

**Setting the Standard:
How a Four Year Utopian Experiment Established a Six Decade Communal
Norm in Sointula, British Columbia**

by

Kevin Michael Wilson
B.A., University of Regina, 1992
B.Ed., University of Victoria, 1999

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of History

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Abstract

“Setting the Standard” examines over one hundred years in the existence of a British Columbia coastal community: Sointula “*place of harmony*”. From its beginnings as a socialist utopia settled by Finnish immigrants, to its place in the 1960s as a seemingly typical fishing community, peopled by a diverse ethnic mix, this thesis traces the ideological changes of the island’s inhabitants over a six decade period. In doing so, this work uses Sointula as a case study to see how an ideological base first forms in a community and then how that ideology forms a standard that influences all succeeding community developments. Through this case study, particular historical events in the province surrounding the mining, logging and fishing industries, as well as the co-operative, labour union, and socialist movements are examined.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my partner Wendy and my son Noah, both of whom were extremely patient over the long period spent researching and writing this work. My love to you both.

Introduction

The community of Sointula, on Malcolm Island, British Columbia, was formed in 1901 as a socialist utopia removed from the outside world, its very name "place of harmony" suggesting a community that was to be built outside the social and economic norms of most British Columbian communities. Even the implosion of this utopian vision in 1905 did not change the outlook or the hopes of the Finnish immigrants who came here: no church, no alcohol, no government control (even today, the community remains unincorporated) and a commitment to socialist/co-operative values remained communal norms until well into the 1960's, and in many cases, beyond. Its community based nature with a focus on group security over individual profit often kept Sointula ideologically removed from other British Columbia communities. Rallying around socialism, the co-operative movement, union support, and their own Finnish identity, however, Malcolm Islanders were able to form alliances that included them in 'communities' that transcended geographical proximity. The shared community ideals of the Malcolm Islanders forged during the island's early utopian phase and centered on a few key institutions/organizations in the succeeding decades, defined Malcolm Island for much of the twentieth century.

In its immediate subject and wider surrounding issues, this thesis explores areas that have been covered in the general literature. The community of Sointula has inspired two books, a film documentary and numerous journal and newspaper articles; its beginning as a socialist utopia and its continued role as both a source of socialist activity (through unions and political activism) and Finnish heritage in

British Columbia, have attracted both scholarly and popular interest. The unique contribution of "Setting the Standard" within this wider body of research is to examine the ideological and historical factors that formed a well examined British Columbia community, and to trace how that ideology underwent alteration and transformation in succeeding decades.

The distinct focus and scope of this thesis is highlighted in its contrast to other major works on Sointula. In time period and subject matter, *Sointula: Island Utopia* by Paula Wild, is the work most similar in make-up to this thesis. Socialism, ethnic identity, union support and the co-operative movement are all discussed, and the timeline extends from before the start of the utopia until 1995 when the book was written. Wild's work, however, differs in approach, tone and depth of analysis. She begins with an exploration of the idea of 'utopia' and how it relates to the idea of community (something the thesis does not consider deeply), gives a cursory overview of the conditions in Finland and Vancouver Island that inspired the utopia's creation, and quickly moves to the story of the Kalevan Kansa, the co-operative joint stock company that was to be the economic and governing engine of the utopia. Over half of Wild's book deals with the events of those four years from 1901 to 1905 with her focus clearly on the charismatic leader Matti Kurikka, the original leader of the community. Wild does note how the influences of the utopian period, such as socialism and ethnic pride, persisted but she does not analyze in detail how these ideals developed and shifted over the succeeding decades.

Wild, a professional writer rather than a historian, follows the chronological development of a story, rather than attempting to prove a specific theory or argument.

Thus, areas of 'dramatic appeal', (e.g. the turbulent four years of the utopia, Matti Kurikka's past, and, later, the 'hippy movement' of the 1960s and 1970s), receive proportionately more focus than more mundane subjects. She ignores or gives minimal attention to such subjects as the Sointula Co-operative Store (the key institution on the island from 1909 to the 1970s and the focus of the island's co-operative movement), the activist Malcolm Island PTA, the influence of both English-speaking loggers and Finnish-speaking conservatives in the post-World War II period, the changing perspective on religion on the island, and the contrast between Sointula and nearby communities (particular nearby Aboriginal people). By focusing on only part of the story, Wild is not able to comprehensively examine how those ideals came to influence every aspect of life on the island or how the island adapted the ideals to its own purposes.

The other book on Sointula is *The History of Sointula and the Kalevan Kansa*, by Matti Halminen (translated by Allan Henry Salo), a 1936 account by one of the founders of the community. Halminen focuses largely on the Kalevan Kansa/utopia period and the immediately preceding years when a number of Finnish immigrants were adapting to a new environment in British Columbia. Halminen explains the rationale behind ideologies such as socialism, the co-operative movement and temperance and aptly demonstrates how these ideologies became entrenched into the culture in the Kalevan Kansa. Halminen's account has an immediacy and sense of ideological fervor, fitting for an individual recounting the 'values' of his own community.

Halminen's work provides "Setting the standard" with a sound source for its initial chapters. His ideology and specific areas of interest (temperance and socialism) also provide insightful material but do not offer the full story of the ideologies that governed Sointula and how they changed over time. An avowed Marxist, Halminen makes no claim to ideological neutrality and makes clear both his hatred for capitalists such as mine-owner James Dunsmuir and his faith in the rightness of socialist objectives. Halminen's focus on Socialism also overshadows his attachment to post-Kalevan Kansa co-operative activity on the island.

Allen Henry Salo (the translator of Halminen's work) sets a more "neutral" tone in his 1978 thesis "The Kalevan Kansa Colonization Company, Limited: A Finnish-Canadian Millenarian Movement in British Columbia". This work concentrates entirely upon the Kalevan Kansa period and on the physical and ideological conditions in Finland and in British Columbia that gave rise to this entity. Salo uses the Kalevan Kansa as a case study (much as "Setting the Standard" attempts to) to explore ideas of hierarchy versus egalitarianism, individualism versus co-operation and the "rules of conduct to which men in community are bound". Like me, Salo is interested in how community standards are set by ideologies and historical pressures.

Where Salo's work differs is in its timeline and in its theoretical backing. Like Halminen, Salo quite effectively develops the historical basis for the Kalevan Kansa period, allowing the reader to understand the formation of the community's ideology. While suggesting that community standards become 'the truth' against which the future activities will be judged, this is merely conjecture on Salo's part as he does not

take the next step and examine the later decades, ideology and changes Sointula underwent. As with Halminen (and to a lesser extent Wild) Salo's focus remains firmly focused on the developmental utopian stage of the community.

Salo concentrates on the development of the Kalevan Kansa as a product of a certain time, his depiction of it as a millenarian movement in the title of his thesis, being an indication of this focus. He examines the 1901-1905 experiment in terms of a group's attempt to come "to terms with the question of identity," one of a number of utopian experiments, particularly during the last part of the nineteenth century, when socialist and co-operative ventures began to question tradition ideals of religious and social hierarchy, as well as the rising dominance of the capitalist system. Salo develops to a greater extent than "Setting the Standard" the background for the Kalevan Kansa and for the motivations of its central figure, Matti Kurikka; however, uncovering how the ideals of the Kalevan Kansa remained with the original settler's descendents is clearly of secondary interest to Salo. The Kalevan Kansa and the factors that allowed its creation make up his contribution to the literature on this subject.

Sointula continues to attract interest from both scholars and the general public. In 2001, Karvonen Films produced a video, "The People of Sointula", that discusses the history of the Kalevan Kansa period in detail, including comparative views of the original utopia and contemporary Sointula. This largely anecdotal video has Sointula residents recounting their ancestors' stories and noting how life in the community has developed. Intended to be accessible to a wide audience, the video neither attempts to present an original argument or an idea about the community's origins or to uncover

how and why the original ideologies of the community adapted and changed over time. It is also relatively sparse when dealing with the years between the cooperative's collapse and the present day.

J. Donald Wilson's article "Matti Kurikka and A. B. Makela: Socialist Thought Among Finns in Canada, 1900-1932", promises a wider focus than the other works by placing Socialist thought on Malcolm Island within the context of Socialist thought among all British Columbia Finns in a particular time. However, it centres largely on these two leaders of the Kalevan Kansa, the forces that shaped them and their work in Sointula itself. Wilson effectively uses the two men as counterpoints, contrasting Makela's hard-line Marxism to the theosophical socialism of Kurikka, and how each philosophy worked (often in opposition to its counterpoint) in the Sointula experiment. Wilson gives an effective, if brief, overview of the socialist political movement in both British Columbia and Finland in the period after the collapse of the Kalevan Kansa by viewing Makela and Kurikka's roles within it. However, as neither Makela nor Kurikka regained anything like the influence they had held in nineteenth century Socialist circles (particularly in Finland) in the post-utopia period, Wilson's essay is as much a character study of two individuals as it is of Sointula, Socialism, or Finnish identity.

In *Dreams of Freedom: Bella Coola, Cape Scott and Sointula*, Gordon Fish attempts to compare the 1901-1905 Sointula utopia and the ideologies that inspired its creation to the settling of the Bella Coola Valley by Norwegian immigrants in 1894, and the development of Cape Scott by Danish immigrants in 1896. Fish notes the similar desire for freedom that drove the three groups to attempt to form 'ethnic'

communities based on common ideals. Like “Setting the Standard”, *Dreams of Freedom* details the historical and geographical factors that influenced these North European immigrants, both in their home countries and in their British Columbia settlements, as well as the alterations that ideology had to make in response to practical realities. Fish does this through a very effective use of oral interviews, using some of the same individuals as “Setting the Standard” employs.

While succeeding in establishing the basis for specific Scandinavian communities in turn of the century British Columbia (and in using each of the three examples to compare and contrast among the others), *Dreams of Freedom* differs significantly from “Setting the Standard” in both detail and scope. Fish specifically eschews giving a comprehensive history of these three communities and centers his study on the formative years of these communities rather than succeeding decades. Indeed, there were no ‘succeeding decades’ at Cape Scott, the site being abandoned by its Danish immigrants before World War I. This highly personalized look at the roots of three Scandinavian communities is not a study on shifting ideologies in a community setting.

While “Setting the Standard” bears similarities to these other works, and draws on them as source material, it makes a unique contribution to the literature on both Sointula and the wider themes associated with the community by showing how these themes developed in Sointula from 1901 to the 1960s. Thus, this thesis provides a deeper understanding of a specific British Columbia community and the influences behind its development by capturing the historical context in which certain ideologies are first accepted and then develop within that community.

The method by which this thesis achieves this is through its use of primary and secondary sources. Using the aforementioned work by Wild, Halminen and the others noted above, as well as other accounts, I was able to establish a groundwork of accepted facts about the community. From that vantage point I was then able to build on that knowledge, and sometimes to challenge the established facts, through the use of source material that had either been completely overlooked, or had been meagerly employed in past works.

The Sointula co-operative store, for example, was the most important institution on the island for decades-yet none of the other works cited or any other articles I found, made use of the extensive co-op minutes, co-op records from the provincial government, or centred their oral interviews on the co-operative store. As well, the original Finnish newspaper of the utopian period, *Aika*, had been completely translated in the last five years, allowing me much original source material (Paula Wild being the only one to have made similar use of this newspaper). The Malcolm Island PTA minutes seem to have been a completely neglected source for any work done on the island – despite the fact that the organization was listed as one of the five most important organizations on the island in the 1950s. The use of material regarding RCMP surveillance of the island also contributed much to an understanding of how Malcolm Islanders were viewed differently by the authorities of the outside world. Setting the standard also involved ten new oral interviews that helped uncover certain aspects of the community and its idealism (from changes in religious belief, to the inner workings of the co-operative store).

These, along with other material gathered during my three trips to the island, allowed for a comprehensive view of the ideals that shaped Sointula and the reasoning behind the alteration of those ideals over time.

Chapter One: The Roots of Utopia (1809-1905)

On 29 November 1901, the Kalevan Kansa Company, representing a group of British Columbia Finns, and W.C. Wells, British Columbia's Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, representing His Majesty King Edward VII of England, signed an agreement for the settlement of Malcolm Island. From this formal bureaucratic beginning of a co-operative trust company arose tales of a community that, at times, took on truly melodramatic dimensions: "the free love utopia", "the Communist state in BC", "the hippie commune"; all of these depictions became part of the folklore surrounding Sointula, a community that did not seem to fit in with provincial norms. To understand how Sointula achieved this notoriety, it is necessary to examine both its nineteenth century Finnish roots and its start as a utopian experiment in November 1901.

In 1809, Finland saw the end of the long domination of its affairs by Sweden. Unable or unwilling to compete with the expansionist aims of Tsar Alexander I of Russia, Sweden acquiesced to Alexander's assumption of the title of Grand Duke of Finland, the title previously held by the Swedish monarch. Though many Finns may have felt a lingering loyalty to Sweden and Swedes were a sizable minority within Finland, the Tsar's promise of a measure of internal political and social control insured there was no widespread resistance among Finns to this change. Many had lost faith in Sweden's ability to defend them and saw possibilities for greater local autonomy under the Russian monarchy. Politically, the agreement with the Tsar

seemed to bring some security for the Finnish people and bred optimism for the nation's future.

The extensive nature of this change in Finnish society after 1809 was perhaps best summed up by the Finnish-American historian Pekka Hamalainen:

[Finland] enjoyed extensive autonomy till the end of the nineteenth century. It retained and developed further the political, social, and cultural institutions and traditions that it had inherited from its long association with Sweden. It had its own culture, laws, diet, government, civil service, military, monetary unit, official languages, educational system, church, and a number of other attributes which distinguished and separated it from the Russian empire. In short it had a distinctive national identity of its own.¹

The identity, formed in the early nineteenth century, helps to explain the ideological motivation behind those who created Sointula. The very name of the founding company, Kalevan Kansa, 'The People of Kalevala', is a direct tie to perhaps the most important cultural undertaking in Finnish history, the formation of the Finnish national epic poem "The Kalevala" (Land of Heroes). Published in 1835 by classical scholar Elias Lonnrot from his collection of traditional Finnish runes (folk song-poems), this 12,000-line epic captures the spirit of an archetypal, ideal Finland. In it, hard working heroes in a beautiful pastoral setting strive for justice and a better life in the face of outside adversity. The poem captures both the rural roots and individualistic self-conception of the Finns in the homeland and what the Finnish-Canadian immigrants were attempting on Malcolm Island. At the turn of the twentieth century, this work inspired a sense of Finnish nationalism and pride that became part of the Sointula's make-up. The pages of *Aika*, the newspaper and official voice of the Kalevan Kansa Co., are filled with references to the Kalevala.

Works such as the Kalevala and a general drive for educational reform in Finland strengthened the cultural pride that they reflected. In 1867, the Finnish government separated education from the confines of the Lutheran Church which, while promoting general literacy, opposed universal education. Nine years earlier in October 1858, Finland opened its first Finnish-language secondary school (previous schools had only Swedish instruction). These measures seemingly increased educational opportunities for Finns in their own language but in the 1880s bureaucrats sought to stifle the development of Finnish language secondary schools. The reaction to that effort "led to a rapid growth in the desire to learn and encouraged a great deal of volunteer work and self-sacrifice for the sake of these schools." As historian L.A. Puntila notes, "The growth of interest in learning among the peasantry was striking"². Public pressure and liberal legislators helped overcome a policy that seemed particularly hostile to the desire of the Finnish-speaking majority for Finnish-language education. This growth of educational fervour in the face of official obstruction helps explain two factors that were to make themselves felt in Sointula: a stress on the importance of education, especially in the Finnish language (Sointula had the largest Finnish language library in Canada in the early 1900s), and a distrust of authority. The latter point emerged again and again through Sointula's existence.

Much of this distrust was aimed at the power of the Lutheran Church. Not only had it attempted to stifle advanced educational possibilities for the common Finnish people, but as the official state church it had taxing privileges. "The priest's sack is bottomless" runs an old Finnish adage, referring to both the tax money and the days of labour tenant farmers owed to the local parsonage.³ The constant tirades in

Aika against the Church (as opposed to Christianity) speak to its dominant role in nineteenth-century Finland. In the words of one historian, the Lutheran Church "was the Church of the Establishment, and the nation was of the Establishment".⁴ Despite liberal language and education reforms, the nation remained controlled by a hierarchy, of which the Church was a central part; this hierarchy was not necessarily sympathetic to the social, economic and educational desires of the Finnish majority.

This hierarchy included factory owners and rural landholders, typically a Swedish speaking elite removed from the concerns of the Finnish majority. Though the majority of Finland remained rural into the twentieth century demographic change, particularly in the south and west where the famine of the 1860s had been especially devastating, drove a number of people to the cities and larger towns. Many late nineteenth century industrial workers in Finland lived a bare subsistence existence in a crowded, unhealthy urban sprawl. Farm life was no more certain. As the descendent of an original Sointula colonist noted, "In the 1880's Finland was like a dictatorship. You had to do what you were told, it was hard to own land, and you had to pay a lot of taxes to the government".⁵ Puntila adds "those who owned the land could turn out the tenants whenever they saw fit, often from fields the crofters had cleared themselves".⁶ Such conditions helped engender socialist activity, particularly in famine ravaged southern Finland, which had, perhaps, the largest number of tenant farmers. The south also gave rise to such socialist leaders as the playwright/feminist Minna Canth and two of her acolytes, the writers, journalists, and soon to be utopian leaders, Matti Kurikka and A. B. Makela. These future leaders of Sointula spent hours in Minna Canth's salon discussing socialist and nationalist thought and religious

and philosophical ideas then currently circulating in Europe and America. Many of the ideas formatted by Matti Kurikka in the comfort of Minna Canth's salon found their way into the pages of *Aika*, where they were the subjects of much debate. Indeed, some of them came to divide Malcolm Island, and helped bring an end to the utopian experiment.

The already less-than-utopian lives of the common Finnish people became even grimmer under the oppressive rule of the Russian Tsar Alexander III (1881-1894). Alexander took steps to curb Finland's special status, lessening the power of the Finnish Senate, and placing the Finnish postal service under the control of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, the brunt of Russian oppression came during the reign of Alexander's successor, Nicholas II (1894-1917). By the February manifesto of 1899, Russian autocracy in Finland was extended, the Finnish constitution effectively annulled, and the laws of the Finnish Diet transformed into 'advice' that the Tsar could take or leave as he saw fit.⁷ This edict even allowed for the conscription of Finns into the Russian army, reducing Finland to little more than a Russian province.

Together, the economic turmoil of the cities, the unstable tenant system of the farms, the overarching dominance of the church, and the increasing autocracy of the Russian state in Finland led to emigration on a grand scale. Tens of thousands of Finns made their way to either the United States or Canada. A sizable proportion of the former, disappointed at their prospects in the U.S., moved on to Canada and the opportunities that a young, quickly developing nation seemed to offer. Searching for a place apart from the harsh rules, regulations, and confines that had held them in the

past, many of these Finnish immigrants were open to the socialist, communitarian, and utopian ideals that had their first opportunity to take solid form for these people in Sointula.

Finnish immigrant Matti Halminen perhaps best captures the factors that inspired the foundation of this utopian experiment in *The History of Sointula and the Kalevan Kansa*. Unlike scholars and historians who have written about Sointula, Halminen was a part of this history from the beginning. His recounting of his life in Sointula and British Columbia, from the dangers of 'Lord' Dunsmuir's coalmines to the foibles of Matti Kurikka's leadership, is a first-hand account both of the factors that brought the Finns of Sointula together and the problems that drove half of them to depart, and of the underlying hopes and ideals which eventually led to more long-term communitarian ventures - specifically the Sointula Co-operative Store.

Halminen begins his account by noting that Finns only began arriving in Canada in any real numbers in the 1880s when the Canadian Pacific Railway, aided by the Canadian government, attempted to secure workers. Many Finns from the South-Western Lapua region found work on the BC section of the CPR, several securing coveted 'section boss' positions. Lapua Finns continued to hold important positions on the railroad for decades to come. Though hardly joining the ranks of the province's business elite, this wave of Finnish immigrants were at least able to see some chance for advancement and a better life in British Columbia.

The same cannot be said, however, for the second wave of Finnish workers to come to BC, the Vancouver Island coal miners. Halminen recalls how the coal mines on the island were risky because of the frequency of gas explosions, this being the

likely cause of both an 1887 Nanaimo and an 1888 Wellington coal mine explosion.⁸ Deaths and the exodus of frightened miners presented an opportunity for a group of Finns who went to Nanaimo from the United States in 1888. Eager mine owners quickly hired them and these Finns wrote to others at home and in the U.S. of the favourable job prospects. The result was an influx of Finnish migrant miners.

In many ways, the initial experience of Finnish migrants in the mining communities of Nanaimo, Ladysmith, and Extension were magnifications of the insecurity and flux at home. With little chance at being able to secure farmland at an affordable price, new immigrants were relatively dependent on the whims of the industrial bosses, just as they had been in Finland. In relating the abuse that occurred, Halminen highlights the practical reasoning behind Sointula's ideological core:

As the coal seams [at Nanaimo] became depleted around the turn of the century, the owner of the mines, ... James Dunsmuir, began to mine for coal at a place twelve miles away known as the Extension mines. The workers who sought employment there dismantled their board-constructed homes and carried the materials with them to rebuild on lots rented from a private landowner. Soon after, that same millionaire decided to form a new town on the shores of Oyster Harbour where the Extension coal was loaded onto ships. As a result, he decreed that all the Extension miners who wished to continue working for him must move to live in the new town that he named Ladysmith.... Once again, the miners were obliged to dismantle their homes as directed and to purchase lots from Mr. Dunsmuir at high prices. If anything can teach a thinking man to despise subservience and to escape from beneath despotic conditions, it is recollections about events like those.⁹

Low wages and forced relocation were by no means the only hardships faced by these workers. Isolated by their lack of English, far from the support and social stability of home, many Finnish miners turned to alcohol for comfort, earning them the derogatory moniker of 'bad Russian Finns'. Recalling the unhealthy atmosphere

of this time, Halminen notes that "gang fights and drunkenness were everyday fare during holidays as well as during the working week".¹⁰ Historian Allan H. Salo relates that the mine owners were eager to encourage this debauched lifestyle, arranging to have alcohol delivered to the miners, keeping them disunited and in debt.

¹¹ With little hope for advancement, lacking a sense of community, the 'dream of freedom that many Finns had come to Canada to find was in fact becoming a reality of poverty, shame, and alcoholism.

At this low point in the early 1890s two temperance organizations were formed near Nanaimo, *Lannen Rusko* ('Western Glow') on 5 February 1890, and *Allotar* ('Water Nymph') on 11 October 1891. Both groups had an enormous impact upon the Finns of Vancouver Island and led, by direct and indirect means, to the formation of the Sointula experiment. *Lannen Rusko* was the first Finnish-Temperance organization in all of Canada. Though not a founding member, Halminen joined soon after and found it an uplifting experience: "When a person grasps hold of the proper perspective of life's higher virtues he will most often direct to his new undertakings the same vigour which he had formerly applied to less constructive activities... this became very evident within the temperance movement and later that enthusiasm showed itself in labour union participation".¹²

This vigour, begun with *Lannen Rusko*, accelerated dramatically with *Allotar* of which Halminen was a founding member. He described this point of his life as a "spiritual awakening".¹³ Not only did *Allotar* promote temperance, it also helped establish a Finnish language library, gave rise to a Finnish brass band that played prominently in English temperance marches and served as a forum through which

Finnish immigrants could begin to discuss their place in the English-speaking society. Such efforts seemed to transform a dispirited group of foreign speaking migrant workers into a purposeful unit, one with hope for the future. In Ladysmith, this unit coalesced into what was known as 'Finn Town', an enclave of Finnish coal miners and their families who actively preserved the culture of their homeland through language classes, folk dancing and other activities.¹⁴

But if *Allotar* and *Lannen Rusko* had given the Finns in and around Nanaimo spiritual hope, it still remained to give them an economic reality on which to base that hope. In his *History of Sointula*, Halminen makes clear that in the 1890s the Finns around Nanaimo had already discussed the possibility of a co-operative communal enterprise to fill that gap. This was quite a natural development, for although the co-operative movement in Finland did not officially gain momentum until the late 1870s, the Finns had a long history of co-operative dealings. Rural Finland had a tradition of *talkoot*, collective house and barn building, harvesting and fishing that went back centuries.¹⁵ Dairy co-ops, consumer co-ops, and workers' joint-stock companies arose throughout the 1880s and 1890s in Finland; the Finns of Vancouver Island would either have had direct experience with them, heard about them from relatives, or read about them in Finnish publications such as those brought in through the activities of *Allotar*. This communitarian history, coupled with the lack of opportunity for individual advancement for Finns in an English-dominated society, made a co-operative venture a reasonable option.

Yet, though the reasons for a co-operative were there, one element was missing to start the whole endeavour off, an element that can perhaps simply be

described as 'visionary leadership'. That leadership arrived in the form of a charismatic, controversial journalist/playwright by the name of Matti Kurikka. Halminen and his fellow miners had heard of Kurikka, as had most literate Finns of the period. The mercurial editor of the Helsinki working class newspaper *Tyomies* in the 1880s, he had scandalized Finnish society in 1899 with his play *The Tower of Babel*, in which he derided the political and religious hierarchy and had left for Australia that same year, after being narrowly denied the leadership of the Finnish Socialist Federation political party. In 1900, having failed to form a utopian commune in Queensland, Kurikka was considering his next move; at the same time, three ex-members of that commune arrived in Extension, BC, looking for work. There they happened upon Halminen who was naturally curious to hear more of this somewhat infamous man. They gave Halminen some pamphlets that Kurikka had written, in which he highlighted workers' rights. Impressed, Halminen exchanged letters with Kurikka; the miners raised money for passage; and in the fall of 1900 Kurikka arrived in Nanaimo.

For the next year, until the newly formed Kalevan Kansa reached an agreement with the British Columbia government for Malcolm Island, Matti Kurikka provided the necessary visionary leadership that Halminen and his fellow Nanaimo Finns had lacked. Though Halminen noted that many of these early ideas were later regarded as impossible, when Kurikka first explained them they seemed "practical and imaginative". Kurikka's initial idea of forming a joint stock company, the Kalevan Kansa, fit in with the co-operative notion that Halminen and others had previously discussed. Kurikka connected the idea of this stock company to notions of

socialism, Christian love, and women's rights through *Aika*, the newspaper formed specifically as an organ for Kurikka's thoughts. Then, through lecture tours, he carried his campaign for the Kalevan Kansa Company throughout BC and the West Coast of the United States. Starting softly in his talks, he gathered momentum until, "charm[ing] his audience with a frantic speech" he would denounce organized religion, capitalism, and the evils of western society, all of which the Kalevan Kansa would avoid. Classically good looking with long dark hair, and possessing a captivating voice, Kurikka was able to draw in a crowd, gaining both investors for the company and potential settlers. Though much of what he was saying merely echoed ideas already held by Halminen and his fellow workers, Kurikka provided the inspiration to make these miners' dreams a reality. As Halminen himself admits, "without Kurikka's assistance we did not have the needed faith to make it come about. We needed his eloquence and sharp pen for our assistance. In practical matters we could have depended on ourselves".¹⁶

Proving this point, Halminen relates how he found the colony's future home. At the Parliament Buildings in Victoria in the spring of 1901, Halminen and Kurikka met with the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works in an attempt to find a location for a colony. Encouraged by the chief commissioner and given a handful of maps to peruse, Halminen discovered the possibility of Malcolm Island. Located between the north part of Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia, it seemed perfect: close to shipping lanes, of appropriate size with a sizable forest area and, most importantly, designated as a prime agricultural area. Whatever varied ideological reasons people had for coming to Sointula, the desire to farm was a unifying goal for

most. Long-time Sointula resident Arvo Tynjala relates how his father traveled from North Dakota to Sointula with four or five families, all of them bent on farming.

¹⁷ Halminen's reaction to the possibilities of Malcolm Island was immediate and direct: "That island we must attain for our settlers I immediately thought - we must try to get it right away". ¹⁸

Though not yet formally registered as a company, the Kalevan Kansa was a working unit with a board of directors and an acting president, Kurikka. They (board and president) shared Halminen's enthusiasm for the possibilities of Malcolm Island but two problems existed. One, many of the potential settlers lacked the necessary \$200.00 to buy a share in the Kalevan Kansa Co. and simply pledged to work off their share in later labour, leaving the company cash poor. Two, the Industrial Power Company of British Columbia had recently received Malcolm Island as part of a timber lease. The Kalevan Kansa Co., using the second problem to help solve the first, negotiated a contract with Industrial Power to log the timber of the island. Some money was coming in but the provincial government, previously so supportive, began to waiver. At this point, the Kalevan Kansa received unexpected aid in the form of favourable local press. *The Nanaimo Daily Herald* noted that the Finns, promoted "industry, refinement, and a belief in realistic idealism,"¹⁹ while the *Victoria Daily Colonist* noted that the future settlers of Malcolm island were "an industrious, frugal, and easily contented people willing to work hard to secure peaceful homes".²⁰ Recent publicity over the plight of Finnish people living under the harshness of Russian rule had combined with the positive perception of Vancouver Island Finns achieved through the activities of *Allotar* and *Lannen Rusko*. The force of public opinion and

of persistent inquiries by the Finns had its effect. On November 29, 1901, the Kalevan Kansa signed an agreement with the government for possession of Malcolm Island.²¹

On the surface, the agreement seemed hugely favourable to the Finns. The settlers were given seven years to bring 350 people to the island and to make improvements worth \$2.50 an acre. If successful, not only would Malcolm Island be granted to them, but the government would also grant them an additional property of the same size as Malcolm Island. Even the stipulation that the Finns build a school and have their children educated in English seemed to be but a small matter. As Kurikka noted, "I feel the language and nationality of a truly vital, civilized nation will not disappear - even if it is in constant contact with other languages".²² Kurikka was overcome with enthusiasm: "We will be self sufficient and produce everything we need. Unemployment and sickness will evaporate into the past and strikes and poverty will become unknown. It only depends on us to break free from the feet of the capitalists".²³

Yet, despite this professed optimism, it seems probable that Kurikka had fears for the immediate economic future of his new colony (his original utopia in Australia had floundered largely due to a lack of capital). This would account for the deal he made with an individual who, to many Canadian socialists of the time, personified the evils of capitalism - James Dunsmuir. Kurikka was to provide up to 200 workers for Dunsmuir's mines at a rate of \$2.50 a day, even though the standard daily wage at the time was \$3.00 a day. Each worker was a potential Malcolm Island settler and was to agree to pay at least five dollars a month towards his membership in the Kalevan

Kansa. Though this scheme could have brought in a much needed one thousand dollars a month to the company coffers, the board of directors was outraged: "The Kalevan Kansa will not be founded by trampling the wages of other workers, injuring them and thereby irritating them to be against us!"²⁴ Ironically, Dunsmuir himself nullified this plan by shutting down the proposed mine site upon hearing that some of the miners were attempting to unionize. This incident served to display what was to become a recurrent theme in the utopia's brief history: Kurikka's tendency to initiate a project without properly considering all the factors and consequences involved.

In truth, Kurikka's enthusiasm for his own ideas and fiery rhetoric had already been noted. His striking out against political and religious elites in *The Tower of Babel* had made him unwelcome in the upper echelon of Finnish society; his deriding of Marxism as hate-oriented 'stomach' Socialism had set him against potential allies in both Finnish and Canadian socialist groups; and his fiery lectures against the church in North America caused a reaction against not only himself, but against the Malcolm Island community which he represented. His attacks on religion were so notorious that when describing a lecture by Kurikka, a reporter in Worcester, Massachusetts, noted that "word spread among our citizens that the devil himself has now arrived".²⁵ Though there was no doubt as to Kurikka's ability to stir up and arouse an audience, this same passionate temperament could have an unsettling effect on the colony and its ability to attract suitable settlers.

Kurikka himself noted that he needed a counterweight to his fiery personality and recommended his old university friend, A.B. Makela, for the role. Cool-minded and methodical, Makela had helped temper Kurikka's extreme nature in the late

nineteenth century when the two wrote for the workers' daily paper, *Tyomies*, in Helsinki. At least one scholar has observed that the direct and thoughtful Makela was "much more dangerous to his opposition than the shifting and inconsistent Kurikka".²⁶ Makela responded to Kurikka's request almost immediately and arrived on Malcolm Island in January 1902. In his memoirs Makela wrote that he left Finland to escape the Russian secret police, who were set to arrest him for his role in directing underground Marxist literature into Russia; others claim he left Finland due to alcoholism, which was ruining both his journalistic career and his strong influence with the Finnish Labour Party.²⁷ Whatever the truth, both alcoholism and Marxism were to remain constant influences upon his life in Canada.

Yet, despite the fact that Makela's 'stomach' Marxism was anathema to Kurikka and his alcoholism offensive to the temperance-minded community, his presence on the island had, from the beginning, the desired calming influence. In its agreement for Malcolm Island, the government had required the *Kalevan Kansa* to include an oath of allegiance to the King for all prospective settlers as well as a stipulation necessitating settlers to take up arms in defence of Canada should the need arise. These clauses brought up the ghosts of government interference in Finland and the conscription of Finns into the Russian army. Yet Makela was able to dispel these fears before they festered. While agreeing with his fellow settlers that it would have been best to dispense with any oath of allegiance, he made light of any great 'need' that the King of England would have for remote Malcolm Island; he likewise deftly defused conscription fears by noting that the only nearby enemies of Canada were Russia and China, and who would not take up arms if those 'barbarians' attacked? In

a similar vein of strategic compromise, Makela soon changed his name to Austin Mckela, explaining "I just took things from a practical point of view. I spelled my name in a way that enables the English speaker to read it and write it".²⁸ The name Mckela may also have enabled the Finn 'Makela' to more easily carry out Kalevan Kansa business in a British Columbia dominated by an Anglo-Saxon hierarchy. Where Kurikka moved boldly and often earned criticism, Makela¹ moved subtly, and earned respect. In the end, his ability to strike compromises and to work practically within the larger society set the standard by which Sointula continued to develop.

That there was a need for practicality on Malcolm Island was self-evident. The farmland so coveted by the settlers was covered with forest and dense brush. The Kalevan Kansa's first annual report in June 1902 noted an outstanding debt of \$1300.00. By November 1902, 200 people were living on Malcolm Island, many in tents, many planning on working off their \$200.00 membership fee. The Kalevan Kansa's business dealings were not doing well. After having negotiated what seemed a shrewd contract with a Rivers Inlet salmon canning company, Kurikka set out with a Malcolm Island fishing expedition, only to be told he had arrived too late and someone else had been hired. Even the news that the Industrial Power lease of Malcolm Island timber had been cancelled was of more theoretical than practical gain: the Malcolm Islanders could now reap complete profit from their logging efforts, but they also were now forced to market and transport their wood at prohibitive costs.²⁹

The colony's members hoped that the completion of a saw mill late in 1902

would overcome these setbacks and put the Kalevan Kansa back in financial health. Even this accomplishment, however, was of dubious worth as the inexperienced Sointula workers were unable to get the saw mill up to anywhere near acceptable speed. Although some settlers left for other, more easily obtainable economic goals, many remained to follow the more elaborate utopian fantasies that Sointula seemed to make possible. Even the moderate and cool-headed Makela noted in his memoirs that upon arriving on Malcolm Island he believed that “there would have been room for the whole Finnish working class. I thought of building a big ocean vessel which could bring the whole Finnish nation to that free land”.³⁰

Makela’s idealistic hopes for the island, extended to a vision for the community’s physical structure. He outlined plans for a village on the shore of ‘Rough Bay’ on the south shore of the island that would include parks, a beach promenade, public buildings and a marketplace. This, at a time when two small wooden cabins and a makeshift sauna were the only structures on the island (a communal hall and a smithy would soon be constructed within a year) and where trails needed to be blazed from the shorelines through the dense underbrush in order to access the rest of the island. Even the ability to transport new arrivals to the colony was curtailed by a lack of sailing knowledge and transport. The initial colonists had largely been transported by fishermen from other communities; the one sailboat owned by the colony, the Kalevatar (Kaleva Queen) was nearly capsized by its inexperienced crew in its first attempt to transport new members to the island.³¹ The colony, at this state in its existence, was living with very meagre comforts and had yet

¹ As this individual is consistently referred to by Malcolm Islanders (past and present) as ‘Makela’

to learn how to master the skills necessary for the environment they were in.

The leaders of the community, however, Kurikka, Halminen and Makela, seemed overcome by the possibilities. This optimism seems to have been a standard response of the Kalevan Kansa's members, an optimism perhaps tied to youthful exuberance. The vast majority of the first Finnish settlers on Malcolm Island were in their twenties and thirties. One long-term Sointula resident, Irene Michelson, recalls island elders discussing the start of the colony: "they were all so happy, young, healthy, ambitious to make everything to turn good".³² Clearly something beyond simply material gain and comfort was driving these settlers. Sointula resident Mrs. L. E. Guthrie notes that her father, a successful Oregon businessman, being intrigued at the thought of establishing a more socially just society.³³ The colony's first doctor, Oswald Beckman, had likewise come north from Astoria, Oregon, convinced by Kurikka to leave a successful private practice in pursuit of a dream. The settlers of Malcolm Island were not just seeking an escape from economic and political oppression; they had a sense of creating something new.

This creation, at times, took on a decidedly mythic quality. *Allotar*, the temperance society from which the original idea of a co-operative venture sprang, is the name of a water goddess in Finnish mythology. The boat that brought the first settlers to the island, the *Aino*, is the name of a heroine of the Kalevala epic. In a March 1902 issue of *Aika*, Kurikka tells of creating a place of peace (*Rauhala*) in a certain bay on the island, wherein no living creature shall be hurt; he relates how a fat duck waddled unharmed through a group of armed Kalevan Kansa settlers in this

rather than 'Mckela', the former name will be used throughout this thesis.

protected area, flying away to spread the word to others of the good people to be found there.³⁴ The story speaks directly to a pre-modern bond between nature and humanity that is found in the Kalevala. Kurikka wed these elements of Finnish myth with a strong theosophical belief learned in part at the salon of Minna Canth. Theosophy is described as being based on claims of a "mystical insight into the nature of God and the soul".³⁵ The true theosophist relies on his or her 'insights' as more valid than pure reason. Kurikka not only used this philosophy to deride symbols of structure and reason in European society (at one point pairing science with organized religion as two symbols of false authority), but to promote a true Christianity based on simple love. Jesus (referred to as Issu) is evoked consistently throughout the pages of *Aika*, Kurikka noting that the colony on Malcolm Island was to be "a Nazarene's light in Europe's darkness".³⁶ This light was to be evoked through literature, music, and the sharing of philosophical ideals.

It is difficult to know how deeply the other settlers believed in Kurikka's vision for the island as a theosophical utopia. Makela, for one, categorized theosophy as merely "the seventeenth form of religion that they have tried to force upon me in my lifetime".³⁷ Yet, though Makela's common sense views of life appear to have gained the community's respect, Kurikka's passion and vision for the island dominated. Sointula (place of harmony), Kurikka's choice for the colony's name easily won out over Makela's less colourful choice of Kodiksi (home place). When the first board of directors was elected at the first annual meeting, Kurikka was made President, receiving every vote cast. Even the practical Matti Halminen recalled that at this starting point, "it truly seemed possible that we could build a utopia".³⁸

What kept that dream living as long as it did, especially with the economic hardships that ensued, may have been the practical application of the colony's shared ideals. As a direct reflection of the exploitive working conditions in Finland and in Dunsmuir's mines, the colony set out certain standard working conditions: an eight hour work day; one dollar a day in wages; leaders chosen by the members of each work group; and, at the end of the year, each stock holder would receive a five percent dividend on their stock - half of which would go back into the company for recreational and intellectual benefits.³⁹ All stockholders, women as well as men, were to be entitled to vote on the affairs of the colony. As well, in keeping with both the educational and linguistic reforms that had begun in Finland, Sointula was to develop a 2000-book Finnish language library, run by settler Katri Riksmann. Even the cultural desires of the colony were largely met through the production of its own plays and the creation of its own music. By 1904, an assortment of the colonists' poems was collected in two volumes entitled *Kansan Sointuja I and II* (Kalevan Kansa Songs of Harmony); Kurikka set some of them to traditional Finnish hymn music, read or sang them out on his lecture tours, and eventually sold 2500 copies to the outside world.⁴⁰ All of these practices and achievement gave the colonists of Sointula a degree of optimism and pride in their utopia.

So much seemed possible that it may have been difficult for the colonists to separate the achievable from the fantastical, as evidenced by the board of directors meeting of July 8, 1902. As was to later occur at the Sointula Co-op Store's semi-annual meetings, the Kalevan Kansa board also discussed community concerns and celebrations. At this particular meeting the practical matter of beginning English

lessons for the community was discussed and agreed on, after which *The Tower of Babel* was performed, and a song by Kurikka sung. The colonists also agreed upon the less practical idea of creating an entirely new calendar, based on a six-day week, and a five-week month, after which 'brother' Martin Henrikson gave a lecture on the duty of the colonists to become model citizens who were to 'spread the light' wherever they went in the world.⁴¹ From the start there was an unspecified conflict in the colony between two ideals: one, fitting in with the rest of society while still proudly promoting Finnish heritage and socialist thought; and two, creating a new society apart from the capitalist world, one which was to influence Western civilization with the power of its example. In the end, only the first of these ideals was to prove practical enough to serve as the template for a successful, long-lived community.

The ending of the second idea may very well be seen to have begun on the night of January 30, 1903. True, the utopian ideal had suffered many setbacks before this point: the ineffective financial ventures, including a recent failure to raise dairy cattle because of the lack of fodder; the exodus of many settlers disappointed with the colony's lack of comforts; and the grumbling of many at having to live in communal dwellings. But, as Halminen notes in his memoirs, Kurikka was tireless in combating these problems. Just when it looked like the money was running out, Kurikka would return from Vancouver with money from a log shipment; as old settlers left, Kurikka convinced more settlers to take their place; and if the recently completed three-story log house nicknamed *Melula* (noisy) was not any colonists' ideal, this communal living quarters was at least a temporary housing solution until individual cabins could

be built.⁴² As Halminen noted before, without Kurikka the colonists did not have the necessary faith to make this venture a success. As long as this faith was maintained, the colonists could continue to maintain the dream that Kurikka had set before them of creating something new. With the destruction of *Melula*, in a fire that claimed eleven lives, faith in that dream was tested for all (and shattered for many).

At first, the impact of the fire on the colony was the simple horror of loss: "I will not try to present a description of the effect of that blow", Halminen wrote, "I will simply say that the strength was gone from my feet.... Eleven people, who were to me like brothers and sisters, have been killed".⁴³ Though the loss of life was felt most, the loss of goods was great as well; it is estimated that thirteen tons of supplies, as well as passports and the company ledger, were destroyed. Morale fell greatly at this point and at perhaps no other time was the strength and example of the colony's leader needed more.

Yet, just when the community needed to pull together, the figure of their leader became a dividing point. People began to have suspicions regarding Kurikka's conduct in this affair. Even before the fire, some disgruntled ex-settlers had sent letters to various newspapers questioning their leader's honesty and competence. The financial affairs of the Kalevan Kansa that winter were grim and Kurikka had admitted to Halminen that at times it was necessary for him to "lie a little" just to keep the colony afloat.⁴⁴ The creditors of the Kalevan Kansa Co. had sent a representative named J. Warren Bell to Malcolm Island to see if it was worthwhile to give the colony any more credit; by coincidence, the fire occurred while this man was staying in *Melula*. Rumours spread that Bell was an auditor sent by the government

and that Kurikka had started the fire to get rid of evidence that he had been embezzling funds. This speculation was fuelled by the fact that Kurikka was among the very first out of the burning building and that he saved some of his important poems from the blaze. These rumours were almost impossible to combat; nearly a year past the event, Kurikka was still defending his actions in *Aika*.

Thus, the fallout from the fire went far beyond the tragedy itself. Dr. Beckman left to start a new life in the United States, leaving the colony without a physician. Still others departed or were driven away when they persisted in their accusations against Kurikka. Though he did not formally prosecute those who had, in his opinion, besmirched his name, Kurikka insisted that two of the worst offenders be banished from the island and he threatened to resign if they were not. Makela, who had received his own share of unsubstantiated accusations regarding the fire, unexpectedly opposed this motion. Kurikka won but the first truly open split between Kurikka and Makela had begun. More than that, a real problem of trust had been exposed. No credible evidence of arson existed against Kurikka; Bell was not a government inspector and it appears very unlikely that the leader of a fragile colony would concoct a plan as destructive to the Kalevan Kansa as this. The fire and its aftermath signified that a portion of colonists were beginning to doubt the character of their leader and perhaps to question whether such a man could create a new, just society on Malcolm Island.

Yet, what was remarkable was not that the dream of creating a new society had begun to ebb, but that many settlers still appeared to have faith in it. Three weeks after the fire at the annual meeting of the Kalevan Kansa it was disclosed that the

company had debts totalling \$60,960.39, and had made a total profit of only \$32.38 the previous year. Yet the *sisu* (grit, or determination) of the colony was not destroyed: individual log cabins were built to replace *Melula*; \$1,000.00 was raised to improve the printing press; a bigger engine for the sawmill was purchased through a settler's \$2,000.00 donation, and the formation of a bank to lend money to others coming to the island was even considered (an island-based bank was realized in 1940 with the formation of the Sointula Credit Union).⁴⁵

Further testifying to the devotion many still felt towards the utopia was the 'settlers' agreement'. Created by Makela at the request of the board of directors, this agreement stated that members of the Kalevan Kansa were to look upon their work, money, shares, or other donations to the company not as outside society saw it, but as part of the co-operative venture of the utopia; any disagreement over private property was to be settled by the company rather than by an outside court.⁴⁶ Thus, members leaving the colony could not automatically remove their goods and money, and thereby threaten the colony with bankruptcy. The fact that the majority of the members were willing to sign such an agreement indicated that a strong belief in Sointula still existed. It also cemented an idea that was to remain on the island for generations: interference by outside authorities is unnecessary; the community will take care of its own affairs.

Generally speaking, the outside world did not appear interested in interfering. Despite assurances in *Aika* that capitalists such as Dunsmuir were distraught at losing their Finnish workers to the Sointula utopia, outsiders seem to have viewed the activities of the Kalevan Kansa as a private affair. This changed as Kurikka began to

write more and more about what came to be known as 'free love'. Tying in socialist ideals with the purity of nature and women's equality, Kurikka noted, "once private ownership is abolished, the family becomes unnecessary and marriage recognized as fornication, what could be purer than what is already seen in uncorrupted nature".⁴⁷ He even wrote that it was fine for a woman to have different fathers for her children. Kurikka defended his belief by claiming that he was fighting the inequality of traditional marriage that placed women in a subordinate position to men. The outside world saw it differently. Johan Lundell, a Lutheran preacher at Extension, wrote to the provincial government that "Matti Kurikka is the leader of a socialist and atheist element and he personally advocates free love".⁴⁸ It is uncertain what Lundell expected the provincial government to do with this information, but, as Halminen relates, many settlers feared this scandal would cause the authorities to become involved in the colony's affairs. This did not occur, but Lundell's depiction of Sointula was not easily shaken. Sointula resident Laila Butcher recalls how years after the initial accusation, a passenger ship passed by the island, its loudspeaker noting the 'free love commune' to be seen on the left-hand side.⁴⁹

Kurikka may have championed this cause, at least in part, as a way to encourage single men to stay on the island (the male-female ratio was generally about three to one). Makela went further, stating that "as a single man Kurikka is interested in all women and would like to see every marriage dissolve."⁵⁰ As Makela's own marriage began to falter, he eventually even accused Kurikka of seducing his wife. Opposed vocally by many women on the island, attacked by his former best friend, and lacking any visible support, the free love debate initiated by Kurikka seems to

have been a typical 'bold yet unthinking' gesture on his part. Though some scholars have suggested that Kurikka was ahead of his time in his views on women and marriage,⁵¹ it seems more accurate to suggest that he was simply taking the communalism of Sointula to a degree that few in the community then, or in later years, would agree was appropriate.

The same may be said of his desire to have the children of Sointula raised in a communal manner. In March 1904, the Kalevan Kansa opened a communal home to educate and raise the children of the community whom parents could leave there full time or just for the work day. Again, Kurikka eagerly explained to the women of the community what was best for them, using the pages of *Aika* to tout the freedom to engage in meaningful work and to ponder worthwhile ideas that were to come as a result of loosening the bonds of motherhood. That the majority of women resisted the idea did not appear to bother Kurikka: "If a chicken has made its nest in a dangerous place...and you try to bring it and its young ones to a safer place, what does the chicken do? It screams and pecks and does everything to resist the change".⁵² Once more, Kurikka was pushing communalism beyond the comfort level of the community; what is more, he was doing so in condescending and sexist language, alienating a large segment of the colony's population.

Just as Kurikka seemed to be misreading the social desires of the colony, so too was he distorting its economic reality. In March 1904, he announced in *Aika* that, "the design of our company is so vast that already now BC's biggest capitalists could take its place. With a few dollars incorporation expenses to the United States even Rockefeller and his companions could join".⁵³ The president of a company

continually near bankruptcy was comparing himself to John D. Rockefeller, the richest man in the world. This self-delusion perhaps led Kurikka to the business venture that effectively ended the utopian experiment. In the spring of 1904, Kurikka put a three thousand dollar bid on the construction of the Seymour and Capilano Bridges in Vancouver. When other colonists suggested that the bid was too low, Kurikka responded that the important thing was the “possibility of future contracts in the Vancouver area worth tens of thousands of dollars”.⁵⁴ The result was a debacle: Halminen estimates that, when all the tallying was finished, one hundred men contributed eight to nine thousand dollars worth of free labour to the municipality of North Vancouver and effectively gave away some of Malcolm Island’s best timber. No additional building contracts were forthcoming.

Instead of using his energies to mitigate the financial damage caused by this mistaken venture, Kurikka devoted much of his time to ideological rather than practical matters. During June and July 1904, while the other men of Sointula were building bridges in Vancouver, Kurikka was in Sointula, deriding the Ten Commandments “brought down from Mount Sinai by a Semitic robber chief”. Noting that the commandments were based on control rather than love, Kurikka used the pages of *Aika* to offer up as a counterpoint his own *twenty-one* ‘Guiding Principles for the People of Kalevala.’ In the many pages of description of ‘right living’ are included such advice as “Let us play, but let us not romp’ and “Let us lose our temper, but let us not get angry.”⁵⁵ It is not recorded how the people of Sointula reacted to receiving platitudes from their leader at the very moment of a financial disaster perpetrated by the same. However, much of the colony was clearly weary of

both Kurikka's utopian ideas and his lack of practical knowledge; perhaps sensing this, and fearing that he would lose his position as president in an upcoming special meeting, Kurikka resigned from the Kalevan Kansa on October 10, 1904, taking his leave of the colony.

Makela and the remaining settlers attempted to continue, but the utopia lacked vision without Kurikka. The colonists also missed his ability to recruit new settlers and investors with his eloquence. Makela, for all his calm rationality, could not inspire people the way that Kurikka did. On May 27, 1905, the last meeting of the Kalevan Kansa divided the few remaining assets. The Vancouver-based Dominion Trust Company took over the dairy herd, the saw mill, and the forests of Malcolm Island and sold them in 1907. The dream of utopia was gone, but not the dream of a better life: "slightly more than 100 people remained at Sointula. They now had their own parcels of land, for which they had paid \$1 an acre, some basic foodstuffs such as flour and meat that were evenly distributed from the colony's stock of food, and very little else. At least there were no more debts to be paid off; they were making a fresh start, and they had their own resourcefulness".⁵⁶ No Russian autocracy, no bosses, no dominating church, and no impediments to owning their own land; despite the apparent poverty of their situation, the people of Sointula had gained many of their goals. As well, a standard for the community had been set, a pattern for a communitarian ideal centred on Finnish language, culture and identity, on temperance, on socialist philosophy, on co-operative living and on suspicion of authority. Equally importantly, unreachable utopian ideals, i.e. Sointula as a centre of industry and shipping, 'free-love', and theosophy as a guiding religion/philosophy for

the colony, had been discounted. Sointula was to remain a community with a distinct identity and philosophy, but it was an identity and philosophy based on what was possible not desired – a philosophy set by the experiences of the four year utopia and the lessons learned there-in.

Chapter Two: From Utopia to Community (1905-1939)

With the dream of the Kalevan Kansa and utopia having failed them, the people of Sointula were forced to place their immediate focus on making a living on a rather remote B.C. island. Through the next several decades they not only succeeded in this endeavour, but they also found a way to bring their ideologies and communitarian values into their workplaces, into the community's cultural and political activities, and into practically every aspect of daily life on the island. In this way, the ideals of the original Kalevan Kansa would become fixed in the institutions and activities that served to define the community through the first half of the twentieth century and beyond. Nowhere was this more evident than in Malcolm Island's centrepiece: the Sointula Co-operative Store.

The role that the Co-operative Store came to play in the community went beyond that of the practical; in many ways it became both the economic and emotional focal point of Sointula in the absence of the Kalevan Kansa. "The Co-op was the heart of the community", Dave Siider (grandson of an original settler) remembered, "It did everything".¹ Sally Peterson, whose father Theodore Tanner was the first president of the Sointula Co-op, recalls the Co-op store as a unifying force: "I think that [the Co-op] held the people together, you know, because they were all working for the same thing there. Trying to make the Co-op grow and go".² The secret of the Co-op's hold on Sointula stems from the leadership position it assumed in the community and the circumstances under which it was formed.

The Sointula Co-operative store was begun out of simple necessity. As an

isolated community it was not easy for Malcolm Island to keep its settlers supplied with the necessities of life: As Wayne Homer recounts: “Up to 1909, Peter Hilton kept a private store in his living room. But his stock was very small; it didn’t go very far. He didn’t have money to begin with. So the community got together and decided they should buy Hilton out and move his store into a larger building and establish the Co-op Store”.³ Thus, the initial spark for the Co-op was the simple need for a stable supply of groceries and goods for the community.

The Co-op Store met this need with what can best be described as modest success at first. Initially formed by just 26 members, the store opened on December 4, 1909, and did \$2,000.00 worth of business in its first month with a net loss of \$50.00. The report on the first month’s business ends on a note reminiscent of the false optimism seen in the Kalevan Kansa days: “We look to the future with hope.” This time, however, that hope and optimism would prove to be well founded. By 1959 the Sointula Co-op had 341 members, some from neighbouring communities, had sales of \$425,000.00 per annum and even had a doctors’ and dentists’ office to accommodate the periodic visits of both to the community.⁴ By then it had become more than just a purveyor of goods; as David Siider noted, it had become the heart of the community and was a vital institution to Malcolm Island in a variety of different ways.

One of the most obvious ways in which it did so was by focusing on the needs of the community, rather than on profit: “They managed to keep the prices way down, way below other private stores because they bought in quantity. Then it was agreed by the membership that the store should not charge more than five percent mark-up over the landed cost here. Well, that kept the price way, way down”.⁵ In her 1927

account of Malcolm Island, Virginia Johnson recalls that prices at the Co-op Store were actually lower than in many more accessible communities in the south.⁶ A more capitalist outlook might well have seen the people of Sointula as a captive market and a community store as a potential money-making source for one or two entrepreneurs but on Malcolm Island group security trumped individual gain.

That group security prevailed is a testament not only to the continued communitarian ideals of the settlers, but to the difficulties in shipping goods from Malcolm Island as discovered in the Kalevan Kansa days. Individual Malcolm Island farmers attempting to market their produce to the rest of British Columbia found that the cost of shipping eggs, butter, and other products was just too much to ensure a decent profit. Resident Arvo Tynjala notes that the Co-op, by shipping goods in large quantities, was able to ensure better rates; the farmers sold to the store, and the store shipped to the outside world.⁷ This solution allowed individual farmers to make an acceptable living and, as Wayne Homer recounts, it ensured the success of the store:

It was the marketing which really built up the store. There were numerous people with small farms and they had enough land cleared so they could support three or four cows and a couple hundred chickens This guy in Prince Rupert, he came here to buy furs and he discovered that there's something else to be bought here: the farm produce. So he made a contract with the store that he'd take everything they had to give and he sent it to the various villages, mines and logging camps and fish canneries around Prince Rupert.... It sold very well.⁸

The Co-op store also helped mitigate the problems caused by the lack of grain and fodder on the island. Tauno Salo, a Co-op store employee in his youth, recalled the Co-op ordering in huge lots of feed for the farming community and even bringing in hay during poor growing seasons.⁹ These measures did not erase the difficulties

with large scale farming but did promote some economic stability, giving both individual farmers and the Co-op Store much needed assistance during their first few decades of existence.

That symbiotic relationship continued throughout the Co-op's existence. The Sointula Co-op store provided goods and services to its members in ever increasing amounts. In turn, the members supported the Co-op, not only financially, but in practical and ideological ways as well. That this relationship developed is not surprising given the rules under which the Co-op was formed. The fifty-two "Rules and By-laws of the Sointula Co-operative Store Limited" detailed the benefits and the obligations the store and its members had to each other in detail: the store was obliged to disburse profits to its members at a set rate that depended on the value of the member's purchases (Rule 30); as the store was set up to aid Malcolm Islanders, initially no non-residents were taken as members (Rule 4); applicants for membership could be rejected by the five-member board of store trustees (later known as the board of directors), but a two-thirds majority vote at the yearly general meeting could overturn this decision (Rules 5 and 6); members had to purchase as exclusively as possible from the Co-op and no member could carry on a similar business (Rules 7 and 8).¹⁰

It was a reciprocal arrangement. Members would profit based on their commitment to the store. Settlers were not forced to become members, but once accepted as members were required to support the store and could be expelled for not doing so. Commitment to the store was further strengthened by the democratic nature of the arrangement. The two-thirds majority needed to overturn the rejection of an

applicant was unusual in co-operative circles; the norm was that a simple majority vote on a matter raised at a general meeting prevailed (Rule 40). As both owners and customers, members of the Co-op controlled their institution. This satisfied their general socialist belief in giving power to the majority and was also of practical benefit. Unlike later failed fishing co-ops, or experiences in the political arena, the Sointula Co-op Store initially kept outsiders from controlling their organization.

As the years went on, more members of the community became members of the Co-op Store. Practical and ideological considerations aside, the Co-op's success in attracting people was largely a result of its role on Malcolm Island. In a community with no mayor and no real local government - to this day Sointula has not been incorporated as a town - local groups and organizations depended on it to provide local services. As the Kalevan Kansa had from 1901-1905, the Sointula Co-operative Store did just that. It funded the local library, a source of pride in the community;¹¹ it used the Co-op truck to haul gravel out to fix the roads,¹² and it allowed community members to use its vault as a bank, the Co-op manager writing up makeshift bankbooks for depositors.¹³ Lastly, in a gesture sure to please a future co-operative generation, children 16 and under received a present from the Co-op every year at the annual Christmas celebration at the Finnish Organization Hall.¹⁴ The Co-op became ensconced in the lives of Malcolm Islanders.

In no way is that more obvious than in the general meetings held by the Co-op twice every year in the Finnish Organization (FO) Hall. Initiated simply to deal with the business of the Co-op Store, as more and more of the community became involved with the Co-op, these meetings began to deal more and more with general

community issues. "I guess it was almost a town holiday", resident Lennie Pohto remembers, "everybody, all the adults, or a good portion of them, would be at the meeting. They'd debate things that weren't maybe involved with the Co-op at all, just sort of other community...[trails off, begins to laugh] ...Maybe some woman's cow was in the neighbour's garden, for all you know that would get on the agenda, looking for ways to solve those kinds of problems".¹⁵ Co-op meetings became a type of town forum where the concerns of the community could be discussed and often solved.

The meetings were not only avenues for Co-op and community business, they were also social gatherings. They were celebrated as such by the children of Sointula, who eagerly looked forward to their 'mulligans':

Come lunchtime the women there they'd have a committee set to prepare the food. And they used to make these big mulligans - meat, beef mulligans. Sort of a Finnish traditional dish I guess on the island here [described as a soup filled with meat and vegetables]. And us school kids, the school was just below the hall...come lunchtime I guess all the kids would... they'd go up to the hall and we'd have our lunch up there too. They used to call them eating meetings, you know, you'd have the meeting then you'd eat there, and then we'd go back to school and the adults, they'd go back to their debating the rest of the day.¹⁶

A mainstay of the community from the 1910s to the 1950s, probably no resident of Sointula past a certain age does not recall the Co-op "eating meetings". The debates, the food, and its all-day nature, all marked it as a special occasion, as Lennie Pohto noted, almost a town holiday. The Co-op store had become the centre-piece of the community, connecting its members.

Even through the difficulties of the Great Depression the store maintained that

position by expanding its activities and by making itself necessary to the community. Tauno Salo who worked at the Co-op store in 1936 delivered groceries to isolated parts of the community twice a week; fishermen could make special orders that would arrive on the next ferry. By 1936, the Co-op had a hardware store, a dry goods department, a meat counter, and a separate warehouse for lumber, gas, and oil.¹⁷ By providing goods and services, supporting farming and keeping its prices low, the Co-op helped maintain the community through the Depression of the 1930s.

During its first thirty years of its existence and particularly through the Depression, the Sointula Co-op experienced its own hardships. In later decades, managers, directors, and members of the Co-op drew on past practice as a guide but, in the formative decades, much of the Co-op business was run by simple trial and error. A 1910 audit demonstrates that, despite the noted efforts of the Co-op manager and personnel, the early organization of the store was somewhat haphazard: "The whole of the business has been managed with care and in a businesslike manner, especially when taken into consideration that those concerned have been compelled to sell goods before they received the bills, and before they were properly marked and priced, and other obstacles in the way of bookkeeping."¹⁸ Two respected members of the community, Felix Myntti and Geo Kangas, carried out this initial audit but were not professional auditors (a professional auditing firm was not used until the 1930s). Everyone involved with the Sointula Co-op at this point can really be described as a non-professional, thus leaving the Co-op prone to mistakes more experienced personnel possibly would have avoided.

This lack of experienced personnel seems to have extended to management.

As a director of the Co-op in the 1950s and 60s, David Siider notes that it was very difficult then to find suitable managers for a store that handled everything.¹⁹ Though the exact backgrounds are not available for every Co-op manager of the first thirty years, the fact that the store had 17 of them by 1939 suggests that it was equally difficult to find suitable management in this earlier time period. To be objective, the turnover rate for managers in the first thirty years may also reflect the difficulty in managing a co-operative that was in the process of adapting. Between 1909 and 1932, at least thirty-two rule changes were made to the fifty-two original Co-op rules. The livelihood of the community also changed. As an indication of that alteration, whereas in 1917 the directors all listed farming as their occupation, by 1926, four of the five directors were fishermen and the fifth a carpenter.²⁰ As fishing replaced farming as a major employer, the Co-op Store had to adapt its efforts towards the needs of fisher-folk while maintaining its role as a supporter of the farming community. A very versatile manager was needed in such circumstances.

Managers and directors needed to keep up with both changing times and with worsening economic times. The Great Depression of the 1930s significantly affected the Co-op. From 120 members in 1927, the Sointula Co-op Store reached a low of 96 members in 1938, most likely as a result of residents leaving in search of work. From a net profit of \$4, 634.01 in 1928, the store had a net loss of \$3, 885.70 in 1931, its first loss since January 1910.²¹ The Co-op rebounded up and down in profit and loss through the 1930s, creating a situation that, while not desperate, was highly unstable.

Two events in 1933 further shook the stability of the Co-op but they also helped demonstrate the *sisu* of the Sointula people. The most dramatic was the

October fire. The Co-op store had been added onto sporadically as the need for greater and varied supplies grew. The store had reached a fair size when an accidental blaze destroyed most of it. But this setback did not long deter Malcolm Islanders: “the people demonstrated their loyalty to the store. Volunteer workers not only repaired the damage, but soon other improvements were added and a larger and better store was the result”.²²

A less outwardly spectacular, but potentially more serious problem arose when the Co-op was struck off of the Register of Companies for failing to file its annual reports for three consecutive years. Quickly employing the skills of their Notary Public, Adam Hilton, and securing the services of a law firm, the directors of the Co-op attempted to correct their error. Through a petition to the Supreme Court of British Columbia, Co-op secretary Bruno Kaario made his plea to have the Co-op reinstated, noting “that the failure to file the said Annual Reports was due to inadvertence and the Directors were not aware that the Association had been dissolved until they were advised of the matter on the 27th day of September 1933, by the solicitor for the Association [the Co-op had been officially dissolved January 19, 1933]”.²³ Kaario’s petition succeeded and the Co-op was restored to the register on January 3, 1934.

Though the co—operative effectively solved this matter through the British Columbia legal system, the incident raises serious questions: why, after more than twenty years in operation, did the Co-op fail to fulfill what appeared to be a fairly straightforward and necessary administrative duty? It may simply be that the directors were more knowledgeable about co-operative ideals than about the regulations of the

outside world. The semi-isolation of Sointula and its settlers (a result of location and ideology) though preserving a unique character to the community, may well also have kept it from a fuller understanding of the workings and business of the outside world.

This first thirty years of development were very much a learning process for the Co-op. The end of the Depression in 1939 not only saw better economic times for the store but corresponded with the hiring of Hannes Myntti as Co-op manager. Though born and raised in Sointula, Myntti had left as a young man to go to Port Arthur (part of present day Thunder Bay) in Ontario, where he acquired experience in co-op management.²⁴ Myntti managed the store for 29 years, giving the Co-op stability, experience and a set routine through which carried out both local store and provincial administrative business. The 'heart of the community' continued to be run by one of the community's own – but also benefited from business knowledge gained in the outside world.

The Sointula Co-operative Store provided Malcolm Islanders with many things: an ideological centre; a source of economic aid; and even a governing structure. It could not, however, provide the majority of settlers with a livelihood. After the dissolution of the Kalevan Kansa many Malcolm Islanders had hoped that farming might fulfil that requirement. Indeed, with each settler able to work his or her own parcel of land there was some success, especially among the most enterprising. Theodore Tanner's apple, plum and cherry trees thrived, and ex-coal miner Matti Halminen became "a farmer once and for all. He cleared about eight acres of farmland out of the green timber with his own bare hands. He had a beautiful orchard;

he had cows and sold milk and butter with all the other peoples".²⁵ Other settlers' eggs, chickens, and butter exports were moderately successful, aided by the marketing efforts of the Co-op Store; as late as 1917 the majority of the community members identified their primary occupation as that of 'Farmer'.²⁶

Though some success came from agriculture, three factors were working against its long term success: one, the heavily wooded soil was just not conducive to large scale crops; two, Malcolm Island was relatively isolated, making the export of farm produce - as well as the import of farm supplies - difficult; and finally, as was witnessed in the Kalevan Kansa days, the lack of fodder made raising a herd of beef or dairy cattle problematic. An objective look at the overall farming potential of Malcolm Island did not reveal a promising future. As people began to realize that farming was not going to provide a livelihood for most, more and more settlers turned to the two obvious alternatives: logging and fishing. Unfortunately, both activities took men away from the security and relative comfort of the Malcolm Island community.

In the first decade of the twentieth century the logging industry in British Columbia was emerging from a severe recession that had affected the Pacific Northwest throughout most of the 1890s, hitting the lumber industry particularly hard. The Klondike and Alaskan gold rushes in the late 1890s helped spark a general resurgence in the economy, while settlement development in the Okanagan region as well as on the prairies opened up opportunities for lumber shipments to the BC interior, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and parts of the United States. This lumber boom lasted until the beginning on World War I, giving many Malcolm Islanders an

opportunity to improve their economic fortunes.²⁷ Unfortunately, this usually involved travelling to where the big and medium sized logging companies had their camps, often far from Sointula.

Settler Arvo Tynjala relates how following the break-up of the Kalevan Kansa, small groups of Sointula men were forced by necessity to travel to these logging camps, the best English-speaker among them stepping forward to ask for work:

We used to go from Sointula with rowboats all the way down to Seymour Narrows on this side and into the different inlets and islands, sometimes hundreds of miles looking for jobs. ... The conditions [in the logging camps] in those days were awful as far as living quarters go. The loggers carried their own blankets and bedclothes, and there was nothing in the bunkhouses but the mattresses and the bedbugs. There were plenty of them!²⁸

Tynjala notes that the loggers usually arranged for a little time off to go home and have a good cleaning in their saunas. As the Finns were noted as hard workers, the logging companies usually accommodated these requests. However, the Sointula Finns were also noted for another quality that sometimes made it difficult to even secure a logging job: "In many cases they [the logging companies] would prefer the men who came from town because they had no boat to row away in if they got into trouble. We were kind of independent you know".²⁹

Yet this independence did not preclude a commitment to co-operative/socialist ventures, a commitment that may well be seen as having stemmed from past experience. As an ethnic minority in the province, Malcolm Island Finns would have been aware that individually, as in Finland or in Dunsmuir's mines, they held no real power, and might easily be exploited by the logging companies. One way to fight

possible exploitation and to secure some group security was through union support. Tynjala remembers transporting Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU) organizers to a deserted beach at night, then sneaking them into a logging camp where they attempted to organize the men. He notes that this tradition continued in later years, with Sointula fishermen transporting International Woodworkers of America (IWA) organizers (the LIWU's successors) from camp to camp, sometimes even taking them to rest in the safety of Sointula.³⁰ As major logging companies could blackball those suspected of union activity there was some risk involved in aiding the unions. Doing so, however, was in keeping with the socialist ideals that had been such a part of the original utopia.

While the harsh unsanitary conditions of the logging camps and the danger of being blackballed might ironically have strengthened the logger's resolve, giving them an enemy to fight and a cause to rally around, the isolation of logging life was not so easy to combat. A Sointula singer and poet identified only as Laulaja Mies (a pseudonym meaning 'singer man'), recalling his early days as a migrant worker, captures the sense of loneliness and eroded values that he saw occurring among these young lumberjacks:

In my wanderings, I stopped at a hotel
I went to see how the lumberjacks were celebrating

When I entered the doorway
my shoes got wet with vomit.
oh the poor young man
who drinks the poison there.

One of the loggers sat at the door,
Another was thrashing near the wall,
The others tried to dance when Frank the mandolin was playing

They shouted: "Our money will never run out"
They promised drinks for all.
They said: "Bring, girl, some drink
So we don't die of thirst".

The hostess' face shone like the sun
When for a dollar's drink she charged fifteen.
She put her arm around the boys' necks
And bid the boys to sing.

The joy only lasted about a week,
When the pockets of the loggers contained no dollars.
The boys don't feel like singing
When they wake up by themselves.³¹

Though written of a later generation, this song could easily have been about the Finnish coal miners of the late 1880s. The same fear is evidenced that alcohol and a lack of community support will rob the workers of their self-respect. Though many Sointula men had no choice but to leave their homes to earn a living, concern about how the capitalist world would influence them never faded entirely. The influence of the outside world was a factor that increasingly made its presence felt upon the people of Sointula.

In the short term, however, it was the Finns working away from Malcolm Island who most influenced the capitalist world. Though this occurred to some extent

through union activities in logging, Sointula Finns most actively changed the industry that became their mainstay: fishing. Their drive to do so can be traced to its importance in their lives. As fisherman Alfred Williams states, "Without fishing we would have been practically starving, we wouldn't have anything. Everything we have here comes from fish".³² Driven by practical as well as ideological reasons, Malcolm Islanders not only made their primary living through fishing, they also helped transform it through the application of socialist/co-operative ideals.

The first fishermen of Sointula operated locally, catching enough to supply the needs of their own families and of others in the community. However, with the break up of the utopia and the failure of farming it became necessary to find the best fishing ground in order to make a living. Rivers Inlet, located on the central British Columbia Coast, became perhaps the most important salmon fishing grounds for Malcolm Islanders. It was relatively close to home and, especially in the first part of the twentieth century, had large runs of the commercially valuable sockeye salmon, the fish of choice for the canning companies. The rowboats owned by most Sointulans, however, were of little use in salmon fishing. As a result, they were forced to rent their equipment from the canneries: "It was all company owned gear. You went up to the cannery. You got this skiff; most of the time it was sunk, tied to the float. ... You'd bail it out...the rent for the season was \$10 for that boat".³³

Sointulans found themselves in an uncomfortable position, forced to sell to the big canneries, dependent on them for their equipment, and having to accept the prices that they set. As costs rose and the companies kept their prices at 15 cents a fish, the Rivers Inlet fishermen decided to organize. In 1917 these fishermen met in Sointula

to form the United Fishermen of British Columbia (UFBC) union and went out on strike that same year. Though the canning companies tried to divide the strikers by pitting one group against the other, the union held firm and negotiated a raise to 22.5 cents a fish.³⁴ More important than the higher price or the future of the newly formed union (the UFBC folded in 1924), may have been the example set: united, the fishermen had won out against the powerful companies. It was an example the Sointula fishermen used in upcoming battles.

They also used their individual drive. Throughout the 1920s more and more Sointula fishermen began to build their own boats in an effort to free themselves from dependency on the canning companies. Boat builder John Anderson led the way in 1918, setting up the first boat yard in Sointula. By 1951 it had built over 600 vessels.³⁵ Though much smaller in scale, eight other boat yards came into existence on the island through the years. Such efforts helped make Malcolm Island known as a boat-building centre and also made it more of a self-sufficient community.

Wild also notes how this drive to succeed could have its inventive side. Fisherman Laurie Jarvis, a gill-netter, tired of hauling in nets by hand. Using the rear end system off of a Model A Ford, Jarvis invented a gillnet drum that reeled in the fishing nets; this invention came to be employed by fisherman world wide, though unfortunately it proved too easy to make for Jarvis to maintain an effective patent.³⁶ Neither Anderson's boat yard nor Jarvis' drum made their proprietors rich but they effectively demonstrated Malcolm Islander's independent streak and a passion to excel at their chosen livelihood.

This individual drive for a better life, coupled with a co-operative instinct,

took its fullest form in the creation of the British Columbia Fishermen's Co-operative Association (BCFCA, 1929-1932), the first fishermen's co-op in BC. In *Tides of Change: A Story Of Fishermen's Co-operatives In British Columbia*, fisherman/author A. V. Hill recounts how Sointula fishermen, relaxing in their saunas, or debating in their community hall, started to explore the idea of a co-operative fishery, free of big cannery control.³⁷ Initiated by such Sointula Co-op Store alumni as Bruno Kaario, Victor Macki, and father and son John and Felix Myntti, this fishing co-operative grew to have over 2,000 members, the majority of these from off of Malcolm Island. The Yugoslav seiners were one such group of non-Sointulans who never-the-less saw potential benefit for themselves in this venture. Most of these Yugoslav fishermen owned their own gear, needing the big canneries simply to purchase what they caught; however, the companies were often unable to handle fishermen's whole catch, and usually gave preference to their own company boats.³⁸ This co-operative gave such fisherman an alternative to the status quo and allowed them, for a time, to challenge the supremacy of the big canning companies.

The BCFCA ran on a new concept in British Columbia fishing. While private companies were, for example, offering 15¢ per fish for blue back salmon, the Co-op offered 10¢ per fish - with a probable additional payment when the fish were sold. Though it entailed an act of faith on the fishermen's part, the idea took hold, aided by an effective public relations campaign. A yellow 'flag' was hung from the masthead of every Co-op member, giving rise to the recruiting slogan: "A yellow flag or a yellow streak". In the first month of the 1929 fishing season, 90% of blue back salmon had gone through the Co-op.

Over the next few years, the success of the BCFCA undercut the monopoly held by the private canning companies as well as their control over certain groups. At this time Japanese-Canadians made up a large percentage of the fishermen in BC. Living predominately along the Fraser River, in houses rented from the large canning companies, they had been required to deal exclusively with these companies. Further curtailing their freedom, the provincial government placed restrictions on the number of licenses issued to Japanese fishermen. The Amalgamated Association of Japanese Fishermen sponsored a court challenge to the licensing restrictions in 1928.³⁹ In 1930, the BCFCA made an effort to support the Japanese fishermen in their fight against the ongoing license restrictions by appealing to the Department of Fisheries to abolish a recent 10% cut in fishing licenses issued to Japanese fishermen. Partially in thanks, many Japanese fishermen decided to deliver 50% of their catch to the Co-op from then on. Though incidents of racial conflict between white and Japanese fishermen were hardly uncommon along the coast, the memories of such co-operation across racial divides helped foster a more accepting attitude in places such as Sointula. Fisherman Dave Siider, though too young to have had direct experience in the matter, recalls older Sointula fisherman speaking very highly of their Japanese counterparts.⁴⁰ As with later union activities, bonds formed in shared co-operative ideals crossed over divisive lines.

Though the large canning companies had been unable to stop defections to the Co-op camp, many obstacles remained for the BCFCA. One was its inability to secure credit from the chartered banks. Many companies and organizations faced bankruptcy in the Depression; banks were more likely to give loans to those that it

had already loaned money to, protecting their initial investment. Operating on capital generated from the \$25 shares it was selling to its members, the BCFCA lacked such influence with the chartered banks.

The second obstacle was a split within the Co-op gravitating around one individual- Francis Millerd. A recent provincial law (championed by the large canning companies) had forbidden the issue of any new salmon cannery licenses. To secure a cannery license, the BCFCA bought the bankrupt Millerd's Cannery. Millerd insisted on being kept on as manager as part of the sales agreement, and seems to have been an active and honest manager for the Co-op. His behind the scenes deal making, however, and general top down outlook for the cannery went against the co-operative nature of the BCFCA. The President and Secretary of the Co-op, Sointulans Bruno Kaario and Otto Ottava, led the faction pushing for a more co-operative approach to decision making. Millerd, in turn, had the support of many non-Sointulans who felt that Kaario and Ottava's 'consensus' approach was interfering with Millerd's effective running of the company. By far outnumbered, Kaario and Ottava were forced out of their leadership roles. The Co-op was weakened with distrust and its Sointula members felt excluded from the very organization they had built.

The third force working against the Co-op was simple bad luck, compounded by poor judgment. Rushing to buy a load of bulk salmon gillnets for their members, the BCFCA found itself with \$3,000.00 of inferior nets that proved of little practical use. Two directors of the Co-op (non-Sointulans) turned out to be secretly employed by large canneries, creating, at best, conflict of interest, at worst, spies for the

competition. Finally, the Co-op simply had bad timing, emerging in the middle of a Depression, needing funds before an effective credit union system was in place. At the beginning of 1932, the BCFCA leadership estimated that it could start the season if it could secure a mere \$10,000.00 loan. No bank would agree, and in the spring of 1932, the BCFCA folded.⁴¹

Sointula fishermen tried again in 1946 to create a fishing co-op, the Sointula Fishermen's Co-operative Association (SFCA). Much smaller in scale, it succeeded until it merged with the larger Fishermen's Co-operative Association (FCA) in 1950; a few years later the FCA went under, apparently a victim of infighting and competition from private companies.⁴² For the Sointula fisherman both positive and negative lessons came out of these co-op experiences. On the positive side they learned that, when working fishermen united, they could initiate change and even challenge the big companies that had seemed to be beyond competition. On the negative side they learned that being part of large movements could mean having one's point of view submerged by the majority. Though Malcolm Islanders continued to play an active role in large co-operative, socialist and union activities in almost every future example they either directed the movement, or made certain that the direction of the movement suited their needs and ideology.

A good example of Sointulans leading a movement for their own benefit is the 1936 strike in Rivers Inlet. Fish prices had been rising fairly steadily since the 1917 strike, up to 45¢ a fish by the beginning of the Depression. With the hard economic times of the Depression, however, the canning companies began to cut back to 40¢ a fish and by 1936 they were offering 35¢ a fish. Worse yet, it did not matter how big

the particular fish was, there was no poundage system - 35¢ for even the largest salmon. Victor Wirkki recalled the 1936 fishing season as a particularly memorable one: "The very first year that I went out fishing alone we didn't fish only a week in Rivers Inlet, then we went on a strike.... The companies they didn't get the fish, that's the only way that you could figure that the fishermen won. But then the following year they [the prices] were up all right!"⁴³ As Sointula fisherman Lester Peterson recalls, this was a turning point in the BC fishing industry:

Never previously had there been a completely solid front of the fishermen.... The Japanese fishermen ceased fishing, the Indian fishermen, although they had great discussions with the Indian Agents stopped fishing. The next year the fish were bought by the pound and on the average it probably was around 45 to 47 cents a fish.... But the leaders in the strike, who held us together, were Sointula fishermen⁴⁴

Equally important may have been the aid of the Sointula Co-op store and the efforts of the women of Sointula. Fisherman Scotty Neish, a future leader in the BC fishing unions, recalls the strikers running low on necessary groceries, denied credit by the company stores: "It was mainly fresh stuff that we were short of. We were all tied up in Alert Bay, but the Sointula Co-op Store offered us credit over there, so we used the *La Paloma* [Neishes' boat] to go and pick up the groceries for the whole fleet. The women in Sointula were cooking fresh bread and buns for the whole fleet".⁴⁵

It is of course true that Malcolm Island as a whole had a vested interest in supporting the strike; increased fish prices benefited almost everyone. It is also true that by leading the strike, Malcolm Island fishermen ensured themselves a say in how it unfolded. However, the leadership of the Sointula fisherman, and the support by the

Co-op Store and the women of the island, can also be traced to ideology. Concern for the average worker went back to the original utopia, and in many cases before that time. It was then unsurprising that Malcolm Islanders supported and lead the 1917 and 1936 strikes; doing so served both their ideological and practical needs.

During the formative years of the Malcolm Island community, the fishing and logging industries in general were instrumental in serving these needs. The Finnish settlers who sought freedom through farming on their own land began to achieve it in the forests and on the ocean. Though Malcolm Island loggers predominately worked for others, the reputation they enjoyed as good workers, the proximity of a home community and the existence of an alternate livelihood (fishing) gave them leverage in achieving decent working conditions. In fishing, the increase in self-owned boats coupled with the growing power of union activity (and to a lesser extent co-operative ventures) gave Malcolm Island fishers much freedom in their chosen livelihood; fishing also (perhaps more so than logging) gave ample evidence that like-minded workers could band together to improve their lives. Thus, through the two industries, a contrasting mix of independent living, economic success and communitarian ideology were realized. All combined to create a stronger, more close-knit Malcolm Island community.

Given the adherence of Malcolm Islanders to both the practical and the ideal, to independent living and to working class support, it was not always easy for outsiders to understand or to categorize the Sointula people. A blunder in this regard appears to have been perpetrated by entrepreneur Andrew Anderson in a May 25, 1909 letter to Premier Richard McBride. Anderson, a non-resident businessman with

a colonization scheme in mind, described how optimistic he and his fellow “joint capitalists” were to see the good people of Sointula ridding themselves of their “foolish notions” of the past: “They have stuck individually to their lands - built beautiful, neat houses and all have more or less cultivated lands around their houses. They are anxious to make good for themselves”⁴⁶ Anderson promoted himself as a business link between Sointula and the province, suggesting that the people of Malcolm Island were looking to capitalists and to the government for help in developing their community.

Anderson’s belief that Malcolm Islanders could be capitalists-in-waiting is in some ways understandable; even within the original utopia, Kurikka had discovered members holding what he deemed to be the decadent beliefs of the capitalist West: “They think of getting butter for their children’s meals, while their neighbour’s children do without milk”.⁴⁷ In describing the actions of the settlers upon the break-up of the utopia, Arvo Tynjala noted that families with means bought up the best farm land, leaving the less desirable areas for the poorer members of the community.⁴⁸ These actions, coupled with Anderson’s observations regarding the great enthusiasm with which the Finns of Sointula built up their own property, might well have fooled any casual observer. The socialist idealism of Sointula was, from the start, tempered by a drive for individual success that did resemble the capitalist spirit.

However, as seen in Malcolm Islanders’ fishing and logging efforts in the first forty years of the twentieth century, individual strength and a desire for success did not preclude a wider social conscience. This social conscience was evidenced by the enthusiasm with which the people of Sointula had already embraced Socialist politics.

In 1907 Malcolm Islanders formed the Sointula Socialist Club (SSC), joining with the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), which had had its platform and constitution translated into Finnish to entice just such spirited Finnish-Socialist communities. Two years later, in the 1909 provincial election, every single Sointula vote was cast for the Socialist candidate.⁴⁹ A few years later the devoted Marxist A. B. Makela, unofficial leader of the community until his death in 1932, wrote an article denouncing the provincial government as "bandits", joining with capitalist "robbers" to pillage the people.⁵⁰ There was a general concern in Sointula for the conditions of the majority, a concern informed by the practical needs of self and community.

The commitment of Sointula to Socialist parties throughout the twentieth century is an example of idealism steered by practical concerns. The Sointula local of the SPC raised funds for campaigns and held regular community meetings, drawing entire families. Extolling the enthusiasm of the Sointula local, the Socialist newspaper the *Western Clarion* lamented, "If only our Anglo-Saxon members had half the zeal of the Sointula Finns!"⁵¹ This zeal could sometimes take on a rather draconian form. When it was discovered that three Malcolm Island men had not voted for the SPC, the community immediately expelled them from the local. Independence was highly valued in Sointula but as was demonstrated in numerous ways throughout the island's history, members of the community were expected to fulfill their obligation to that community.

Yet it was not long before Sointula, and indeed the Finnish-Canadian community as a whole, turned away from the SPC. The signs of a potential rift were woven right in to its makeup. Historian Alan Neil Kuitunen notes that as early as

1908, Finnish-Canadians made up a sizable portion of the SPC membership; however, English-Canadians dominated at the executive level, and seemed hesitant about sharing their power.⁵² At a 1908 Inter-provincial Party convention in Fernie BC, John Rivers, a Sointula logger who, along with A. B. Makela had founded the SPC local in Sointula, made a motion to run a Sointula resident as a SPC candidate in the upcoming federal election; he was told that the Provincial Executive committee of the SPC could not help financially.⁵³ Though it may truly have only been a matter of lack of funds, outwardly it appeared that the Finns of the SPC were valued more for their numbers and enthusiasm than for their ideas or leadership potential.

This notion was cemented in the debate over the SPC's 'Impossibilist' ideology. This stance had three main planks: one, that capitalism could not be reformed; two, that trade unions benefited few workers in the short run and no workers in the long run; and three, that the workers as a class must rise up and destroy the wage system. When the Sointula local argued for changes to this stance, they, along with other Finnish locals, were denigrated as "clannish foreigners".⁵⁴ It was an unacceptable relationship for Malcolm Islanders. As in their early days as new immigrants, once again they were under the authority of an English-speaking elite that seemed to discount their opinion; as well, these elite appeared wedded to a doctrine that, far from addressing practical ways in which to improve the lives of working people, seemed bent on achieving the same sort of 'utopian ideal society' that the people of Sointula had seen fail on Malcolm Island. Relations between the Finnish locals and the rest of the SPC reached such an unbearable level of distrust and acrimony that by 1911 the entire Finnish membership had either been expelled or had

left the Party.⁵⁵

Though Sointula's first foray into politics failed, positive aspects arose from it. For one, through their actions with the Sointula Socialist Club, the people of Sointula had united. Just as they had fought for the Kalevan Kansa with much passion, so too had they given themselves to a body which, likewise, had promised a better future for all; such actions helped bring a sense of unity to the community, a unity which was displayed in future socialist and co-operative ventures.

Secondly, this political experiment increased their interaction with other like-minded Finnish communities in Canada. Sointula was already well known outside of British Columbia due to its unique beginnings. However, though Finns from elsewhere knew about Sointula and the Kalevan Kansa experiment and there had been interaction with other Finnish communities, the SPC was the first organization in Canada that brought socialist-minded Finns together in one body. Though the SPC failed to fulfill Finnish expectations, the unity it had temporarily provided was still desired. In 1911 socialist-minded Finns in Ontario created the Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada (FSOC). A Sointula local of the FSOC, formed that same year, became an inseparable part of the community for decades to come.

Though it would be misleading to state that the majority of Finnish-Canadians in this time were Socialists, the numbers were much higher than for the general population. Kuitunen estimates that by the end of 1914 roughly 30% of Canada's 20,000 Finns were members of the FSOC, an organization whose name alone indicated a socialist agenda.⁵⁶ This put the people of Sointula together with approximately 6,000 other Finns, supporting common ideals. An examination of these

ideals shows how compatible they were with both the material and ideological goals of early Sointula:

The purpose of the Organization is:

- a) To assimilate the Finnish-speaking people of Canada with the native population by instilling in their minds the benefits of Canadian citizenship [and] by the teaching of the English language;
- b) To advance the standard of life of the Finnish-speaking people of Canada by encouraging and developing co-operative enterprises tending to secure their material interests;
- c) To develop the mental faculties of the Finnish-speaking people of Canada by the holding of educational lectures, by furthering artistic endeavours such as singing, music, theatricals, gymnastics, and by maintaining libraries and reading rooms;
- d) To own such buildings and other properties, and to carry on such businesses as are necessary...in particular (1) To publish a newspaper and other publications; (2) To maintain bookstores...

The Rules of Foundation of the
Finnish Organization of Canada,
Chapter I, "Names and Purposes".⁵⁷

In many ways, the FSOC merely provided national support for activities and beliefs Sointula had formed back in its Kalevan Kansa days. The Sointula library was created during the original utopia and still exists. English language lessons, having initially been encouraged by Kurikka, were now carried on through the FSOC by such Sointula residents as Aina Tynjala.⁵⁸ The original model for the FSOC paper *Vapaus* (Freedom) was the Kalevan Kansa's *Aika* (Sointula notables A. B. Makela and Katri Riksmann provided further influence on *Vapaus* as editor and contributing writer respectively).⁵⁹ A hall for musical, theatrical, intellectual, and athletic activities had existed in Sointula since 1903 - now it simply had a defined identity as the Finnish Organization Hall - FO Hall for short.

However, though much of what the FSOC was promoting merely echoed what many Malcolm Islanders had already envisioned, the FSOC also allowed Sointula an opportunity to have a practical impact in socialist and working class activities Canada wide. When the FSOC gave its support to the Marxist Social Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC) Sointula made sure to secure a voice for itself in the party by purchasing shares in *Cotton's Weekly*, the SDPC organ.⁶⁰ Sointula boat-maker Ole Anderson recalled the strong union support given by the residents of Sointula: "Say there was a strike of the miners back east; well they would come through the Finnish Organization. You had to take up a collection or you could even put up a show or something and the proceeds would go towards the aid of the strike".⁶¹ Resident Alfred Williams noted that Sointula residents learned at a young age to take an interest in both local and national social concern, and did so largely through the Finnish Organization: "In the old days the FOC was for the working class. There were meetings every Sunday night and kids age ten and older were expected to attend. Someone would read the news from the FO in Toronto and we would discuss what needed to be done around the community".⁶²

While other BC communities of the time might celebrate their shared life philosophy through Sunday church services, the Sointula Finns did so through these Sunday FO meetings. It is a comparison Sally Peterson readily acknowledged: "[The Sunday meetings] were a kind of religion...you learned the values".⁶³ As outside observer Virginia Johnson noted in a 1927 article, the Sointula Finns learned more than just values at the FO 'church': "98% of the people on Malcolm Island do not profess any religion - but each Sunday have classes where the younger generation are

taught physical drill, nature study, and Esperanto". Johnson noted that concentrating on their cultural and material gain left the Finns with "no spiritual hopes for the future and no fears for the present".⁶⁴

It would be misleading to say that socialism and the FO Hall were direct substitutes for religious thought and the church in Sointula; diversity of ideas, the importance of other institutions such as the Co-op Store, and a general drive for independence prevented any one ideal or organization from controlling the community as the Lutheran church had controlled similar communities in Finland. The Finnish Organization, however, through such efforts as supplying striking workers with food, and promoting physical and cultural activity, seemed to espouse a 'seize the day' mentality that corresponded with Sointula's "no fear for the present" philosophy or faith.

It was, as Ole Anderson recalls, a very active faith:

[We] just had to make our own fun. I don't think there was a night of the week that there wasn't something doing at that hall. There was athletic practice or song practice or show rehearsals; you name it. There was a show there just about every Saturday.... they were mostly Finnish plays, pertaining to the Finnish Organization and the labour movement and so on.⁶⁵

Though these activities could be looked at as typical small town ways to keep active, there was an importance attached to them not generally seen in other communities, as Sointula fisherman Wayne Homer's recounts of the Saturday plays: "Everybody had to take a part in the show; they couldn't say no. The committee in charge of the play, they decided who they were going to shanghai for the parts and that was it".⁶⁶ With the only organized form of entertainment on Saturday nights and the ability to conscript the cast, the Finnish Organization in Sointula had an ideal venue through

which to promote its socialist philosophy.

Many Sointula residents have commented throughout the years on the security they felt living there. Unlike FO members in mining towns, combating strike breakers and RCMP, or FOs in cities, dealing with conservative English-speakers suspicious of Finnish accents and politics, Sointula was a place filled with generally like-minded people. Yet, events in the national and international arenas did affect this seeming harmony.

The first incident occurred on September 25, 1918, near the end of World War I. The Bolsheviks had gained control in Russia just the year before, making peace with Germany, and thus causing socialist groups in North America to be viewed with suspicion. In Canada the FSOC, along with other socialist organizations, was declared illegal through a federal Order-In-Council. Just over a year later, the FSOC was allowed to reorganize as the Finnish Organization of Canada, with the understanding that it no longer associate with socialist organizations. This attempt to control the Finnish Organization was unsuccessful; by 1922 the FO, including the Sointula branch, became a foreign language member of the Worker's Party of Canada, later renamed the Communist Party of Canada (CPC).⁶⁷ As Paula Wild notes, "Almost everyone in Sointula was a member of the FOC, and since the FOC requires its members to carry a CPC card, almost everyone in Sointula was also a member of the Communist Party."⁶⁸ Although this attempt at government control had failed, it served as a reminder to the people of Malcolm Island that, despite their isolation, they were not immune from government interference in their lives.

The second incident also stemmed from events occurring during World War

One. In 1918, conservative forces in Finland known as 'Whites' fought a civil war with socialist forces known as 'Reds'. The 'Whites' emerged victorious. Throughout Canada communities of Finns divided depending upon which side of the civil war they supported. 'White' Halls arose in competition with the socialist FO Halls. Calling themselves loyalists, the 'Whites were generally conservative, church-going Finns, hostile to the Socialist cause. For obvious reasons, no 'White' hall immediately arose in Sointula. By the beginning of the 1930s however, a confrontation was developing in the Socialist camp. According to Wayne Homer the newly-formed Unemployed Workers Organization needed a space to meet; however, hard-line communists controlled the FO Hall and would not let the new organization use the facility, perhaps judging the newly formed organization too concerned with capitalist matters such as wages and employment. Homer and others of his organization built their own hall which came to be known as the White Hall.⁶⁹

There is no suggestion that this Unemployed Worker's Organization was in any way a conservative body; resident Tauno Salo recalls the White Hall being built and run by the "CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation] group".⁷⁰ That the most conservative organization in the community was composed of CCF supporters is perhaps the best indication of how deep socialist values ran in the community. Located within fifty yards of one another, each hall had its own members and activities, with virtually no crossover. Like the members of the FO hall, the 'syrup gang' (as the 'White Hall members were known) put on regular Saturday night plays, and almost always had a dance to follow. Norma Williams recalls how, as a child, she was one of the few people who could easily move between both camps: "I had two

sets of grandparents, one were the Whites and one were the Reds. But I was lucky because I could go to both halls. But Albert [her husband] could only go to *one* hall!"⁷¹ Perhaps because the members of both halls shared a similar socialist ideology, the split never seems to have led to any serious confrontations, and indeed, with the closure of the White Hall a few years later, did not endure long. The White Hall went on to become a restaurant, a butcher's shop, and exists today as a net loft.

If the White Hall and the syrup gang did not dull hard-line socialism in Sointula, time and technology did. Victor Wirkki recalls that when the FO Hall started showing motion pictures in the 1930s, the plays became less frequent.⁷² Though the FO tried to inject its ideals to the audiences of the largely commercial movies, by the mid 1940's people seemed more interested in entertainment than in communist ideals. As fisherman Dave Siider remembers: "There used to be an old guy here, he was always advocating the communist system at the community hall... There used to be a show every Saturday night and sometimes he'd take to the floor and have a big speech. Us young kids especially and even older people would just shake their heads..... They were getting very tired of it".⁷³

The move away from communist ideals may have been aided by the fact that movies and later, television, replaced the socialist plays and Sunday FO meetings that had helped foster these ideals in the younger generation. The practicality of the Finns may also have come into play. As the years went by, it must have become obvious that the Communist Party was unlikely to ever be a political force, either provincially or federally. However, the more mainstream CCF and its successor the New Democratic Party (NDP) would be. Norma Williams (for many years a provincial

elections returning officer) notes that many if not most of the Sointula old time communists gradually found their way to the CCF and then to the NDP.⁷⁴ Eventually, the FO Hall was taken over by a politically neutral community group, and became simply a recreational centre. For decades, the FOC had been at the centre of political and cultural action in Sointula and had a primary role in keeping the initial socialist values of Sointula alive, as well as fostering cultural, social, and physical activities that kept the community united.

During the first thirty to forty years after the dissolution of the original Kalevan Kansa colony, the somewhat scattered socialist thoughts of Kurikka's utopia matured into practical socialist and co-operative ideals, displayed through institutions such as the Co-op Store and the FO Hall, and through union activity in the logging and fishing industry. Life, however, was not merely 'practical', or 'idealistic' for the Finns of Malcolm Island. Much of what bound the community together during its first decades can perhaps best be described as 'play'. Recreational activities and general socializing helped create a bond between the residents, a feeling of community.

Not surprisingly, a lot of the 'play' of Sointula was structured around socialist ideas and institutions. May Day, a socialist holiday not generally given much prominence in Canadian communities, was an important event in Sointula:

Ole Anderson: May Day was the biggest celebration Sointula had. Everything was closed on May Day. It was the Labour Day here. That was the big celebration. Most of the women even got a new dress for that day. If they didn't get one any other time of the year they had a new one on May Day. It was the same as sports day is today. You'd have different outdoor races, but you also had the indoor programs of recitations and songs and different things. Each one had a prize for the kids...

Gloria Williams: I remember the tree where they used to have that

speaker's platform, it was what you called a 'schoolmarm'.

Alfred Williams: ... It was split like a 'Y' in the middle, in the crotch, they had the platform with a little fence around it. Whoever wanted to hold a speech, well he would get up on there and the people used to sit on the grass in a circle and listen to the guy. The political speeches lasted forever.⁷⁵

Outdoor fun and socialism were mixed together as part of the standard for a Sointula childhood in the 1930s. May Day was, of course, only once a year, but it was still an occasion when the community could join together not only around a political ideal, but in a sense of fun as well. This combination was, as already mentioned, provided frequently by the Finnish Organization through its plays and Sunday meetings. However, the FO also had a specific program for youth recreation in the form of the Young Pioneers modeled on the mass youth organizations formed in the Soviet Union in 1922. This group acted as a combination Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, keeping both boys and girls in the community amused and active. Albert and Norma Williams recall this organization as being an integral part of growing up on Malcolm Island. On Sundays some adults from the FO organized dances at the hall for the children, some of the older children playing accordion and piano. In the summer, they had picnics and a summer camp at a huge house out by the lighthouse. Chaperones such as Elma Kaario told "wonderful stories" of Finland, so real that "you lived in there".⁷⁶ These activities gave the children of Sointula something to do and connected them, through music and stories, to the heritage of the homeland.

One significant part of this Finnish heritage was a commitment to exercise and physical fitness. Traditional rural Finnish life emphasized physical rigor. Arvo Tynjala notes that Finnish people are generally athletic, and that athletic programs are

well organized in Finland.⁷⁷ Although logging, fishing, and farming all contributed to maintaining physical hardiness on Sointula, exercise classes were also held throughout the week to boost fitness levels even higher. The Young Pioneers were by no means discouraged from these activities; however, the FO Hall was usually booked with a number of activities for the adults in the community, and outdoor exercise was dependent at least somewhat on the mercurial weather in the region.

Judging that their physical needs were not being adequately met, in 1930 the Young Pioneers approached the FO and requested an Athletic Hall in which to exercise. The unfolding of events demonstrates both the importance of physical fitness to the community and the intricacies and interconnected nature of Sointula's institutions:

[The] Finnish Organization mortgaged its building, the old hall, to this Co-op store and borrowed the money. The Co-op Store borrowed the money from individual people. You see, they wanted the security. But the way it was worked... the Finnish Organization had no authority... anybody wouldn't have trusted them, you know, for a loan or anything because they are not a financial organization anyway. It might die all of a sudden without anybody knowing its dead. But the Co-op Store was in a different position and everybody could lend money to them.⁷⁸

Working in unison, Sointula's two most important institutions helped bring the Athletic Hall into being in 1931. The hall served a number of functions: the first floor consisted of a large gymnasium, while the top floor became the new home for the library. Theodore Tanner taught exercises and debating techniques to the Young Pioneers every Sunday morning and when the children were not using the gym, the adults of the community undertook such activities as creating human pyramids up to

the ceiling.⁷⁹ Everyone got involved in the formation of the Athletic Hall; everyone received some benefit from it. Even in its recreational activities, the majority needs of the community were served.

Not all of the recreation was communal or regulated. Part of the experience of growing up on Malcolm Island seems to have been the independence that residents enjoyed. A typical summer activity for teenage boys in Sointula was to take a rowboat and a friend and camp their way around the island.⁸⁰ Usually the journey took two or three days, the teens living off their provisions, wild berries, and whatever fish they could catch. The older teens and the men of the island took part in hunting expeditions for deer and game-birds, the rugged nature of the island providing a natural habitat for this wildlife.⁸¹

Even in their work, Sointulans found time for some unstructured play. Fisherman Dickie Michelson recalls as a teenager going to the dances at Beaver Cannery, for which many Sointula men fished and many Sointula women canned: "There was a float with a bootlegger down the coast a way. Sometimes the old folks would disappear for a while and leave us kids paddling around the rowboats or fishing, getting into mischief really, I think.... One dance, a couple of guys were dancing too lively and they fell off the dock and damn near drowned".⁸² Even though such incidents might recall the debauchery of Dunsmuir's mines, or the isolation of the loggers in Laulaja Mies' song, they have an entirely different feeling to them. Kids 'getting into mischief' for a few hours, too lively dancing, men foregoing temperance ideals the occasional Saturday night, these speak to the independent spirit of Malcolm Islanders, not debauchery or isolation. The men and women attending

these dances appear to have been celebrating their youth and relative freedom and then returning to the stability of their home community. As has been noted, “co-operation and independence were the twin poles of life in Sointula”.⁸³ The sense of security gained through their co-operative efforts at home gave Malcolm Islanders the opportunity to exercise their independence in their work and in their play.

The bonds formed in the first four years of the Kalevan Kansa and developed through the decades after, helped create a united community in Sointula. As Ole Anderson recalls, “everybody knew everybody - knew what everyone was thinking about”.⁸⁴ Irene Michelson, who arrived in Sointula in 1905 at age five months, relates that with the picnics, trout fishing, Saturday night dances, and other activities she “never felt isolated” on Malcolm Island.⁸⁵ Even those who were able to get away to larger centres did not always relish the chance; resident L.E Guthrie recalls that the young women who went to Vancouver to earn money for new clothes and such were always eager to return, unused to the rules and regulations of the outside world.⁸⁶ Life on Malcolm Island was secure with people knowing their neighbours and with institutions such as the Co-op and the FO looking after the needs of the community. It was also, in comparison to the lives of past generations, free, with fishing and logging offering the chance of an independent livelihood and with an isolated and semi-wild island on which to grow up. Ironically, in its origins Sointula had been envisioned as a community that would reach out to the rest of the world as a model; in reality, during the first half of the twentieth century it largely withdrew into itself, coalescing around the ideals that had helped form it as a distinct co-operative community.

Chapter Three: Growth and Change (1939-1970s)

As both the end of the Depression and the beginning of World War II, the year 1939 saw a transition in Canada from a country coping with economic hardships to one preparing for the war effort. With large numbers of enlisted men and women experiencing the world outside Canada for the first time, with a home economy invigorated by wartime production, and with a self-assurance gained through energetic patriotism, Canada could not help but grow, economically and culturally. Sointula grew likewise. Due to its unique history, ideology, and institutions, however, Malcolm Island experienced alterations unseen in most Canadian communities. Having been a largely homogeneous community throughout its existence - socialist, Finnish, isolated, and co-operative - Sointula now matured in a slightly more fragmented manner. The core beliefs of socialism and co-operation did not disappear, but they had to exist alongside new ideals, and to accommodate the changes initiated during the World-War-II period. If Sointula's first thirty-nine years had been characterized by freedom and security, its next thirty some years would be marked by flux and adaptability, practical responses to a changing world.

One of the most immediate of these practical responses occurred during the war years with the outward 'Canadianization' of much of the island. The Finnish Organization Hall, long a symbol of socialist, anti-imperialist sentiment, hung photographs of the King, Queen and Winston Churchill on its walls; a recording of "God Save the [King]" was even played before and after special events.¹ By 1944, the Sointula Co-op had purchased \$26,700 worth of Victory Loans;² in April that year,

Vapaus reported a \$300.00 donation by the first unit of the Sointula Red Cross and in November, *Vapaus* reported that the Sointula Ladies Aid Society had donated 40 care parcels to the Canadian armed forces.³ For perhaps the first time in its history, the activities of Sointula's institutions were similar to those of the surrounding communities, and indeed, to the Canadian norm.

It has been suggested that the patriotism displayed through these institutions was simply the reflection of a growing sense of nationalism among the young adults of Sointula. By this time the children of the original immigrants had become increasingly Canadian. In contrast to their Finnish parent's tepid response to World War I, a number of these young adults in the 1940s volunteered for the armed forces.⁴ Albert and Norma Williams recall joining the service in 1942 and 1943 respectively, Norma was one of a few Sointula women who volunteered to serve, either in the forces or as nurses.⁵ While Malcolm Islanders left to join the armed forces the armed forces simultaneously came to Malcolm Island. During the war, army, navy, and air force personnel stationed along the coast came to the dances at the FO Hall.⁶ The isolation that had perhaps been most responsible for keeping Sointula out of Canada proper was starting to erode.

One of the practical results of this increased contact with the outside world seems to have been a greater push for Anglicization on Malcolm Island. This trend had already been underway for some time, with children learning English at school, and with English movies taking over from Finnish plays at the FO Hall. Outside influences helped accelerate the effort. As one Sointula resident recalls: "during the war some Sointula girls wouldn't speak Finnish. If you talked to them in Finn, they

would answer you in English. Some of them had boyfriends in the Air Force, and it wasn't fashionable for them to speak Finn".⁷ Finnish names as well underwent a change. The Honkala brothers for example anglicized their names during World War II. Vaino, Henry and William Honkala became Wayne and Henry Homer, and William Williams.⁸

This 'Canadianization', however, should not be overemphasized. While there was an outside face of patriotism in Sointula, undoubtedly representative of some changing values, there is some question as to its overall depth and strength. While having noted that a number of Sointula men and women served in the armed forces, both Albert and Norma Williams indicate that many of the men were probably called up by the government.⁹ Though conscription for overseas service was not put in place until 1944, the National Resources Mobilization Act of 1940 gave the government considerable powers to determine the roles that individual Canadians would play in the war effort, including recruitment for coastal defence. Echoing that sentiment, Victor Wirkki recalled that most men were called into service, very few joining out of any sense of patriotism. Wirkki, in fact, notes that Sointula fishermen were much more likely to avoid enlisting by joining the Fisherman's Reserves the 'Gumboot Navy':

[The Gumboot Navy] was a bunch of fishermen with these seine type boats, bigger boats. They were controlling this ...BC coast during the war years, [looking for] submarines, or anything that shouldn't be around....For the gumboot navy, that section, they wanted to get in there so that they wouldn't be called into the regular navy or army or something of that sort.¹⁰

The original settlers of Malcolm Island had fled a Russian regime that had threatened to conscript their men into its army; the Gumboot Navy allowed these settlers' sons to put their knowledge of the sea to use in the defence of Canada while avoiding conscription. Patriotism may well have been on the rise in Sointula, but it was a patriotism coloured by practicality and a long standing wariness of outside control.

It was also a patriotism mitigated by influences most Canadian communities didn't face: loyalty to a foreign country (Finland), and loyalty to a worldwide movement (socialism). These two competing concerns were highlighted through an event that was to have a far-reaching effect on the community of Sointula: the Finnish-Russian Winter War of 1939-1940. For centuries, Finland had had to contend with the security concerns of its powerful Russian neighbour to the east. As noted in Chapter One, in 1809 Russia had persuaded Finland (or more accurately, its Swedish ruler) to cede it territory in order to create a buffer zone between itself and the growing power of France under Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1939, the Soviet Union tried to persuade Finland to cede it part of its territory to create a buffer zone between itself and the growing power of Germany under Adolph Hitler. This time, however, an independent and rightward leaning Finland refused to accommodate its powerful neighbour. As a result, while most of the rest of the Western world was focusing on the threat of Germany, from December 1939 to March 1940, Finland was combating the forces of the Soviet Union.

The reaction of Sointula to the Winter War indicated that, despite an increasing bond with the rest of Canada, many still saw Finland as 'the homeland'. As

Alfred Williams recalls, “the whole town got pretty hot under the collar during the Russian-Finnish War. There were two groups: the anti-Russians and those that sympathized. So there was a little ‘war’ here too!”¹¹ Debate over the Winter War got so volatile that some members of the community were unable to discuss the subject rationally. The Co-op store had a couple of seats inside its doors, traditionally used by members to sit and discuss local and international events; after several disruptive arguments broke out over the merits of the Winter War, the Co-op removed these seats.¹²

Malcolm Islanders had a history of fiery debates over various political issues. With the settling of the war in March 1940 by Finland ceding some territory to the Soviet Union, the whole Winter War argument might well have dissipated becoming just a slightly more vocal disagreement in the history of debate on the island. Other factors, however, augmented the effect of this event on Sointula. The first was the reaction of the Canadian government and people to the Winter War. Finland was cast as the little independent hero in this drama struggling against an aggressive socialist giant; food, funds and supplies were gathered to support Finland in its struggle. Finnish-Canadian historian Varpu Lindstrom notes that the popularity of the Winter War in the Canadian imagination lay in the fear and suspicion Canadians felt towards the communism with which the Finnish Organization had long been associated. This fear, built up by the Winter War and by RCMP distrust of ‘red’ organizations, led to the banning of the FO in August 1940.¹³

In the past, Sointula, largely due to its geographic isolation, had generally remained unmolested by those forces that opposed socialism; the Finnish socialist in

Ontario who lived in constant fear of the RCMP knock on the door in the 1930s has no counterpart on Malcolm Island.¹⁴ However, all socialist Finnish-Canadians felt the effect of the FO banning. In October 1940, the *Alert Bay Bulletin* announced that following a visit by the RCMP in accordance with the Defence of Canada Regulations, the Sointula FO Hall was under the administration of a local committee.¹⁵ Unlike several Finnish-Canadian organizations elsewhere, the Finnish Organization in Sointula was able to get its hall back when the FO was taken off the government's list of illegal organizations in October 1943; however, as Lindstrom makes clear, the Finnish Organization never fully recovered from the ban:

During the period of illegality [the Finnish Organization] lost many of its members.... Many objected to the FOC's stance during the Winter War and its open desire for a Soviet Victory over Finland. After the ban was lifted, halls were in poor condition: two had been sold and two, one in Nipigon, and one in Sudbury, had burned down... Other smaller communities decided that they were unable to pay the taxes in arrears owed on the properties.¹⁶

Not only was the FO now a weaker organization, but, with the Anglicization of Sointula Finns and disquiet over the FO's hard-line communist stance on the Winter War, the importance of the organization to the island seems to have waned. A secret RCMP report on Sointula from 1944 indicates that the Sointula FO's meetings were not well attended. Subsequent RCMP reports in 1948, 1952, and 1956, indicated financial troubles within the Sointula FO and a disinclination of young Malcolm Islanders to become involved in the organization.¹⁷ As evidenced by the RCMP's continued interest, the Sointula branch of the Finnish Organization did not quickly or easily disappear from sight; however, its time as a leading organization in the community was ending. Changes emanating from the Winter War helped promote the

gradual erosion of one of Sointula's most important institutions. The Finnish Organization in Sointula lasted, in name at least, until 1978, when the hall was taken over by a non-political Recreational Society. An organization that had acted as a communal bond for Malcolm Islanders was at an end.

A second factor that gave the debate over the Winter War an added impact in Sointula was, ironically, government suspicions about supposed right-wing sympathies on the island. When the Winter War ended, the conservative Finnish government turned to Germany as the only ally that could help it fight the power of the Soviets. In June 1941, Finland and Germany joined forces in an attack upon the Soviet Union. While right wing Finland had been lionized by the western media during the Winter War, it soon became demonized as a Nazi ally on the eastern front. Perhaps due to the vociferousness of the debate on Malcolm Island over the Winter War, Sointula, out of every possible Finnish community in Western Canada, was singled out by the RCMP as a possible zone of pro-Axis sympathy: "It is ascertained that a new political philosophy appeared and is being agitated among the members of the Finnish settlement of Sointula, Malcolm Island, B.C. This new philosophy may eventually develop into fifth column activities unless checked in time".¹⁸ No action by the government appears to have followed from this report; indeed, no evidence of any pro-German activity on Malcolm Island during World War II was ever revealed.

While this surveillance by the RCMP may have had no real effect beyond reminding Malcolm Islanders that Canadian authorities could be very suspicious of groups and ideologies outside the mainstream, the incident is significant on a symbolic level; that the community associated with Matti Kurikka, A. B. Makela, and

long-standing socialist ideals could ever be considered a haven for pro-Nazi sympathy seems illogical.

Part of the explanation may lay in the influx of new Finns who came to Sointula before, during, and after the Winter War. Muriel Lowry, the granddaughter of Matti Halminen, recalls debates in the community and in the co-op store over the Winter War and the merits of Socialism. She notes that it was predominantly the new Finnish migrants who, right-wing in nature, questioned and disputed the socialist ideals that had been so ubiquitous; undeterred by the removal of the co-op seats, they sat on nail kegs and argued with their socialist neighbours.¹⁹ Having fled Finland due to the threat of the socialist Soviets and having been raised in a 'loyalist' tradition since the defeat of Finnish socialism in the civil war of 1918, these newcomers had a totally different perspective than that common on Malcolm Island. It seems likely that it was one or some of the new, conservative Finnish immigrants who, in espousing their anti-socialist views, came under the RCMP's suspicion.

Over the succeeding decades, this new conservative element on the island may have further weakened the traditional hard-line socialism of the Sointula Finns, helping create a new political view in a community that had once almost unanimously supported communism. Tula Lewis (nee Jarvinen) was part of a small wave of Finnish immigrants in the early 1950s. While insisting that there were no real political battles between the new Finns and the old at this time, Lewis agrees that there was an ideological divide; "All the ones that came when we came were certainly not...[communist or socialist]".²⁰ New residents with new ideas had arrived in Sointula.

The new Finns also seem to have helped instigate an acceptance of religion on the island. Though undoubtedly some long time residents in Sointula had some religious leanings, most seem to have viewed organized religion with the same suspicion as their forebears did: “the majority of the people that were here they just had no need for a church... I guess if the Finns would’ve wanted a church they would have built one in two days”, Lennie Pohto notes.²¹ Informal religious gatherings had taken place in the 1940s, with a chaplain from the ship MS Columbia conducting a service in the FO Hall in 1941 and with missionaries Alf and Margaret Baynes beginning semi-regular, non-denominational Bible classes at the Sointula school in 1948. A 1952 article in the *Alert Bay Pioneer Journal* documented the development of a real divide, a pro- and anti-church movement on the island. Covering the funeral of a Sointula Finn who had recently migrated from Finland and noting that a Lutheran minister had had to be brought from Vancouver for the ceremony, the *Pioneer Journal* ran a headline reading, “Prayers for Church at Sointula”. Long-time resident John Anderson retorted that “that article may express the opinions of the newcomers who arrived here a year or so ago from Finland but it does not correspond with the feelings of our pioneers”.²² The rift between the newcomers and descendants of the original settlers continued through the 1950s.

The situation, however, was not simple. Recalling the eventual establishment of the Sointula Community Church in 1961, an anti-church resident remembered that, though it was mostly newcomers who started the church, some had been long-time residents.²³ Remembering the religious path that her own grandmother and her husband’s grandmother had taken, Norma Williams suggests that the emergence of

religion in Sointula may have re-awakened some long dormant feelings:

The oddest thing about this whole deal about religion, like with Albert's grandmother and my grandmother from the Tynjala side - they were brought up with religion in Finland. Very religious. And then as they got out of it altogether, they almost condemned religion. ...She [Norma's grandmother] was in her 90s when she died, she did nothing but read... her Finnish bible. And Albert's grandmother really shocked me because when her time was up she wanted a Finnish pastor from Vancouver to come and see her.²⁴

While it is certainly not uncommon for people nearing death to turn to religion, it is also quite possible that religious beliefs had always existed in some form among a number of Malcolm Islanders but had been suppressed amid the more dominant anti-church, socialist atmosphere. The newcomers from Finland had not been raised in such an environment and so felt more at ease in displaying their religious feelings. Their example helped bring about acceptance (if far from unanimous support) for religion.

In the gradual erosion of its hard-line socialist principles and in the grudging acceptance of organized religion, Sointula was following a path similar to other Finnish-Canadian communities. As historian Edward W. Laine observes, unlike Finns in the United States, the majority of Canadian Finns came after socialism had already taken root in Finland (Matti Halminen and his fellow miners being obvious exceptions). It was not until the post World War II period that conservative, church-minded Finnish immigrants began to change the nature of Finnish-Canadian communities across the country.²⁵ Thus, the shared socialist philosophy that had united Sointula to other like-minded Finns throughout Canada was being lessened, as Finnish-Canadian communities started to more closely resemble most other Canadian communities.

This transformation was aided on Malcolm Island by the emigration of several long time Sointula residents. Wanda Laughlin, a Malcolm Island “newcomer” (she moved to the island with her parents in 1961) has written a history of the community’s long-time dwellings, noting when they were built and who had lived in them. She has found that the biggest departure of original owners occurred in the 1950s. Laughlin suggests two explanations: people who had done well in the fishing industry could afford to purchase a home in Vancouver or Surrey and the arrival of new residents meant there were buyers for Malcolm Island homes.²⁶ While some of the newcomers were new immigrants, others were English-speaking loggers such as Belveal, Shiels, Wooldridge, and Laughlin who married Sointula women. While logging often took men away from Malcolm Island to find work, it also provided employment and entrepreneurial opportunities on the island. Shiels Logging, run out of Rough Bay by Elgin Shiels (and his father before him), employed 6-8 workers in its best seasons; Malcolm Island Logging, a much bigger operation, ran from 1950 to 1960 and Delmare Laughlin was responsible for starting three different logging camps on the island as well as a sawmill that shipped lumber as far as Burnaby and even into the United States.²⁷ Though Delmare Laughlin himself admits that Sointula was first and foremost a fishing community, the economic benefits brought in by the “logging immigrants”, through house purchases and through new businesses, helped to promote the post-war economy on Malcolm Island.

The new immigrants also helped to promote the communitarian ideals of the island largely through its major institutions. Though it is doubtful that many English names ever appeared in the Sointula FO register, these names became increasingly

frequent in the co-op and credit union reports as directors, committee heads, and simply members. The loggers who had moved to Sointula became a part of the social/co-operative nature of the community. Undoubtedly, the replacement of long-time Finnish speaking settlers with new English-speaking immigrants helped speed along an 'Anglicizing' trend on the island. However, by marrying Sointula women, by engaging in a typical and respected Malcolm Island occupation, and by being willing to give back to the community through support of its institutions, the loggers who came to the island did not so much alter the community as strengthen its communitarian structure by their presence.

Part of the transformation of Sointula into a more typical Canadian community seems to have been an increased connection with other BC communities, particularly nearby Alert Bay. Since the native people of that community had helped ferry some of the first settlers to Malcolm Island, there had always been interaction between the two, much of it practical. As Victor Wirkki explains: "We used to be more or less connected between Alert Bay. They had the doctor and the hospital there, and the police were there, and the beer parlours were there".²⁸ For the people of Alert Bay, Sointula was a source both of needed supplies and of entertainment, in the form of the Co-op Store and the weekly dances at the FO Hall. Through these events and institutions, bonds were formed. Muriel Lowry recalls encouraging a young native carver, a member of the Hunts, a renown BC carving family,²⁹ while she was working at the Alert Bay Hospital. Alfred Williams recalled that so many Alert Bay people came to Sointula's Saturday night dances in the 1930s that the dance times were changed to accommodate Sunday laws against dancing.³⁰ Albert and Norma

Williams note that Alert Bay had just one, smaller grocery store, and so Alert Bay residents used to come to Sointula to stock up.³¹ Even before the social changes brought on by the war, Sointula was not completely isolated from its neighbour.

A divide did exist between the two communities but it is difficult to measure. Summarizing their relationship, Alfred Williams notes that ideologically the two were opposites, with the Alert Bay people being “Royalists” (holding strong loyalties to the British Commonwealth) and Sointulans being socialists.³² A look at the *Alert Bay Bulletin* newspaper during the early 1940s seems to confirm the “royalist” nature of the community, given the enthusiasm with which its various organizations greeted the Empire Day celebrations (a day commemorating the British Empire, notable by its absence in Sointula).

Seeming to recognize that a divide existed, the March 15, 1940, edition of *The Bulletin* noted the need for more unity in the district. Though it is largely conjecture, it appears as if the war years helped bring about some of that unity. While *The Bulletin* did not mention May Day in 1939; the May 1, 1940 edition of the paper was devoted to Sointula and its May Day celebration. The same edition reported the Sointula Athletic Club was putting on a play at the Parish Hall in Alert Bay to aid the Canadian Red Cross.³³ With an Alert Bay newspaper commemorating a socialist holiday and with a Sointula club previously associated with the FO and socialism raising money for Canada at a church hall, it seemed that an effort was being made towards bridging the ideological boundaries dividing the two islands.

This period also saw the two communities taking similar actions in the realm of co-operative development. In May 1939 the BC Credit Union Association was

formed; Sointula formed its own credit union a year later, Alert Bay the year after that.³⁴ The timing of these new credit unions seems to have been auspicious, for with the booming wartime economy, people had savings.³⁵ It is noteworthy that the Sointula Credit Union began side by side with the neighbouring Alert Bay Credit Union; during the war years, the ideologies of the two islands seem to have become increasingly similar.

These ideologies were of course helped along by further practical interactions between the two communities. While volunteer labour built most of the structures in Sointula during its first fifty years, when the time came to build a new co-op store in 1950, the community entrusted Alert Bay father and son Alfred and Tage Westerlund to construct probably the most important structure in town. Malcolm Islanders also entrusted Alert Bay's Dr. Harold Pickup with their most important commodity, their health. Dr. Pickup began coming to the Co-op store office to give checkups in the early 1950s, making house calls to invalids, and making himself an accepted addition to Malcolm Island life.³⁶ Before neighbouring Port McNeil started to grow in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and before the ferry service improved at roughly the same time, the connection between Alert Bay and Sointula was important and appeared generally friendly.

While the connection between Sointula and the white people of Alert Bay appears to have been generally amicable, the relationship between Malcolm Islanders and the Aboriginal population of Alert Bay is harder to categorize. Certainly some families and residents seem to have been on good terms. Before working in the Alert Bay hospital, Muriel Lowry had developed close relationships with some Alert Bay

Aboriginals while accompanying her father, Oiva Halminen, over to that island.

Oiva, like his father Matti before him, sold farm produce such as butter and eggs to Aboriginal families at Alert Bay, building friendly relations as he did so.³⁷ Tauno Salo recalls a similarly amicable relationship with natives coming to the Saturday night dances, some bringing saxophones and drums in order to play with the Sointula band.³⁸ In a 1982 interview, long time resident Wayne Homer said that Malcolm Islanders and Alert Bay Aboriginal people had a unique and respectful relationship: “Oh, between the Indians and the Finns its been friendly neighbours from the very beginning. We never had a quarrel with the Indians, but the Alert Bay whites, they had several quarrels with the Indians”.³⁹

But others in the community question the validity of this ‘unique’ relationship, noting some real tensions between the two groups. Muriel Lowry relates that the teenage boys of Sointula during the late 1930s and early 1940s were against any Alert Bay Aboriginals dating Sointula girls, feeling that they were not good enough for their ladies.⁴⁰ Victor Wirkki recalls incidents of Aboriginal people turning up drunk at Saturday night dances, at a time when drinking was still frowned upon by older temperance-minded residents (though hardly unpractised in Sointula).⁴¹ Dave Siider sums up the relationship quite simply: “There was a difference between the natives and the white men on Malcolm Island”.⁴²

This mixed view of the Aboriginal population seems to have existed since the beginning of the colony. In describing the Aboriginal population of Alert Bay in 1904, Makela depicts them as natural socialists, giving away their excess belongings to others [presumably through potlatches]. He noted that they often come to the

dances and to the communal dinners in Sointula, and were better neighbours than those most of the settlers had had in Finland.⁴³ Similar views of the relationship appear in the Halminen family's interactions, in Alfred Williams' remembrances of Aboriginal participation in the dances, in approval of Aboriginal participation in the great fishermen's strike of 1936 and in Wayne Homer's belief in a mutually respectful relationship. It is a view that can perhaps be summarized as inclusive, one that sees common ground in shared socialist values and in a desire for economic security, and then builds bonds from that.

Matti Kurikka, however, expressed an alternate view as early as 1902. Coming upon a boat-load of drunken Finns consorting with Aboriginal women, he remarks on these "repulsive losers with the half-animal females".⁴⁴ Though the drunkenness of these Finns seems to be part of what disgusted Kurikka, clearly he disparaged their association with people he depicts as hardly human. This view of Alert Bay Aboriginal people as something innately different than Malcolm Island whites appears in Muriel Lowry's recollection of the 1930s and 1940s, and in the Dave Siider interview. It is a view that could be described as exclusive, one that holds up the image of the Sointula Finn - sober, hard-working, cultured, co-operative - and finds others lacking in comparison.

It is, of course, difficult to say whether an inclusive or exclusive view dominated on Malcolm Island, or even whether such a complex relationship can be defined in such simple terms. Like Malcolm Islanders' relationships with other outside groups, such as new Finns, Alert Bay Royalists, or simply the rest of the province, Sointula's connection to Alert Bay Aboriginal people was different for

varying members of the community and changed over time. As with these other groups, Malcolm Islanders seem to have found areas of common interest, perhaps building on some shared socialist/working class interests; but, as with these other groups, Malcolm Islanders seem also to have pinpointed differences, distinguishing their own community by what they were not: not conservative Finns, not Royalists, not Aboriginal. The only safe generalization regarding the Sointula Finn/Alert Bay Aboriginal relationship over the twentieth century would appear to be that it was multi-faceted, and deserves further study.

During the 1940s it became increasingly difficult for Malcolm Islanders to distinguish themselves by pointing out their differences from other communities. Some of the big changes, such as the decline of the Finnish Organization, the influence of conservative Finns, and the increased patriotism inspired by the war have already been noted. But many of the changes in Sointula involved subtle, gradual alterations in social norms. Victor Wirkki recalls a large wooden sign that used to hang in the FO Hall: "Man be a man - don't come here drunk!" Even when Wirkki came of age in the mid to late 1930s, the sign's advice was being ignored more and more.⁴⁵ By the 1950s, according to Lennie Pohto the rules against drinking had pretty much "fallen by the wayside".⁴⁶ The community did not, of course, descend into the debauchery and alcoholism of the nineteenth century mining towns whose example had inspired Sointula's temperance, but one more distinguishing feature of this community was disappearing.

Writing of the changes in the 1940s, Paula Wild notes that in the past people walked wherever they needed to go, visiting their neighbours along the way. Starting

with a surge in automobile buying in the late 1940s people began to drive everywhere.⁴⁷ This faster-paced lifestyle placed less emphasis on community ties. Alfred Williams saw this change as emanating from the effects of the war and the resulting economic boom: "After World War II things changed - people got too much money - didn't need the same spirit. You can go to Vancouver and go see a movie, and go to night clubs, etc."⁴⁸ But it was not necessary to leave the island for social activity to change. Lennie Pohto, like many Malcolm Island residents, fondly remembered the Saturday night movies as the teenagers' "event of the week", when the youth would have fun getting into mischief up in the balcony, while the adults were watching the show below.⁴⁹ The movies were discontinued soon after television was introduced to the island in the early 1950s; one more aspect of community bonding, erased.

The change in spirit and community feeling was not immediate. Growing up in the 1940s and 1950s, resident Loretta Rhitamo played badminton at the FO Hall at least once a week and saw Sointula-produced plays in both English and Finnish but she wished there was more to do in the community, a sentiment not found expressed by earlier generations.⁵⁰ Showing the same desire for adventure and for job opportunities, Muriel Lowry left the island in 1946, at age 17 to see what Victoria had to offer.⁵¹ Whereas young men could go into fishing or logging, increasingly, young women in the 1940s and 1950s completed grade 12, only to find few career options on the island.

Though hardly an exodus, a changing attitude to the outside world, coupled with economic reasons, was slowly altering Malcolm Island society. Up to 1958, the

Union Steamship Company ran a foot passenger ferry service twice a week; it was replaced in that year by the *Island Princess*, a vehicle ferry that ran once a day between Sointula and Kelsey Bay on Vancouver Island. The fact that each vehicle had to be lifted on to this ferry by crane (a cumbersome process) and the less than ideal state of the northern Vancouver Island highway system at the time, limited the number of excursions from Sointula. Increasingly, however, Malcolm Islanders were getting greater opportunities to experience the rest of the province. Economic changes, transportation improvements, and an increased curiosity about the outside world were changing life on the island.

Further changes that began in the war period created closer connections within the community, serving both its economic needs and the ideology that had characterized it in the past. Paradoxically, one of the changes that did so was the influx of the war Finns. Though these Finns helped introduce religious and political ideals that disrupted the status quo they also contributed an element that supported Sointula tradition: language. At a time when English was beginning to overwhelm the island, the arrival of strictly Finnish-speaking immigrants was an important counterweight. Albert and Norma Williams credit these new Finns with preserving the Finnish language in Sointula for at least a generation.⁵² As preserving Finnish culture and identity had been such an important part of the original Sointula colony, carried on past this point through the auspices of the Finnish Organization, and through the efforts of community elders, the continuation of Finn as a living language on the island can be seen as an important continuation of past values.

The phenomenon of the new reinforcing the old was also demonstrated

through the creation of new institutions. During and immediately after the war new organizations helped solidify communitarian traditions. One of the first of these new institutions was the Sointula Credit Union which enjoyed the wartime boom that put the necessary funds in the credit unions' coffers. In Sointula, the credit union was both a practical and ideological continuation of past concerns. Practically speaking, a credit union was a necessary safety-net for co-operative organizations and average working people, the type of institution that might well have saved the British Columbia Fisherman's Co-operative Association during its credit crisis of 1932. Ideologically, as a co-operative venture it fitted in well with Sointula's past ties to co-operative fishing ventures and the co-op store and was a long delayed fulfilment of the ideologically driven goals of the Kalevan Kansa. In the short run, ideology overshadowed practicality. Sointula residents actively invested their savings in the new credit union, giving it the necessary funds to become financially viable; having ensured its creation however, they did not make use of the credit union for the purpose for which it had been created – borrowing money. Perhaps in 1940 the local economy was still at a relatively low point. Depositing money in the credit union was an acceptable risk since one could always get it back; borrowing money for a business venture or for home improvements may have seemed too risky; another factor may have been the difficulty of securing supplies during the war to build or improve houses or businesses. Regardless of the reason, despite the prestige of its credit committee members Hannes Myntti, Otto Luck, and Peter Hilton, three recognized leaders on the island and pillars of the Co-op Store,⁵³ the credit union was closed in the early 1940s. After it reopened in 1949, it became an essential and much used

institution (currently, as a branch of the Coastal Community Credit Union).

Though never as vital to the running of Sointula as the co-operative store, the revived credit union was recognized as an important part of the community. Determined not to repeat their initial mistake, board members such as Otto Luck took out loans that they did not really need so that the credit union could earn interest and keep operating.⁵⁴ Soon, however, such acts of 'community spirit' were unnecessary. From a meagre \$5,826.00 in personal loans in 1949, the credit union was loaning over \$64,000.00 in 1960;⁵⁵ loan requests had grown so quickly that the credit union contacted the Chief Inspector of Credit Unions in British Columbia for advice on how to keep up with demand. The inspector recommended using the "very large deposit account of \$54,500.00" to cover these loans. With the post-war boom, increased fish prices and the influx of new immigrants, residents were investing their money in the Sointula Credit Union and the community, taking out loans primarily for house mortgages.⁵⁶ The credit union helped the people of Sointula take advantage of their increased economic prosperity.

The credit union was also important on an ideological level. Banks had had a bad reputation in Sointula since Kurikka's editorials in *Aika*, a reputation not strengthened through such endeavours as the failed fishing co-ops. Here at last was a 'bank' that was run by the people of Sointula, that was not driven by profit (the yearly profit for the CU didn't rise above \$4000.00 a year until the 1960s), and that was responsive to the needs of the whole community (the CU even bent credit union rules by doing business with non-CU members, as a community service).⁵⁷ Housed for years in the Co-op Store, the credit union provided learning material to educate the

school children in the co-operative credit union tradition;⁵⁸ it became a centre point of the community.

Just as economic advances in the war years stimulated the rise of the credit union system in British Columbia, so too did the war economy help bring about the formation of an organization that, arguably, played an even more pivotal role in Sointula: the United Fisherman and Allied Workers Union (UFAWU). But though the economic and bureaucratic environment of World War II helped cement union gains and led to the formation of the UFAWU in 1945, much of the credit for the union's birth can be traced to the pre-war period.

In the past, BC fishermen had experienced such barriers to success as low fish prices, the vagaries of a cyclical salmon run, and the control of the industry by large canning companies. However, decades of increased co-operation between fishermen, as witnessed in the fishing co-ops (two of which Sointula fishermen had created), and the 1917 and 1936 fishing strikes (which these same fisherman had largely led) had begun a process of change. The importance and example of the 1936 strike was evident in the first edition of *The Fisherman*, a newspaper that was to become the voice of the UFAWU. Its first front page cited a resolution passed during the "great Rivers Inlet salmon fishermen's strike the previous year" which had called on existing unions and organizations to "take immediate steps to build one industrial union".⁵⁹ Inspired by the example of that strike and by the spirit of this resolution, activists in the fishing industry began agitating for this one, all encompassing body.

The first major success occurred in 1938 when the Salmon Purse Seiner's Union (SPSU), supported by the Pacific Coast Fisherman's Union (PCFU), struck to

demand an increase in fall chum salmon prices; the strike succeeded, not only in winning the first signed union agreement for the SPSU, but also in bringing two disparate unions together.⁶⁰ The war years, however, provided the catalyst for the UFAWU's formation. From 1939 to 1945 the fishermen of British Columbia benefited from a huge demand from Great Britain for herring and canned salmon to feed its armies and people, exceptional fish runs, and the creation of the Regional War Labour Relations Board (RWLRB) as a third party in labour negotiations.⁶¹ The first two factors gave BC fishers a commodity much in demand; the formation of the RWLRB gave them an impartial body through which they could negotiate improved conditions, such as the union certification of shore workers (primarily cannery workers) and price increases for union members. Encouraged by their successes, and wishing to build on them, the SPSU, the PCFU and various other groups joined with the shore workers in 1945 to form the UFAWU.

The importance of the UFAWU in Sointula has been considerable over the years. According to Victor Wirkki, a member of the UFAWU from its inception until 1978, most of the Sointula fishermen belonged to the union and profited well by it; "Most of the time they done good anyways. Sometimes the prices came up so much that it was hard to believe".⁶² In 1951 alone, the union was able to secure a \$35.00 to \$50.00 a month raise for its shore workers and a 25% to 36% increase in salmon prices.⁶³ Such early success helped make it a matter of common sense for Malcolm Islanders to support the union. And though such adherence was never 100%, as with past community-supported initiatives (the co-op store, the FO, the SPC) some 'peer pressure' ensured that everyone supported the union. Dave Siider, who started fishing

at the end of the 1940s, remembered that joining the UFAWU 'was expected' of a Sointula fisherman.⁶⁴

Though Malcolm Islanders did not provide the leadership in what was to become the largest fishing union in British Columbia, their support was both well organized and idealistic. In 1943, Sointula resident Harold Malm employed his boat *The Mistral* as the official fishermen's and shore workers' union organizing boat and wrote a column about his adventures in *The Fisherman*. Ken Homer provided many a politically-barbed cartoon in support of the union, including one celebrating fellow Malcolm Islander Laurie Jarvis and the invention of his gillnet drum;⁶⁵ and representatives of the UFAWU local in Sointula faithfully attended union conventions in Vancouver, Lennie Pohto even serving for a time on the executive council of the UFAWU.⁶⁶

As well, the Women's Auxiliary to the Sointula local of the UFAWU became very active, discussing with UFAWU delegates the importance of voting in provincial and federal elections, exploring educational advancement possibilities, planning events in support of the union, and inviting the "womenfolk" of fishermen to be involved in the union. The UFAWU gave Malcolm Islanders the chance to engage in direct and practical union-building activities such as meetings, organizing, and fund-raising and in indirect supportive activities such as political involvement, educational advancement, and social commentary. In form, it is reminiscent of both Malcolm Island's early Kalevan Kansa days and its experiences through the Finnish Organization. Just as in the *Aika* and *Vapaus* newspapers, *The Fisherman* promoted international socialism (or quite often communism), and criticized activity deemed to

be capitalist and imperial; it took great pains to attempt to integrate the co-operative movement with union activity.⁶⁷ The UFAWU was both a means through which Malcolm Islanders were able to achieve higher fish prices and an organization that, with the waning of the FO, could provide a solid connection to socialist ideals.

These new institutions held many similarities to Sointula's older bodies: they promoted strongly held socialist and co-operative ideals; they were community supported and run; and they were largely dominated by the men of the community. From the founding male members of the Credit Union to the very name of the United Fishermen and Allied Worker's Union, the predominance of male control, as with past Sointula institutions, was obvious (although the term fishermen applied also to women who fished in this period, the UFAWU was led almost exclusively by men). In the late 1930s, however, a new organization changed that standard. The Malcolm Island Parent Teacher Association, in existence until 1966, with a brief hiatus from 1943 to 1949, was a vehicle through which women on the island were able to influence change. Though the PTA was by no means exclusively controlled by the female portion of the community, women dominated as committee heads (covering literature, health, group activities, community programs, and other subjects), and on the executive council.⁶⁸ Though women often dominated PTAs across the province in this time period, the activities of this body on Malcolm Island went beyond those of most other communities.

The PTA became a recognized cornerstone of the community. In her 1950 history of Sointula, resident Aili Anderson listed the co-op, the credit union, the FO,

the United Fisherman and Allied Workers Union, and the Malcolm Island PTA, as the five most important organizations on the island.⁶⁹ The last group's influence in Sointula can be seen in its efforts to improve the community, to connect Sointula to the rest of British Columbia, and to engage in general social activism.

Naturally enough, the PTA directed much of its efforts at projects directly related to the school and its pupils. They organized stage dramas and basketball games and purchased film projectors, badminton sets, and encyclopaedias, paying for them with numerous bake sales, fashion shows, raffles, whist drives, bingo tournaments and other fund raisers. When the PTA re-formed in October 1949, it made a commitment to look after both the educational needs of the school and its children and their parents. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the PTA organized night classes in woodworking and in sewing and arranged talks to parents on such subjects as "the Social Development of the Child" and "the Mental Health of Children."⁷⁰ The stress on education that had been present in the earliest days of the Kalevan Kansa was still being displayed in these later years.

The PTA, however, took a wider view of its role in Sointula, concerning itself with general community concerns, especially health. On October 2, 1937, the PTA asked the provincial Board of Health & Hospital Services to set up a Hospital Unit in Sointula, as Alert Bay was too far away in an emergency and was too busy.⁷¹ In the early 1950s, having secured the services of a dentist, the PTA agreed to cover the \$2.50 fee for any pupil whose parents could not afford to pay.⁷² With the very real danger of both polio and tuberculosis epidemics the PTA looked into x-raying school children for TB and arranged a committee to take care of polio shots. It also

attempted to secure the services of a public health nurse. Just as the Co-op Store took care of more than just supplying groceries to Malcolm Islanders, so the PTA did more than concern itself with purely school related activities.

The PTA also provided opportunities for young Malcolm Islanders to examine other social structures. Sointula students competed successfully in an annual musical festival held in Alert Bay. The PTA assisted in regularly sending two students to the annual High School convention at the University of British Columbia and created a scholarship fund to help one graduating student every year attend university. The PTA also came increasingly into contact with other communities. Having briefly disbanded during the mid-1940s, the reformed Malcolm Island organization turned to the Alert Bay PTA for information on how a successful PTA worked; five years later, both the Port McNeil PTA and the Malcolm Island PTA planned and shared expenses for a student's Sports Day. PTA activities connected Malcolm Island with Parent Teacher Associations across the province through the annual PTA convention in Vancouver.⁷³

Malcolm Island PTA concerns, however, did not stop at the provincial level. The activist agenda that was so prevalent in many of Sointula's institutions appeared early on in the PTA. On November 11, 1938, a PTA member was assigned to say a few words promoting Peace Week before the weekly Saturday night movie at the FO Hall; on May 19, 1939, the association decided that all children from Sointula should go to Alert Bay on the 24th of May to attend a Sports Day, and to hold a demonstration while they were there (the nature of the demonstration is unstated in the records). Further afield, the PTA sent donations to the "Aid for Greece" fund to

help that country recover from its bloody 1944 to 1949 civil war.⁷⁴ The Malcolm Island PTA was an activist organization, locally, provincially, and internationally.

It was also an organization that acted in concert with other Sointula bodies. A May 9, 1952, PTA report notes that the Sointula Credit Union had volunteered to pay for the showing of a film at the school and that the PTA had purchased another share in the Credit Union. The December 1949 minutes describe a plan to join with the Athletic Club to start gymnastics and basketball after the new-year; and in 1958, short on funds, they shared the expense of sending two students to the annual High School conference in Vancouver with the UFAWU and the Sointula Co-op Store. The PTA was part of the communitarianism that still seemed to thrive, but it was a communitarianism that was increasingly interconnected with other British Columbia communities. The Malcolm Island PTA continued on until 1966/67, when membership began to decline, and a feeling began to emerge that "perhaps our PTA has served its purpose".⁷⁵ It had carried on a traditional Malcolm Island practice of getting necessary activities accomplished on the island and had done so in conjunction with other Sointula institutions; it had also, however, become a part of the change that was bringing Malcolm Islanders in increasing contact with the rest of the province and its influences.

That the people of Sointula held on to their traditional ideologies amidst much change, and in spite of the predominance of alternate ideals in the outside world, can be attributed largely to practicality. Union activity made sense to fishermen benefiting financially and otherwise from the strength of the UFAWU. The presence of a community-based bank responsive to local needs made credit union sensibilities

logical. And when it no longer made practical sense to support a certain ideology or institution, such as the hard-line Socialism of the Finnish Organization, support was effectively withdrawn. Beliefs on the island were tied to the practical benefits attached (the lessons of the failed 'utopia' had remained); institutions that did not continue to meet both the ideological and practical needs of the community could not survive. The post-war success of the Sointula Co-op Store, as well as its near demise in later years, attests to that statement.

Despite the rise of several new and important institutions, the Sointula Co-op Store maintained an enviable status not only on Malcolm Island, but also all along the coast. As Alfred Williams recalls, "People came from all over to shop at the co-op. It had a fine hardware store and fisherman from as far away as Port Hardy would come here to rig up their boats".⁷⁶ The war years increased the co-op's support and its funds. From a modest 96 members and \$34,180.41 in assets in 1939, the institution achieved a membership of 220, and assets exceeding \$93,000.00 by 1945 (assets included Victory Loans, increased stock, and rental properties).⁷⁷ Though World War II had brought disruption to some aspects of Sointula life, it meant an economic boom time for the co-op.

That economic good fortune continued into the 1950s, aided by the post war boom and money brought in through logging and increased fish prices and by new technology. In 1950, the co-op store arranged to bring electricity to the island, paying BC Hydro and then collecting from community members to pay the bill. Norma Williams, whose husband Albert was on the co-op board of directors in the late 1940s and early 1950s, recalls this as being the "heyday" of the co-op: "When electricity

came, well naturally everybody bought ranges, they bought TVs [television arrived in 1953]....that was big dealings when you could sell washing machines, dryers. So that's why the co-op did really well".⁷⁸

Another reason for the co-op's prosperity was the professional management of Hannes Myntti who returned from Port Arthur in 1939 to serve as manager, a position he held until he retired in August 1967. According to his daughter, Loretta Rhitamo, he was not only a hard -working and effective manager, but as an outgoing and friendly presence made the atmosphere of the co-op inviting. She notes that with her father it was "co-op first, everything else second!"⁷⁹

Under Myntti's leadership, the co-op store thrived, with its assets steadily increasing and its membership rising to a high of 368 in 1962.⁸⁰ Even a conflict with government tax-collectors did not impede the co-op's success: a 1953 decision by the Income Tax Appeal Board decided that the large sums of cash co-op members had placed in the co-op 'bank' could not be taxed, as the money was in the nature of a debt, not borrowed capital. Reporting the decision in a March 23, 1953 article, the *Vancouver Sun*, led off with the headline, LITTLE FELLOW ON TOP: Sointula Co-op Beats Tax Czars.⁸¹ Not only was the co-op allowed to reduce hundreds of thousands of dollars from its calculations of working capital, thus saving it a considerable amount of tax, but it did so with an influential mainstream newspaper supporting it. Given past provincial media obsessions with 'free love communes' and 'communist states', Sointula's depiction as an underdog who had taken on the tax man and won can be viewed as a considerable change in perception.

Not everyone viewed the Sointula Co-op's success so benignly. During the

1950s and 1960s the cold war was at its height. Though Canada may have avoided many of the outward displays of McCarthyism as practiced in the United States, there was still active surveillance of groups or individual with known or suspected socialist ties, including the Sointula Co-operative Store. An Inspector of the Special Branch of the RCMP in Ottawa informed the Victoria, BC division in the early 1950s that the Special Branch was maintaining a file on the Sointula Co-operative Store Association. Though the surveillance of a grocery/hardware store on a relatively isolated BC island would seem to be a questionable use of manpower, there was a clear reasoning behind the RCMP's suspicions. In 1955 the Special Branch detailed the movements of an unnamed Malcolm Island 'subject' who was clearly Co-op manager Hannes Myntti for the document notes: "he is still manager of the Sointula Co-operative Store Association in the town. This position [the] subject holds indicates subject is a member of the Finnish Organization of Canada in Sointula, as this co-operative is virtually run by the Finnish Organization of Canada".⁸² Though no evidence exists in any of the Co-op minutes to indicate that the FO had any voice in the running of the store, much less a leadership role, the RCMP Special Branch had evidently decided otherwise.

Having made that conclusion, the RCMP kept busy compiling seemingly innocuous information regarding the Co-op's profits, the formal layout of Co-op meetings, and the content of the Co-op's constitution. Though it is difficult to imagine that anything of importance to the nation's security could have been uncovered in the dealings of an isolated co-operative grocery store, to minds perhaps predisposed to noticing subversive activity there were obvious connections to be

explored here: Sointula Co-op meetings were covered in the pages of the FO newspaper *Vapaus*, Sointula activist Katri Riksmann (pen name - "Grandmother") acting as columnist. As well, the UFAWU (an organization deemed 'subversive' by the RCMP), occasionally covered the activities of the Co-op in the *Fisherman*, noting approvingly at one point that three newly elected members of the Co-op board of directors were members of the UFAWU.⁸³ In a close-knit community such as Sointula there were bound to be connections between the prominent groups in the community, people who were members of the Co-op and the FO, or the UFAWU, and common areas of concern and interest such as the state of the fishing industry, or the Peace movement. In that sense, the Co-op was as much a part of the 'subversive activity' occurring in Sointula, as any other group or individual on the island.

This 'close-knit' nature apparently prevented effective surveillance of the community. An October 6, 1955 RCMP Special Branch report noted that "very little information has been received in respect to subversive affairs at Sointula, B.C. during the past two or three years, due to the fact that we have no coverage of activities at that point".⁸⁴ The report ends with the hope that they would be able to procure a *new* informant. Though evidently at one point there was an informant on or near the island, clearly no group or individual for several years was willing to aid the RCMP. In the outside world, a small co-op with 'subversive' ties may well have faced greater surveillance and pressure from both a conservative minded public and conservative authorities. The communal bonds of Malcolm Island helped insulate the co-op from such concerns, allowing it to all but ignore the ideological pressures of the cold war.

During the 1950s and into the 1960s the co-op continued to do well for itself

and to provide material benefits for the community. Actions such as bringing electricity to the island and providing an office for the doctor have already been mentioned, but there were also simple gestures such as cash donations to the Sointula Women's softball team, the Sointula Library, and even to the Alert Bay Empire Day celebration. The co-op supplied boxes of oranges for the UFAWU's children's Christmas party at the FO Hall and gave turkeys to the staff on most Christmases. There was also innovative thinking in customer accounts, one Co-op member being allowed to pay off his overdue bill in tomatoes, another to keep his overdue account open if he at least made an effort to get some money by going fishing.⁸⁵ Despite the changes that had begun to develop with the influx of new Finns and of new logging families, the Co-op store still had a very close connection with the community - indeed, over half the adults in Sointula were members.

Ironically, the communal concern of the Co-op and the shared co-operative/socialist values it maintained with the community may well have contributed to its decline in the 1960s. An early example was the formation in April 1957 of a union, Local 1518 of the Retail Food and Drug Clerks Union (RFDCU). Though no clear chain of events remains in the records, at least one informed voice believes that the union was brought in by the 1956 board of directors themselves, presumably as an ideological gesture to recognize workers' rights.⁸⁶ Certainly, the Co-op minutes contain no stated reservations about having a union and the members unanimously approved of the union at a general meeting.⁸⁷ The shareholders and board of directors of a private, profit-driven company would undoubtedly have been less enthusiastic for unionization; however, on Malcolm Island it made sound

ideological sense.

From a pure business viewpoint, however, it was a disruptive move. Union/management relations gradually became less amicable and culminated in two narrowly averted strikes in 1968 and 1970. Wages appear to have been the key stumbling block, with major disagreements arising during times of economic hardship for the Co-op. It is difficult to judge if increased union demands had any real detrimental effect on the Co-op's profit margins or if the working atmosphere in the store suffered from the conflict. But the very presence of the union affected decisions made outside Malcolm Island. In 1969, during a time of financial crisis for the store, several banks and credit unions turned down the Co-op's request for a loan. The Industrial Development Bank of Victoria (a federal crown corporation) rejected the application because of the Co-op's lack of operating capital and especially, the existence of a union. Feelings in the Co-op had changed so much by 1970 that the board of directors seriously considered terminating the union contract.⁸⁸ The socialist values of the past were coming into conflict with the economic problems of the present. Though the union remained, the ideological optimism that had welcomed its presence became much more subdued as a result of financial difficulties.

The Co-op's non-capitalist ideology may have also contributed to its decline through the dissolution of the 'customer savings'. Before the appearance of the credit union, the Co-op had maintained a makeshift bank on its premises, continuing this practice until the mid 1960s. Though this practice had originated as a service to the community, attested to by the Income Tax Appeal Board's 1953 ruling that this money was a debt not working capital, it had developed into an integral part of the

Co-op's finances. Dave Siider, Co-op board member in the 1960s, noted that when Myntti retired in 1967, the store had \$80,000.00 in customer savings, which it used as working capital. Perhaps alarmed by the prospect of theft (there had been an unsuccessful robbery of the Co-op in the early 1960s), perhaps feeling that acting as a bank fell outside the Co-op's mandate, Myntti had begun to encourage members to remove their savings from the store. Though Co-op records show that he had secured the board's agreement for a gradual discontinuation of this service in 1965,⁸⁹ Siider suggests that Myntti left the board "flabbergasted" when he encouraged members to withdraw their funds at a 1967 general meeting and that this loss of operating capital left the Co-op in a serious economic bind.⁹⁰ Whether the termination of this service took the board by surprise or not, there is no doubt that lack of working capital affected the Co-op's finances. It is difficult to imagine a for-profit organization willingly forgoing \$80,000.00 of working capital; given its different set of priorities, the Co-op did what it felt was best for the community, even to its own financial detriment.

The most serious crisis confronting the Co-op came at the end of the 1960s, aided possibly by an adherence to co-operative ideals. One of the guiding principles of the co-operative movement is co-operation among co-operatives. The Sointula Co-op Store generally accepted that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, attending provincial co-op meetings, negotiating loans with other co-ops, and advising potential co-ops on how best to get started. In the latter part of the 1960s, however, the Sointula Co-op took this co-operation to a new level, connecting itself more and more with the BC Co-op Wholesale, an organization that supplied goods, organized co-

operative events, and provided financial assistance for many BC Co-ops. The Sointula Co-op had already received advice on union negotiations from the Co-op Wholesale and had attended some of its workshops for managers and store clerks. Finding itself without a manager upon Myntti's retirement in August 1967, the Sointula Co-op asked the Co-op Wholesale to supply a temporary manager and to undertake its accounting.⁹¹ Though past experience in the fishing co-ops and in the left-wing political arena had taught Malcolm Islanders to be wary of outside control over their affairs, in this instance the Sointula Co-op decided to be guided by the Co-op Wholesale, a seemingly like-minded group adhering to the same co-operative principles as it did.

The new manager arrived from the BC Co-op Wholesale in October 1967. A November 19, 1967 report by the Sointula Co-op noted that the account with the Wholesale was paid up to date and that there were no outstanding bills. Within four months the Sointula store had acquired an \$80,000 debt with the Co-op Wholesale. In a letter drafted on July 20, 1968 the Sointula Board of Directors accused the Co-op Wholesale of setting out to gain control of the Sointula Co-op by getting their manager to push the Wholesale's most expensive goods on it and also, as its accountant, of deliberately not paying Sointula's bills to other suppliers, to ruin its credit with these alternate sources and thus force a reliance on the Wholesale for supplies.⁹²

It is important to note that no proof of deliberate deception by the Wholesale was ever presented. With their long standing distrust of authority and outsiders perhaps Malcolm Islanders misinterpreted simple mismanagement or inexperience by

the new manager. Regardless of how the event came about, its impact made the next six years perhaps the most difficult economically in the Co-op's entire existence. The BC Wholesale ignored all accusations made against it, firmly requesting its money (up to \$84,000 at one point), while the banks would not provide loans to an organization that was both unionized and operating with low working capital. The scene was reminiscent of the earliest days of the Kalevan Kansa: the company badly in debt and outside help not forthcoming, Malcolm Islanders forced to rally to save a community institution.

This time Malcolm Islanders did not rally. Both the tight communal bonds and the role of the Co-op in people's lives had changed somewhat in the preceding decade, a change brought on by a closer connection with the outside world. In part, it was a connection that had been fostered by the Co-op itself. Responding to a request from the Sointula and Alert Bay Joint Board of Trade, the Co-op had lobbied the Ministry of Highways in 1965 for improved ferry links between Sointula, Alert Bay, and Vancouver Island.⁹³ Whether influenced by the Co-op's actions or not, by the early 1970s the government was running a regular roll-on, roll-off vehicle ferry between Sointula and Vancouver Island. Even before this event, Malcolm Islanders were traveling off the island in increasing numbers. In 1966/67, passengers to and from the island made 16, 947 trips; by 1971/72 period, that figure had gone up to 36,646⁹⁴. A trend toward increased contact with the rest of the province that had begun in the World War II period was intensifying.

As communities such as Port McNeil began to develop in the 1960s, Malcolm Islanders found themselves with relatively easy access to other grocery and hardware

stores. The practical necessity of having the Co-op on Malcolm Island was decreasing as was the ideological commitment of the community to it. Moreover, some may have started questioning the Co-op's importance to the community. When the co-op board froze the redemption of shares during financially troubled times in the 1960s and early 1970s, many members lost faith in the institution.⁹⁵

On March 26, 1973 the board of directors met to discuss the fate of the Sointula Co-op Association, whose members' interest was practically non-existent. That December the board sent out a questionnaire to all Co-op members asking if they wished to sell the Co-op and all its properties; in February 1974 they tallied the results: 90 Yes to 38 No. The Sointula Co-operative Store Board now had a mandate to sell the co-op.⁹⁶

Several factors prevented the Co-op from dissolving at this point. A new manager, Hugh Macmillan who had arrived on August 31, 1968, "put the Co-op on its feet".⁹⁷ During his six-year tenure Macmillan narrowly avoided two potentially disabling strikes while slowly building up the store with capable management. In that endeavour, Macmillan was aided by bookkeeper Phillip Au, described by board member Olga Landsdowne as a financial 'whiz' who saved every penny he could for the store.⁹⁸ Macmillan also may have been helped by a bit of good luck in the form of an amalgamation between the BC Co-op Wholesale and the Federated Co-operative of Saskatoon in May 1970. By the end of the year, the Federated Co-op agreed to turn Sointula's debt into a loan to be paid off monthly. Though it is impossible to say if the BC Wholesale would have offered a similar arrangement on its own, the fact that it hadn't in the two years before the amalgamation and given the Sointula Co-op's

well-noted distrust of the Wholesale, this development appeared to be fortunate. The Co-op's economic position continued to advance over the next few years; an April 27, 1973 directors reported to the annual meeting that 1972 saw "the first indication of the Co-op Store becoming a profitable operation again" with net income for the year reaching over \$18,000, and the debt to Federated Co-op paid down to \$32,000.00; by February, 1974, the minutes noted that the store was in a strong financial position. Ironically this statement was made on the same day as the members decided to sell the store if a suitable buyer appeared.⁹⁹ Harold Macmillan resigned leaving the store to be run by Phillip Au.

Though strengthening the store's finances undoubtedly contributed to its continued longevity, what kept the store going may have had more to do with geography. Though it is merely conjecture, it seems likely that a unionized store on an out of the way island may not have been first choice for any prospective buyer. As well, though getting on and off the island was becoming easier, the Co-op was still the most convenient place for Malcolm Islanders to shop. All mention of selling the store and its properties disappeared from the minutes of the rest of the decade. The co-op store is still an important business in Sointula (April 2006). The events of the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, appeared to be the beginning of a new era; the co-op store was no longer 'the heart' of an isolated homogenous community.

Conclusion

Since the 1970s the institutions of Sointula have continued to adapt to changed circumstances and ideologies as Malcolm Islanders have become increasingly affected by outside influences. In the late 1960s and early 1970s a sizable group of young left-wing American immigrants or “hippies” came to the island. They reinforced socialist and co-operative idealism, while at the same time altering the community’s more staid social conventions and further weakening the predominance of the Finnish language on the island.¹⁰⁰ Fishing became increasingly profitable in the 1980s before a downturn through over-fishing and the influence of the federal government’s Fleet Rationalization Strategy, dramatically cut the number of fishers on the island. Both the increase in profit, which focussed many fishers on material gain over union support, and the steep decline, which forced many fishers (especially young ones) out of the industry, affected Malcolm Island’s ideological commitments (resident Lennie Pohto estimates that the Fleet Rationalization Strategy caused the UFAWU to lose half its membership on the island).¹⁰¹ Increasing competition for the co-operative store in nearby communities and in superstores and the formation of new types of co-ops on Malcolm Island that depended on government grants for development, further altered established views and relationships. These ‘outside’ forces continued to alter the ideals that had largely formed the community and given it its identity.

As long as Sointula remained a hard to reach island with an ethnically uniform population, a defined socialist leaning, and a bias towards co-operative dealings over

capitalist entrepreneurship, social change was unlikely. Better transportation, a change in ethnic and political makeup, and a slow waning and alteration of the co-operative spirit, insured that social transition occurred. For much of the twentieth century however, this transition was controlled and directly influenced by the original ideals and practical lessons learned from the island's utopian phase, and from the nineteenth century influences placed on the original Finnish settlers. So, the fear of authority that inspired the Kalevan Kansa model transferred into a rejection of formal municipal governance in favour of informal leadership, as provided by the Sointula Co-operative Store. Fervent belief in Socialism eased into union support and the backing of main stream left of centre parties, the former waning as changing economic conditions made union support appear as an impractical option. Adherence to Finnish identity and culture, absolute in the island's utopian period, would be maintained through the formation of the Finish Organization and would only wane as this organization became untenable and as the force of English-speaking immigration became too strong. Even the shift towards the acceptance of organized religion was tempered by the island's original religious scepticism; 610 of the islands 890 residents declaring 'no religious affiliation' in the 2001 Canadian Census.¹⁰² The ideals of the co-operative movement, of socialism, religious scepticism and Finnish identity and culture were cemented during the original Sointula Utopia; these ideals formed the character of Malcolm Island and its residents for most of the remaining decades of the twentieth century.

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