where the Gibson family would reside. The following days were busy with the men laying claim to the land. The Gibsons encouraged others to settle in this heavily wooded area. The legislation of ½square mile plots acted as a deterrent to these families because they felt they were too far apart. On the other hand, land at this time could be had without initial deposit so people began coming to establish a homestead.

European Settlement—In 1892, the area encompassing Gibsons Bay had approximately twenty holdings. However, all of the homesteaders were required to stay a minimum of six months on the homestead to get a crown grant. George Gibson spent his required six months growing vegetables at his homestead in Gibsons Landing; he would then take his produce to the Vancouver city market and take part in construction jobs in Vancouver. Other commuters from Gibsons Landing included Jim Fletcher, a part time brick layer in Vancouver and Arthur Hyde who worked for CPR on the “Empress boats”. By the early nineteen hundreds many pre-empters had vacated and small pox had plagued the town of Gibsons. This outbreak of small pox wiped out the Chek-Welp village of aborigines, who once graced the Gibsons area; this happened so suddenly that many of the dead were not buried and the neighboring residents of the old Sechelt Village saw a population decrease.

Growth—The originating families that stayed through the hard times saw the town of Gibsons Landing grow in a number of ways such as marriages between neighbors, births, and new people migrating to the area. Some of the new faces were Finnish settlers, who arrived in 1905, from Malcom Island. Disillusioned by the “Sointula” experiment that had taken place on Malcom Island, these settlers chose this locale to start a new life. Since all accessible land had been pre-empted, these newcomers could only obtain land through purchase. As a result, these large plots of land were subdivided into more



Logging the land at Gibson's Landing



Homesteader at Gibson's Landing (1912)

What We Found

manageable pieces. The Finnish cleared large pieces of land, built town halls, introduced the “sauna” a traditional Finnish bath, as well as helped establish a store and post office on the plateau inland from the coast. The plateau by this time was known as Gibsons Heights.

School—With a growing community on the rise, Howe Sound School District was created. A schoolhouse was erected immediately west of George Gibsons property and in 1891, Gibsons Landing Elementary School opened its doors to ten boys and thirteen girls. By 1916, Howe Sound High School was created and housed students as far west as Elphinstone Bay Road, Roberts Creek, and Keat’s Island—students traveled from here by boat. It wasn’t until 1923 that transportation of students from outlying districts began. In 1952 the education board opened the Elphinstone Junior-Senior High School and the following five years saw the school population throughout the district almost double.

Churches—Once the schoolhouse was built in 1891, the Methodist church began holding services in it until 1910, when the Methodists built the first church on the Sunshine Coast, known as Gibson Memorial Church. It took until 1946 for St. Mary’s Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Tabernacle Church to be erected.

Post office—In the early years of the settlement, George Gibson had been conducting an unofficial mail service through his home. In 1893 the Howe Sound Post Office came into being with George Gibson acting as Post-master of Howe Sound. In 1906, Mr. Gibson relinquished his position as Post-master and Mrs. Fletcher operated the Post Office in conjunction with her store at the wharf-head. In 1926, a rural mail delivery service was inaugurated, carrying mail to nearly six hundred boxes, extending as far as the Elphinstone Bay Road. In 1962, a new post office building was erected on the corner of Winn and Gower Point Road.

Venture—Logging was the primary industry on the peninsula. A glue manufacturing plant was established in 1900, adding valuable jobs. In 1906 a clearing fire ran out of control and destroyed acres of valuable forest, however, this fire helped to clear the land for agricultural purposes. A vegetable co-operative was inaugurated, supplementing the salmon fishing, which was prevalent between 1935 to 1950.

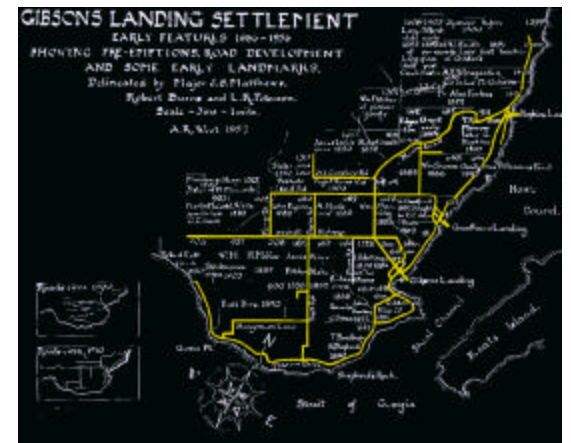
The Howe Sound Trading Company was established in 1895 by Ralph Gibson to equip the settlers with the modern amenities. The roaring twenties ushered in competition to Mrs. Fletcher’s convenience store by adding a hardware, furniture, bakery and meat market. A business section was established at the head of the wharf by World War II and is still there to this day.

Professional Services--An increased population at Gibsons Landing demanded a need for professional services. The first medic to the peninsula acted as a medical officer to the Squamish Indian Band. Finally, in 1906, the first practicing physician located to the Gibsons area. By 1912, a subdivision of land created the need for a real estate business. The Reverend C.O. Darby established the newspaper business with a news sheet titled *Eagle*; in 1945, competition allowed for a new production called the *Coast News*, followed shortly thereafter by the Peninsula Times. Municipalities were established and pipe-lines were run in 1912 creating a village water system. In 1946, a second water reserve was obtained and the old Grantham system was connected to this source. A third storage tank was added in 1960. Electricity first came to the town of Gibsons when a water wheel was built in 1936 on Chapman Creek; in 1954 the new hydroelectric station was built at Clowhom Falls to supply this growing community with sufficient wattage.

What We See



Gibsons Road Development of the Settlement (1900s)



Gibsons Road Development Demonstrating Growth (1956)

What We Found

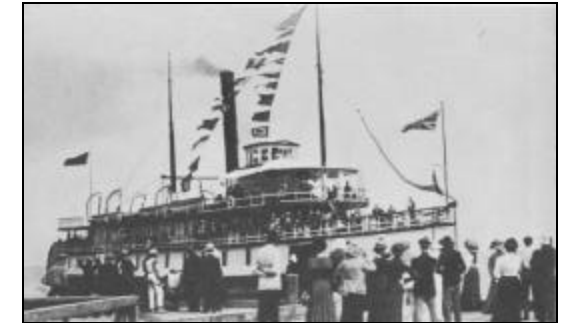
The Port – Gibsons has always been dependant on various modes of water transportation, such as tugboats, steamers, and scows for maintaining contact with Vancouver and New Westminster. Due to an absence of a manageable road system, local residents were also forced to use this transportation system to travel from their plots of land into town. Shortly after George Gibson established his homestead, he built his dock that allowed the mooring of passenger and general freight ships, thus allowing an even more efficient transportation system. Skid roads were slowly being built, all radiating outward from the water. Some of the roads, such as School Road and Pratt Road became main arteries that are still prevalent today. Scows were also used to impart materials such as sand, gravel, and heavy machinery necessary to establish the road system. By 1946, the first ferry service was established to run across Howe Sound and in 1948, the Gibson brothers purchased this ferry service connecting Gibsons Landing to Vancouver. By 1963, a 100-car ferry serviced Howe Sound.

A-2.2 Salient Opinions Expressed by The Community

Trends from the Past to the Present

- 1) "...Gibsons is becoming a tourist hotspot, since forestry and fishing have disappeared...In 1969, people were still building summer homes here, they were to be a family inheritance, but then, taxes were raised so high that nobody could afford to maintain them as such – what happened here was exactly what happened in West Van before the Lion's Gate came in, it was a family-cottage town, until people could no longer afford it..."
- 2) "Changes? Children used to fish from the piers here, now that's prohibited – everybody's liability-conscious nowadays...the problem is, city people bring with them their Mercury Vapour lamps, and the stars disappear – and that's what they came here for!!!"
- 3) "...There are a two erroneous attitudes here towards developers, 1) that we have no end of money, and 2) you're lucky to *even have the possibility* of building here...development in Gibsons is a game of dirty pool, the costs that the town dreams up escalate the more you try to push ahead...we were warned over ten years ago that it was futile developing here, now that's proven true...part of the problem is that you always have new players – 'the mayor of the day' and 'the planner of the day', Once I asked – 'Where will this all end?!' – and you know what they answered? 'We'll tell you when we get there.' – Nobody can develop under that mentality....now I'm sitting on a useless piece of land..."
- 4) "...The big ferry is what caused the split between Upper and Lower Gibsons, the traffic rerouting caught Upper Gibsons on fire...there was a time that came afterwards when council was almost clandestinely working to develop structures in Lower G., the two resulting developments have been failures. Gower Gardens is one of them – it's out of scale, poorly built and ugly...there needs to be living businesses at the waterfront, boatbuilders or some such thing, and it needs to be more than seasonal. Gibsons has 35% unemployment"
- 5) "...In those days, as a teenager, I had too many chores to do to complain of boredom..."
- 6) "...only 5 years ago there were about 36 fishboats in the harbour here, now there are only 15...people used to make good money fishing, but fishfarms only pay minimum wage, and one guy gets rich – fishing used to benefit the whole community...Technology is no match for the fish, we can pull up in one day with one boat what would have formerly taken five days...overfishing is not the only reason the industry has crashed – it's complex – destruction of habitat due to sprawl is another....We can't hope to curb development here, all we can do is implement protective measures for the

What We See



"SS Baramba" steam ship pulling in to Port (1912)

PATTERNS WE SEE

- Cottage turns permanent
- A tourist town needs a tourist attraction
- Fishing and logging are gone, so the town itself is the only resource – a tourist resource
- Wealth is not local, it comes from the city and tourists
- Old folks bring equity here
- Gibsons always was – and is becoming more so – a welfare satellite of Vancouver
- Technology has stolen the traditional jobs here
- Lack of livelihood makes bored teenagers
- Traffic/roads splits communities, it split upper and lower gibsons
- A commuter ferry would bring yuppies too!

What We Found

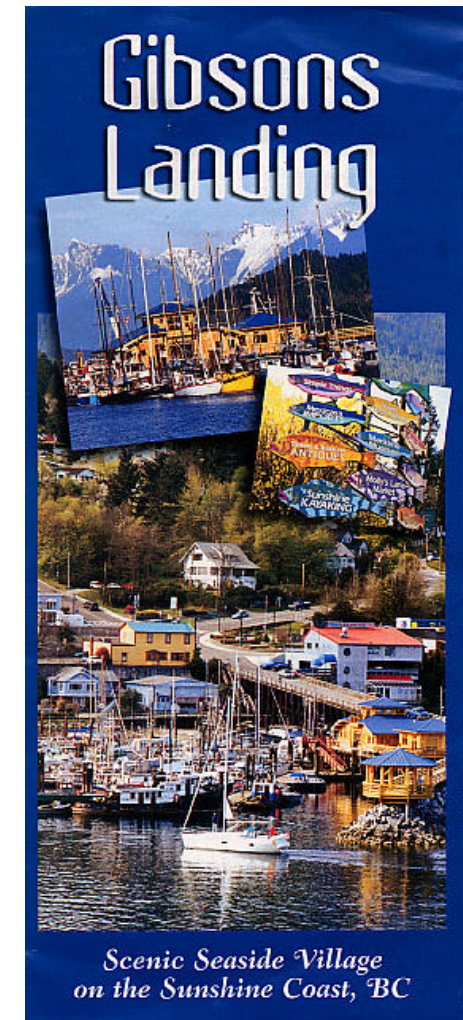
rest of the coast, further North...We're all guilty of raping the land, it's the same thing with logging – people in the industry know this better than the so-called environmentalists...what used to take a week and ten guys is done now in 1 day with 2-3 guys...modern chemistry and plastics are much more of a burden on the environment than pollutants of 50 yrs ago...WWII dumped enormous amounts into the seas, but life flourished again, what we have now is another story altogether...

7) "...We were behind the wharf and harbour building development – the engine that made it real with funds, it was very successful and has been a boon to tourism – now Sechelt is trying to catch up..."

A-2.3 Needs Identified by the Community, (and their possible physical consequences...)

- 1) "...The first thing people ask for when they come in the door is 'Do you have a waterfront hotel?' and I have to tell them, no...I think the locals would prefer a hotel to condos..."
- 2) "... In future development, I would like to see a good fit, the library is what I would consider a bad fit...Peripheral parking and a 2 storey limit... ..I think there will be more 'adult-oriented' housing in the future of Gibsons, we don't do much driving anymore..."
- 3) "... Fishing quotas are a very good thing, nobody liked them at first, but it has led to greater safety and less-poaching – we have to self-police now, but the fact that quotas can be leased is not so great...it puts the average guy out of the game, if you were to start fishing, you'd have to spend about 1million dollars before you even got your feet wet...The Future?...Waterfront markets is a good idea, the wharf and building here have been enormously successful, parking is a problem here, however...White Rock is a good model for parking..."
- 4) The worst nightmare is to see the harbour looking like Sydney – all fibreglass (boats), this really ought to remain a working harbour...
- 5) "...Gibsons needs some kind of focus, once there was a movie being filmed here called 'Needful Things', they built a New England style church right where George Gibson stands, it was amazing. The thing that would give a real boost would be a cruise ship landing on Keats... the problem with Gibsons as a tourist spot is that after you stroll the shops and eat at a restaurant or two – there's nothing to do!"
- 5) "...There's not enough mix to support stronger development, no discos, bars or entertainment...to say that we don't want Vancouver here is old-school thinking...the only way to get a job here is to make one – so that's what my partner and I did...we need better transit here, growth here – for it to be the right kind – should be stepwise, gradual, the problem is not with development but with too rapid development...Hotels and amenities here are crucial – there aren't even boat rentals here...Lower G should develop more low-level high density buildings..."
- 6) The population influx needs employment, which probably won't come from here, so they'll likely be professional commuters/telecommuters – that's why a foot-ferry is so needed here...
- 7) ...10 yrs will probably bring many retired/semi-retired people here, they will bring their equity – the money needed to live the 'waterview lifestyle'...we probably won't have low-cost housing in Upper G as with Surrey...we're working hard on a fast ferry to downtown to encourage commuters – this will open up a whole new avenue...but how will we accommodate these younger people??? That's a good question (funky wharf live/works?)...We need more markets and businesses in Lower G, like on Granville Island where they make and sell, but they must be the right kind of retail, and geared towards the tourists – otherwise they will compete with the existing local

What We See



'Pickling' the village as a Tourist Resource, making and maintaining the myth...

What We Found

businesses...The ferry is the first filter of the town, I hope people never move here expecting all the Vancouver amenities – what is attractive about this place is the rural atmosphere, big-box stores and rows of apartments are not acceptable here...Absentee landlords are a real problem for local businesses – they have no stake in revitalization and they charge exorbitant rents...Pedestrians are ill-considered here, many people here don't even use their cars...".

A-2.4 Current Social Networks

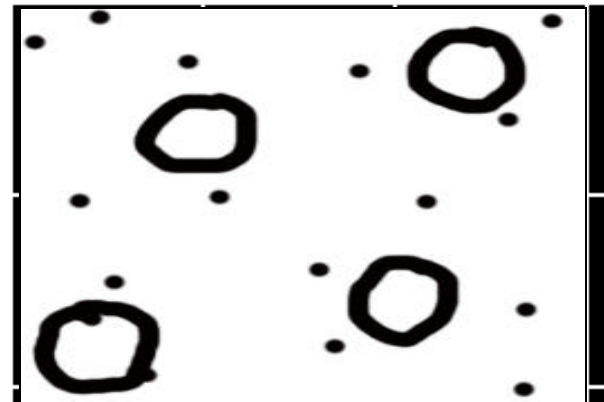
Families in Gibsons may be best analyzed by dividing them economically, though none appear to be extraordinarily wealthy. The first group - those with money - are the ones our group has encountered most frequently in our wanderings. They are families with a Vancouver commuter, who have moved to Gibsons to raise their children. One parent generally stays at home while the children are young to provide some stability, but also due to the lower cost of living that has enabled the family to get along with only one source of income. They are also families of local business-people - store owners, town employees, professionals etc. Though both parents may be working, the short distance between home, school and work means that parents can keep in close contact with their children's daily affairs.

The second group, those with less and often not quite enough money, are less apparent while wandering around Gibsons, but it seems that they may actually comprise the larger part of the town population. They have in general a lower education than the first group, they work (or worked) in places like the lumber mill, they may often be single-parent families. Social networks are being discussed to aid these families, particularly in the form of school breakfast/lunch programs at Gibsons elementary school.

During their elementary and secondary school years, it does not seem that economic differences greatly separate groups of children or teens. All children appear to have similar access to scout and guide groups, sports teams, et cetera. It is at the post-secondary level that the groups seem to divide - largely due to financial and familial constraints and expectations. Teens of the first group tend to leave the Sunshine Coast to pursue higher education and/or jobs (Capp College in Sechelt seems to have too small a range of desired programs). They often have family in Vancouver on whom they can rely for some aid. Those of the second group often don't have as much incentive or opportunity. This is a social problem found throughout Canada, but is significantly expressed in the lack of jobs available within Gibsons for young adults with no experience or higher education.

The largest incentive for teens to get out of Gibsons is the lack of anywhere that they can 'do their own thing'. Gibsons, similar to many other small towns, is not a place to explore who you are. There are few places to gather away from adult supervision - to get far enough away from parents to create a separate adult identity. Many teens leave Gibsons as much for lack of social life as for educational opportunities. It may be decided that this exodus after high school is what Gibsons wants. If Gibsons wants its young adults to stay, serious considerations needs to be given to social spaces exclusively for them.

What We See



What We Found

Anecdotal evidence suggests a high percentage of artists in the Gibsons area. We were told that in the Sunshine Coast Region there hundreds of artists. The most visible cultural group we could identify was the Coast Cultural Alliance, which is striving to enhance the economy through cultural tourism and the arts. The group represents artists in the Sunshine Coast and provides them with support and organizes cultural events such as music festivals, art shows, plays, workshops and seminars. They also provide a resource center on Molly's Lane and artist profiles on the group's web site. A local café in lower Gibsons, "The Flying Cow", was noted by the Coast Cultural Alliance as being the cultural center of Gibsons. A notice board here highlights upcoming events and local artists studios and shows.

Retired or semi-retired people whom we spoke to were either longtime residents or more recent arrivals who retired to the area from elsewhere. The longtime residents seem to be satisfied with Gibsons as it is, and do not wish to see it change too much. They seemed to feel they had everything they needed in town. The senior residents who had retired to the area from somewhere else were often described as being of a higher income bracket than the average Gibsons resident.

Seniors and older adults in Gibsons have several organizations to choose from if they wish to participate in the community, including Harmony Hall Seniors Center, and the Yacht Club. These two locations host many activities for its members such as hiking, card playing, and crafts, as well as general socializing. When asked what they liked about living in Gibsons retirees often noted the friendliness and small-town ambiance, the natural scenery (especially views of sea and mountains), and the slower pace of life.

A-2.5 The Future of Gibsons Social Networks

Some people we spoke to fear that the area is not attracting enough young families or keeping its own young people. Instead, they see increasing numbers of retirees moving to the area. Some thought that the town may lose some of its authenticity if there is not a balance of age levels in the community.

Both the teen exodus and meal programs in school are symptoms of Gibsons greatest problem - an extremely limited number of economic opportunities within the town of Gibsons. With the resource-based economy diminishing, there is less and less money coming into town. Without new money coming into town, the main groups who will want to live there are retirees and Vancouver commuters (with or without families). Unless some new form of economy is centered in Gibsons to draw different groups, we cannot change the fact that most new Gibsons residents will be from the two aforementioned groups who either draw income directly from Vancouver or are spending their savings.

The representative of the Coast Cultural Alliance we spoke to suggested that many of the areas residents would welcome visitors from off the coast who might buy art, participate in workshops, and take seminars. These visitors would also stay in local Bed and Breakfasts and rent locals' boats, thereby providing overall economic benefits to the local economy.

What We See

