

**“SHE’S THE QUEEN OF EVERYONE’S HEART”:
COMMUNITY, GENDER, MORALITY AND SEXUALITY IN THE
“QUEEN VAL-VEDETTE” AND “QUEEN AURORA OF THE EVERGREENS”
BEAUTY PAGEANTS, 1948-1970**

by

Alison Matte

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ABSTRACT

During the decades immediately following the Second World War, beauty pageants were popular spectacles throughout North American society. In contests held in Penticton and Prince George, British Columbia during the 1950s and 1960s, the winners were named “Queen Val-Vedette” and “Queen Aurora of the Evergreens” respectively. As indicated by unique titles awarded to the queens, these pageants held very specific meanings to some residents. Beauty contests were used as outlets for these residents’ to express their sense of community identity, as well as gendered expectations for local young women. This thesis argues that the Penticton and Prince George pageants shared many similarities but ultimately portrayed their candidates and queens in manners that reflected divergent local values. These specific meanings did not necessarily translate to the provincial level, as evidenced by Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora of the Evergreen’s involvement with the “Miss Pacific National Exhibition” pageant in Vancouver, British Columbia.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	17
Chapter 2	48
Chapter 3	76
Conclusion	101
Bibliography	106

Introduction

A record crowd of over 5,000 visitors and citizens filled expanded seating facilities at the Peach Bowl in Queen's Park to capacity last night for the crowning of a new Peach Festival Queen. Miss Carol Malmberg received the royal sceptre, robes and crown to become Queen Val-Vedette X with Lanore Lodomex and Beverley Bond, princesses, in one of the most colorful [sic] Peach Festival coronation pageants ever held.¹

This quote from an article gracing the front page of a 1957 edition of Penticton's newspaper and the accompanying photograph of the coronation depicted a typical beauty pageant crowning ceremony for the British Columbia town. The anonymous writer noted that the ceremony proceeded with considerable fanfare and allowed the new queen the opportunity to address the audience. Queen Carol expressed confidence in her ability to reign because of the support of her 'subjects' and implored them to "enjoy every minute of [the] festival because [their happiness] will be [her] greatest pleasure." To strengthen the links between the new regent and her people, the ceremony closed with a local singer performing a song called "She's the Queen of Everyone's Heart."² In her own words, the 1957 Peach Queen touched on a central feature of beauty queens during the 1950s and 1960s in British Columbia communities. Once a candidate for the crown won the title, she was no longer an individual young woman, but rather a representative of her community and a symbol of its particular character. She was to mirror a specific impression of her town's identity and its expectations for its young female citizens.

The Penticton beauty contest was one of many pageants held throughout North America in the mid-twentieth century. Beauty contests were popular throughout the immediate postwar period and in particular saw an increased presence in American and

¹ "Big Festival Crowd Hails Peach Queen," *Herald*, 16 August 1957, 1.

² "Queen Crowning, Parade Highlight Festival," *Herald*, 16 August 1957, 1-2.

Canadian society between 1945 and 1970. In their book, *American Women in the 1960s: Changing the Future*, Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green argue that the annual occurrence of over five thousand beauty contests across the globe epitomized their direct connection to mainstream and traditional beauty standards.³ Given their pervasive presence throughout Canadian and the American societies, the study of pageants can reveal a great deal regarding different communities' priorities and character.

Many scholars have until relatively recently been reluctant to consider beauty contests as legitimate subjects of study, despite the increase in the number of beauty contests after the Second World War, and their role in many women's experiences during the 1960s. Sarah Banet-Weiser acknowledged this lack of scrutiny in her book, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*, as in her introduction she admitted that the study of pageants is not taken seriously because they are only 'fun,' and that they are simply a reflection of popular culture and thus 'what you see is what you get.'⁴ Noting that their academic colleagues typically view beauty contests negatively, Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje admitted that in drawing together their essay collection on beauty contests throughout the world, they had noted to be aware of their own biases regarding the nature of pageants.⁵ This reluctance to view beauty contests as legitimate subjects of study amongst academic circles explains why few historians have turned their attention to the deeper meanings evident in the staging of pageants.

³ Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green, *American Women in the 1960s: Changing the Future* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 331.

⁴ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 4-5.

⁵ Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk and Beverly Stoeltje, "Introduction: Beauty Queens on the Global Stage," in *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests and Power*, eds. Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk and Beverly Stoeltje (New York: Routledge, 1996), 5.

This thesis specifically examines the two beauty queen examples of “Queen Val-Vedette” in Penticton and “Queen Aurora of the Evergreens” in Prince George from 1948 to 1970. While the two communities are located in very different regions of British Columbia and may seem disconnected from one another, their respective queen contests did not operate in isolation from each other and had comparable organizational structures. Penticton pageant planners established a Val-Vedette tradition soon after the end of the Second World War and quickly developed a contest built on tradition and the promotion of its candidates’ morality. The contest itself became a crucial means of expressing local middle-class sociability through a series of carefully organized teas, balls and parties. Because of these features, the Peach Queen contest and its eventual winner reflected very specific ideas as promoted by some of Penticton’s most prominent citizens.

The Queen Aurora pageant reflected, to a certain extent, many values similar to those emphasized by Val-Vedette organizers. Founded several years later and partly inspired by the Penticton contest, the Prince George pageant strove to promote respectability and morality, while at the same time contradicting that message in freely and questionably promoting candidates’ bodies. Exemplifying gendered experiences of the time, candidates for and winners of the Aurora crown were similarly presented as overtly feminine and sexualized beings. A careful balance between sexuality and chastity, activity and passivity, characterized the Prince George pageant. Despite trivialization by some scholars, the Penticton and Prince George examples clearly illustrate the validity of beauty contests as subjects of study. The meanings ascribed to the two contests and their winners reflected the public needs of Penticton and Prince George, as well as a sense of community identity. At the same time, participation on the wider provincial stage, as

represented by involvement in the “Miss Pacific National Exhibition” (PNE) pageant in Vancouver, robbed these contests of their local meaning in favor of more homogeneous ideals. Essentially, the sense of community assigned to Penticton and Prince George’s beauty queens had far greater meaning *within* their respective towns than throughout B.C. as a whole.

Feminists have always monitored the practice of staging beauty contests, and within the existing historiography, Second Wave Feminism often influenced early works. Second Wave feminists tended to focus primarily on the most famous example of the “Miss America” pageant, while Second Wave scholarship brought attention to the pageant’s presentation as representing more than just harmless fun. Lois Banner’s groundbreaking book *American Beauty* examines the role of the Miss America contest in American society, and argues that beauty contests have been merely one example of perceiving “the pursuit of beauty” as a crucial, exclusively female endeavour. Banner’s twelfth chapter, “The Pursuit of Beauty as Women’s Role: The Beauty Contest, 1800-1921,” traces the history of beauty contests, culminating in the staging of the first Miss America contest in 1921.⁶ She examines the implications of an emerging beauty system, including the rise of modeling as a respectable profession for women, and the prominence of May Day queens and newspaper beauty contests eventually leading to the crowning of Miss America in Atlantic City. These developments sustained the promotion of a ‘Cinderella mythology’ whereby women were encouraged to view beauty as a critical endeavour as it was a primary marker for their success.⁷ Banner’s discussion of the tension that resulted from the promotion of candidates’ wholesome nature despite the

⁶ See Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 249-270.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

emphasis on their bodily features is especially significant, as several scholars later noticed this observation in their own work. Her book is one of the first scholarly works to consider the development of American beauty standards and by extension the rise of beauty contests, and is therefore an important source for understanding beauty contests of mid-twentieth century North America.

As evidenced by the famous protest of the contest in 1968, feminists increasingly condemned the Miss America pageant as an antiquated ritual damaging to women and resistant to social change.⁸ One of the more prominent examples is Naomi Wolf, who considers beauty contests such as Miss America to be merely a part of the larger ‘beauty myth’ whereby women must strive for personal desirability to ensure men’s institutional power. Indeed, Wolf presents the beauty myth as another Feminine Mystique, whereby the emphasis on “virtuous beauty” replaced “virtuous domesticity.”⁹ Other scholars similarly focus on the damaging nature of beauty contests to women, as Angela J. Latham argues that early beauty contests served as opportunities to promote “ritualized legitimization” of public feminine nudity, and that queens are admired because of the appeal of their exposed and scrutinized bodies.¹⁰ Jennifer Jones has an especially scathing assessment as she argues that all beauty contests are “fundamentally based in the objectification of young women and dependent upon women's participation in a competitive rather than cooperative relationship.”¹¹ This overtly critical perspective on the nature of beauty pageants is important to pageantry’s full historiography, as it

⁸ See Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 260-261. Peiss designate this protest as a particular important point the history of Second Wave Feminism.

⁹ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (Toronto: Random House, 1990), p. 18. For comparison, see Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Laurel, 1983).

¹⁰ Angela J. Latham, “Packaging Women: The Concurrent Rise of Beauty Pageants, Public Bathing, and Other Forms of Female ‘Nudity,’” *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 3 (1995): 150.

¹¹ Jennifer Jones, “The Beauty Queen as Sacrificial Victim,” *Theatre History Studies* 18 (1998): 99.

presents a prominent perspective within the earlier understanding of pageants' role within North American society.

In response to such criticism, some books were written with the intention of explaining the harmless nature of pageants and their popularity within North American society. Frank Delford's book *There She is: The Life and Times of Miss America* celebrates the endurance of the Miss America contest throughout the decades of the twentieth century. He is enthusiastically supportive of the Miss America ideal, and provides insight into why Miss America, and by extension the general beauty pageant model, has historically enjoyed strong support. He addresses the criticisms of Miss America, but notes that they are merely 'incidental,' as the contest is meant to be an escape from normalcy.¹² Although his book is not a peer-reviewed source, Delford's work has some value as he bluntly asserts many opinions associated with pageantry. He freely notes that "[the] basic, and base, pageant appeal is, and always has been, girl-watching—and the fewer the clothes the better. Nobody, of course, even dares suggest this any more [sic], so pageant people have quite convinced themselves that everybody is there for all sorts of different, more uplifting reasons."¹³ Oddly enough, Delford agrees with the criticism of many feminists, as he concedes that beauty pageants rely on the objectification of women. While the implications of such an argument are somewhat intellectually unsatisfying in their refusal to consider pageants beyond their baseness, Delford nevertheless presents a popular view of beauty pageants, which is important to keep in mind when considering a contest's appeal to a specific community.

¹² Frank Delford, *There She is: The Life and Times of Miss America* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 8-9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11. Also see Henry Pang, "Miss America: An American Ideal, 1921-1969," *Journal of Popular Culture* 2, no. 4 (1969): 687-696. Although technically published in a respected journal, Pang's article provides little actual academic insight into the pageant but instead almost exclusively praises it.

Scholars eventually built upon the foundation established by feminist works regarding the historical meanings and controversies associated with the Miss America contest. Rather than focusing exclusively on Miss America's contributions to the study of femininity, they tended to consider other meanings associated with the pageant. Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin published an article and later an accompanying book that compiles a series of articles pertaining to multiple aspects of Miss America.¹⁴ Structured with the intention of reflecting the different meanings ascribed to the contest and the different issues typically associated with its staging, their book details not only the history of the pageant, but also how it has dealt with race, the notion of 'whiteness,' and the perspective of individuals personally involved with a Miss America contest 'franchise.' Watson and Martin's work emphasizes the importance of approaching such a controversial beauty contest as Miss America with the awareness that its production is ascribed with multiple meanings. Coupled with an extensive history of the contest throughout the twentieth century, it provides valuable insight into Miss America's place within the historiography of beauty contests.

More recent historiography tends to consider the connection between beauty pageants and the expression of community sense of self. Third Wave Feminism has informed some scholars who emphasize the ambiguity of beauty contests as sites to objectify women while also allowing them the opportunity for self-promotion and expression. A particularly engaging article was that of Wendy Kozol who considers the relationship between the "Miss Indian America" contest and aboriginal cultures in the

¹⁴ See Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin, "The Miss America Pageant: Pluralism, Femininity, and Cinderella All in One," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 1 (2000): 105-126, and Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin, *There she is, Miss America": The Politics of Sex, Beauty, and Race in America's Most Famous Pageant* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

United States. She notes that the beauty contest portrayals of women have been criticized, but that scholars must look beyond the view of pageants as sites of oppression. She argues that the Miss Indian America pageant served as a site to negotiate a sense of aboriginal identity as well as a broader sense of being American. The pageant allowed its candidates the rare opportunity to be represented as authentic and modern aboriginal women within American society, and was therefore an important tool for constructing ethnic identity.¹⁵ Scholars have made similar arguments regarding the “Ten Types – One People” contest in Jamaica, the “Hoa Hau Ao Dai” contests in Vietnamese-American society, and various pageants throughout India.¹⁶ Although this notion of beauty contests as not being wholly damaging to its candidates is not without its issues, it relates to the scholarly notion of studying the complexities associated with beauty pageants instead of dismissing them as nothing more than entertainment or exclusively harmful to women.

The historiographical movement to consider beauty contests as linked to the articulation of community identity has emphasized the issue of ethnicity. Christine R. Yano argues that the Hawai’i’s Cherry Blossom Queen was both a product of, as well as a catalyst for changes within Hawai’i’s Japanese-American community. This queen had to navigate a careful path between notions of being American and what it meant to be Japanese in relation to concepts of diaspora and authenticity. Yano discusses how the Cherry Blossom Queen contest resembled more mainstream pageants while at the same time revealing deep complexities. Rather than serving as a copy of Miss America, Cherry

¹⁵ Wendy Kozol, “Miss Indian America: Regulatory Gazes and the Politics of Affiliation,” *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 1 (2005): 64-94.

¹⁶ See Rochelle Rowe, “‘Glorifying the Jamaican Girl’: The ‘Ten Types – One People’ Beauty Contest, Racialized Femininities, and Jamaican Nationalism,” *Radical History Review* 103 (2009): 36-58; Nhi T. Lieu, “Remembering ‘The Nation’ through Pageantry: Femininity and the Politics of Vietnamese Womanhood in the ‘Hoa Hau Ao Dai’ Contest,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. 1/2 (2000): 127-151; Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, “Writing the Nation on the Beauty Queen’s Body: Implications for a ‘Hindu’ Nation,” *Meridians* 4, no. 1 (2003): 205-227.

Blossom Queen femininity adhered to a traditional notion of being Asian. Presented as authentic, this sense of Asian identity was ultimately constructed as a reaction to mainstream American culture's popularity. Stephen A. Fielding highlights the construction of Italian-Canadian identity through the popularity of the 'Miss Columbo' pageant in Trail, British Columbia, during the 1970s in a similar manner. He argues that the contest served as an important opportunity to articulate the meaning of Italian identity within the small working-class town while illustrating the role of gender within Trail's Little Italy.¹⁷ Like Yano, he argues that the contest was an opportunity to negotiate a sense of being Italian as a minority within a larger community. Fielding's argument is especially useful to a discussion of beauty queens in British Columbia not only because his work is one of the few examines a specific example of beauty queens within the province, but because it recognizes that beauty contests functioned as important sites for constructing community identity and navigating between cultural ideas and notions of authenticity.

Robert Lavenda is one scholar who has also considered the relationship between a community and its beauty contest. Rather than examining a particular ethnic or cultural community, he has instead focused on geographic communities. Studying what he refers to as "Queen Contests" in small towns throughout Minnesota and how they were different from and were similar to the larger example of Miss America, Lavenda argues that despite similarities in structure with the Miss America contest, Minnesota pageants had significantly different meanings. Through efforts to crown the girl best suited to

¹⁷ See Stephen A. Fielding, "The Changing Face of Little Italy: The Miss Columbo Pageant and the Making of Ethnicity in Trail, British Columbia, 1970-1977," *Urban History Review* 39, no. 1 (2010): 45-58. Fielding notes that the pageant was especially important to Trail's Italian community given the anxieties about "the boundaries of local Italian ethnicity."

represent her town, the judging process did not necessarily favour the girl who was seemingly the most beautiful or talented, but rather the girl who best embodied the community's spirit. This had considerable implications for the practices of pageantry in Minnesota, as girls vying for the crown were often literally "the girl next door." Overtly desexualized, Minnesota queen pageants offered a portrait of their candidates as the community's daughters and not its potential wives.¹⁸ For Lavenda Minnesota pageantry promoted candidates who embodied:

the hopes and ambitions of an upwardly mobile small-town middle class. She must be Everywoman—or Everygirl. This means she must be neither outstandingly good nor outstandingly bad, but instead must represent a golden mean of accomplishment that appears accessible to all respectable girls of her class in her town and other similar small towns. Queen pageants are therefore very serious because they produce a winner who represents what small-town residents want to think about themselves.¹⁹

Based on geography rather than ethnicity, Lavenda's conclusions form a key point of departure for this thesis as its emphasis on Minnesota pageants is relevant to the study of British Columbian pageants.

When considering beauty contests held in Penticton and Prince George during the 1950s and the 1960s, other works must be consulted alongside those pertaining to the historiography of pageants. Sources relating to the history of British Columbia in general and specifically the two communities must also be considered. If there is an indication that the pageants' characters differ, then it is valuable to understand how the nature of the two towns may also be dissimilar. The development of the two British Columbian communities can help shed light on how they may have viewed themselves and their history. Paul M. Koroscil's argument regarding the township of Penticton's development

¹⁸ Robert H. Lavenda, "Minnesota Queen Pageants: Play, Fun, and Dead Seriousness in a Festive Mode," *The Journal of American Folklore* 101, no. 400 (1988): 169.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

is particularly relevant. He explains the importance of agriculture, and specifically the promotion of fruit crops and orchards (including peach orchards) to the development of the town site during the early twentieth century. The people who settled in Penticton and the surrounding area were often well-educated and of British descent, and typically held a great deal of capital before settling. Thus, Penticton has typically been portrayed as a site of “Sunshine, Fruit and Flowers [sic]” with a historically well-established, middle-class population.²⁰ This would eventually be reflected in the nature of its queen contest.

In the case of Prince George, F. E. Runnals’ book, *A History of Prince George*, is an important source for understanding Prince George’s roots in the old site of Fort George.²¹ But Robert Neil Diaz’s Master’s thesis, “Reshaping the Land: An Environmental History of Prince George, British Columbia,” is particularly revelatory as he explains how early economic endeavours shaped the nature of the city. The heavy reliance on resource extraction, particularly through mining and forestry, shaped people’s perceptions of the region, and by extension its identity. Mia Reimers touches on a similar observation in her thesis, as she notes the transient worker population that characterized Prince George and its surrounding area.²² The ‘boom and bust’ Prince George economy based on resource extraction gave the town a distinct character and sense of identity that was in turn reflected in its local beauty pageant. This notion of nature appears in the associated imagery of the Queen Aurora pageant. Contest organizers routinely emphasized an association with forests, wilderness, and Aurora Borealis throughout the annual proceedings, and they made similar careful efforts to control the feminine image

²⁰ Paul M. Koroscil, *The British Garden of Eden: Settlement History of the Okanagan Valley, British Columbia* (Burnaby: Geography Department, Simon Fraser University, 2003), 194-226.

²¹ F.E. Runnals, *A History of Prince George* (Prince George: Fraser-Fort George Museum Society, 1983).

²² Mia Reimers. “The Glamour and the Horror: A Social History of Wartime Northwestern British Columbia, 1939-1945,” Master’s Thesis, Prince George, University of Northern British Columbia, 10.

of its beauty queen. Through an understanding of each town's background one can gain a better understanding of their contests.

Notwithstanding the work of several scholars, beauty contests in neither the Okanagan nor the northern interior of British Columbia have been the subject of sustained scholarly enquiry. An even greater reliance on primary sources is therefore required to shed light on the local beauty contests of the immediate postwar period. Archival materials, such as brochures and event programs provide valuable information as to the nature of beauty queens' roles and their prominence within their communities. Newspapers are arguably the most important primary sources, as they provide a wealth of information regarding the staging of the Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora contests. They reported extensively on the associated local festivals and celebrations, and therefore featured numerous articles detailing the staging of pageants, often on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. A thorough image of both pageants emerges through consultation of Penticton's *Herald* and Prince George's *Citizen* throughout the years between 1900 and 1970.²³ Newspapers were therefore the single most important methodological tool for the research and writing of this thesis.

Newspapers also frequently published photographs of the Val-Vedette and Aurora contest proceedings. These images were valuable in the study of Penticton and Prince George's queens as they gave further insight into how the girls were publicly presented. They were also a convenient means for many residents to view the candidates and

²³A particular emphasis was placed on the years after 1921, which marked the staging of the first Miss America contest as the introduction of beauty pageants to a much wider audience. The majority of the most relevant *Herald* articles were published from 1948 onward, while the most relevant *Citizen* articles first began to appear in 1958. This discrepancy in dates can be explained by the fact that while the Queen Val-Vedette contest was first held in 1948, the Queen Aurora contest was not introduced until a full decade later. Specific search terms related to beauty contests were also used, as well as more thorough searching through reels of microfilm. Both methods were used to ensure more accurate research and the lack of online access to the Penticton *Herald*.

queens, as many people surely were unable or chose not to attend contest functions and ceremonies. Although there are issues associated with the constructed meanings in photographs as historical sources, several images are nevertheless reproduced in this thesis.²⁴ Whether used as a means to learn more about each contest or to compare the differences and similarities between Penticton and Prince George's pageants, they are another primary source that, along with newspaper articles and announcements, shed light on the constructed identities of Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora of the Evergreens.

Newspapers are not unproblematic sources. Discussions of the successes and failures of staging a local festival celebrating community pride, such as Val-Vedette's Peach Festival and Queen Aurora's Simon Fraser Days, tend to overstate the celebrations' accomplishments. Portrayals of the festivities, and by extension their beauty contests, assume a tone of universal acceptance and the town's enthusiastic embrace. Indeed, the image of beauty contests in these newspapers often borders on propaganda promoting an unwavering sense of community pride. Yet at the same time the newspapers also provide hints of dissension by some residents, most notably in the 'Letters to the Editor' section against a backdrop of overwhelming town unity marking a celebration of its Peach Festival or Simon Fraser Days.²⁵ Despite such issues, newspapers provide an in-depth view into the workings of the two communities' beauty contests.

While oral history is a valuable resource, especially in the study of history as recent as the late 1960s, it is a tool that was not used in the research for this thesis.

²⁴ For a discussion of the complex nature of photography as a historical source, see Martha A. Sandweiss, "Image and Artifact: The Photograph as Evidence in the Digital Age," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (2007): 193-202.

²⁵ For example, see "Queen's Ball Badly Handled," *Citizen*, 17 July 1958, 2.

Several other scholars have published works that feature the use of oral history and that contribute to the historiography of beauty pageants with considerable success. Because this thesis addresses the concept of community identity in relation to pageantry, however, it is important to assess what the community thought of candidates. For the purposes of a Master's thesis, using newspapers as a principal primary source provides a wealth of information especially relevant to Penticton and Prince George's understanding of the queens selected as their representatives.

Through an extensive study of written primary sources, it is clear that the Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora of the Evergreens contests played important roles in Penticton and Prince George, and that gendered notions occupied an equal, if somewhat different role in both pageants. Penticton's prominent citizens supported the Peach Queen pageant and directed the winner to serve a largely social role. The queen, princesses and candidates provided opportunities for the staging of teas, parties and dances at which businessmen and their wives could mingle and reinforce their vision of Penticton. Expected to be a representation of femininity, Val-Vedette set an example for other young women. Placing its queen in more morally questionable situations did not trouble Prince George. Her primary responsibilities involved highly feminized appearances at business openings, draws and contests, and photograph opportunities advertising local events and fundraisers.²⁶ It was more important for Prince George's queen to serve as a reminder of northern girls' beauty and desirability. These localized differences between the Peach Queen and Queen of the Evergreens were evident despite the similarities of

²⁶ The most obvious example of a local event associated with Queen Aurora of the Evergreen's appearance was the March of Dimes.

their respective contests, and revealed the role of regional identity in the formation of smaller beauty contests in British Columbia.

Finally, while Penticton and Prince George's beauty queens held variant roles reflecting localized notions of community identity, an external factor greatly influenced the presentation of the queens outside their towns. By setting the eligibility guidelines for inclusion in the Miss PNE contest, the provincial pageant shaped the image of queens throughout British Columbia. Consequently, the structures and judging processes of the Penticton and Prince George pageants shared similarities in large part because of the incentives associated with having their queens represent their towns in Vancouver. The result was a stultifying effect on smaller, local beauty contests throughout the province. This meant that while Penticton and Prince George residents ascribed local meanings to their beauty contests and eventual winners, the Miss PNE proceedings all but obliterated these meanings. While the Queen Val-Vedette and Aurora of the Evergreens pageants held important roles within their respective towns, their ideals of community identity were abandoned in pursuit of having a local girl represent the province.

Framed in this context Chapter One, "Penticton and its Virtuous, Social Queen," explores the history of the Queen Val-Vedette contest and the winner's place within Penticton society in the creation of middle-class social values. Chapter Two, "Prince George's Queen Aurora of the Evergreens: Morally Acceptable Girl Watching," highlights Aurora's contrasting traditions of "cheesecakey," and public visibility and service. Chapter Three, "The Miss PNE Contest, Community Representation, and the Homogenization of Regional Differences," explores the relationship between the Penticton and Prince George 'feeder' contests and the larger provincial example. It

examines how the Miss PNE pageant affected the structure of smaller contests and imposed a different identity on queen candidates from throughout the province. Ultimately, the demands of provincial legitimization subsumed what had been an exercise in gendered notions of community identity and sense of place that simultaneously shaped and reflected localized traditions in Penticton and Prince George.

Chapter 1

Penticton and its Virtuous, Social Queen

Like other communities throughout British Columbia, Penticton borrowed much of its local imagery from its major economic activities and regional topography. By the mid-twentieth century, Penticton was widely advertised as a “Land of Sunshine, Fruit and Flowers” because of the longstanding importance of fruit orchards to the town’s economy.¹ Blessed with a prosperous lifestyle and temperate weather, Penticton’s image was that of an ideal small town surrounded by orchards and farms. Conceived as a means to attract visitors, this imagery was a central ingredient in promoting the community and the annual Peach Festival occupied a key role in evoking the sense of local pride.

The Peach Festival was an annual mid to late August exhibition featuring a variety of events and attractions. Organizers published flyers and brochures linking the celebrations with concepts of community identity. One such publication claimed “The Festival provides an opportunity for our own people to gather together once each year to celebrate the fact we are blessed with such fine climate, scenery, our vacationland, and to be good hosts to visitors from many other points in Canada and the United States.”² Along with giving fruit growers an opportunity to promote their ‘tree-ripened peaches,’ the brochure boasted of apricots, cherries, apples, pears and plums amongst the other varieties of fruit grown in Penticton and its surrounding area.³ Another brochure added that the festival was one of the most popular summer attractions in the Okanagan and the

¹ Paul M. Koroscil, *The British Garden of Eden: Settlement History of the Okanagan Valley* (Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 2003), 207.

² Penticton Peach Festival and International Square Dance Jamboree, August 1954, MS 51, Penticton Peach Festival Fonds - 1947-1978, 1989, 1991-1998, Penticton Museum and Archives, Penticton, B.C

³ *Ibid.*

entire province.⁴ These descriptions touched on Penticton's character and its ties to the Peach Festival and, in the process, celebrated images of the town as a flourishing community blessed with sunny skies and bountiful fruit trees.

The winner of the local beauty contest was crowned as Queen Val-Vedette in honour of a type of peach commonly grown in Penticton, and she was commonly known as the Peach Queen. One brochure explained that a trio of peaches, Vedette, Valiant and Veteran, were central to Penticton's economy. The "Three Vees" were described as "[p]erfectly free in the stone, of supreme quality, [and] of luscious appearance," and "'par Excellence' of ALL Peach [sic] varieties." It concluded with the remark, "No wonder indeed, that our lovely Peach Queens are named Queen Val-Vedette."⁵ In effect, Queen Val-Vedette, like the fruit that inspired her title, represented the best that Penticton had to offer. Penticton's character echoed in the local queen and beauty contest. Through her involvement and crowning at the Peach Festival, the community's most beautiful peach, Queen Val-Vedette, brought acclaim to Penticton and exemplified the community's superior sense of spirit.

The values promoted through the Peach Festival and the staging of the Queen Val-Vedette contest were manifested through the contest's influences and history, judging system, associated social calendar, and the eventual coronation of the winner. This chapter proceeds through four sections, with each section considering one of these important pageant features, carefully designed to suggest an adherence to popular ideas regarding morality and virtuousness. The girl representing the town was one who did not

⁴ Attend the 7th Annual Penticton and District Peach Festival, August 1954, MS 51, Penticton Peach Festival Fonds - 1947-1978, 1989, 1991-1998, Penticton Museum and Archives, Penticton, B.C.

⁵ Penticton Peach Festival Souvenir Programme, 1952, MS 51, Penticton Peach Festival Fonds - 1947-1978, 1989, 1991-1998, Penticton Museum and Archives, Penticton, B.C.

engage in lewd or disrespectful behavior, who had the appearance of intelligence and physical beauty, and who, by all accounts, was likely to succeed in her chosen endeavours. In short, the Peach Queen was meant to be associated with the notion of respectability. She was supposed to make Penticton proud, and to embody the positive tone set by the pageant and the Peach Festival. It was because of this that the local newspaper, the *Herald*, often included within its pages such comments as “[t]he caliber [sic] and prestige of our royalty has always been a source of civic pride.”⁶ Yet as the candidates played an important role within the community, it was a role understood exclusively within the confines of the Peach Festival itself. The contest’s importance within the community reflected the larger values of Penticton’s most influential citizens, its middle and business classes, and the candidates themselves were limited to a specific, social function almost exclusively within the confines of pageant events.

Contest History

Penticton’s emphasis on respectable royalty followed larger beauty contest trends of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The largest and most popular contest, the Miss America pageant, served as the best example. Under the guidance of newly-appointed pageant director Lenora Slaughter, the Miss America contest underwent several crucial changes beginning in 1945. These changes ensured greater respectability in avoidance of an overt association with ogling bathing beauties. One of the contest’s most important alterations was the awarding of scholarships as prizes, which meant that the contest was no longer simply a beauty pageant. Its defenders could henceforth claim that it was a legitimate means for ambitious girls to better themselves through higher education.

⁶ Beverley Ann Bella, “Come to the Ball – A Festival Fiesta,” *Herald*, 24 July 1965, 5.

Judging criteria changed to present a greater emphasis on the moral virtue of the contest and its contestants. Organizers introduced several new judging categories including “facial beauty, voice and articulate speech, wholesomeness, poise, special abilities, health, hygiene, and dress.”⁷ This system replaced the previous method that more blatantly emphasized the importance of the candidates’ bodies. Beginning in 1948, winners were crowned while wearing evening gowns rather than swimsuits. This indicated a larger effort to decrease the ‘cheesecake’ element in the contest and adhered to the newly emphasized notion of respectability and moral purity. All of these efforts under Slaughter’s management pointed to a new direction for America’s largest beauty contest. She was determined to tone down the negative images associated with pageantry and attempted to instill a sense of respectability within the contest’s proceedings and the individual candidates.

Why are trends within the organization and presentation of the Miss America pageant significant to the study of Penticton’s Queen Val-Vedette contest? Historically, the large-scale American pageant has been widely considered as the epitome of all beauty contests, and smaller contests throughout North America were influenced by its example. Robert H. Lavenda has emphasized several key characteristics between smaller American pageants and the Miss America contest, which were also common features of the Peach Queen pageant.⁸ Further, Candace Savage has noted the influence of the Miss America contest on Canadian pageants in that for several years during the post-Second World War

⁷ John D. Fair, “Mr. and Miss America Contests: A Tale of Contrasting Cultures in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the Georgia Association of Historians* 23 (2002): 10.

⁸ See Robert H. Lavenda, “Minnesota Queen Pageants: Play, Fun, and Dead Seriousness in a Festive Mode,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 101, no. 400 (1988): 168-175. Examples of shared features between small contests and the Miss America pageant include requiring contestants to answer judging questions, and featuring a ceremonial farewell role for retiring queens.

era, Canadian candidates frequently competed in Atlantic City for the title of Miss America. The nation acted as the “fifty-first state,” fielding a candidate to compete amongst girls representing each American state.⁹ While Peach Queen contest organizers did not look directly to the example of Miss America to set the tone of their local contest, they did however follow larger beauty contest trends established by Miss America. Indeed, Penticton contest organizers consciously ignored local precedents in favour of larger pageant trends. The Peach Queen pageant’s focus on morality followed larger beauty contest trends at the time, personified by Lenora Slaughter’s significant changes to the structure of the ever-popular Miss America contest.

A characteristic shared by many queen contests is that they have traditionally been associated with a significant local event. Several scholars have noted that rural communities in the United States staged local festivals to celebrate community economy and identity that frequently integrated into these events.¹⁰ Blain Roberts, in his examination of Great Depression-era small-town beauty contests in the southern United States, argues that agricultural fairs helped usher in a new era of acceptance for beauty contests. He believes that they served as an extension of the existing habit of featuring contests for various agricultural products, but that in their case, the ‘product’ being judged was that of local women’s appearance and character.¹¹ Akin to many other North

⁹ Candace Savage, *Beauty Queens: A Playful History* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1998), 81.

¹⁰ See Jerrilyn Gregory, “Wiregrass Country Pageant Competitions, or what’s Beauty got to do with it?” in *There She Is, Miss America: The Politics of Sex, Beauty, and Race in America’s Most Famous Pageant*, eds. Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 125-134. Gregory cites the examples of the ‘Miss Sweet Gum and Turpentine’, ‘Miss Peanut’ and ‘Miss Swine Time’ as examples of local character being incorporated into various festivals and celebrations.

¹¹ Blain Roberts, “A New Cure for Brightleaf Tobacco: The Origins of the Tobacco Queen during the Great Depression,” *Southern Cultures* 12, no. 2 (2006): 35. Roberts also argues that because of the longstanding tradition of beautiful baby contests often featured at local fairs, beauty contests were simply a natural progression of an existing social event. In some cases, local girls who were entered in earlier beautiful baby contests later went on to compete in local beauty contests.

American communities, Penticton's annual event celebrated local character and served as a site for a queen contest.

Although there were various fairs and festivals throughout Western Canada at the time, the long-standing tradition of the Apple Blossom Festival in Wenatchee, Washington, provided the inspiration for Penticton's Peach Festival. The *Herald* quoted an early Peach Festival organizer who admitted that Penticton had finally decided to enact its own festival after suffering from "a touch of envy" towards the Wenatchee event for many years.¹² The Apple Blossom Queen also visited Penticton before the first Peach Queen was ever crowned. Months before crowning Beverly Ann Young its queen in 1948, Penticton hosted the Wenatchee royal party, who advised on local festival preparations.¹³ Later that same year, candidates for the Peach Queen crown visited Wenatchee in an effort to promote the Peach Festival and further establish the links between both communities' beauty contests. The Peach Festival as a whole, and the Val-Vedette contest specifically, mirrored the traditions of a respectable public celebration that had been an important social event in the Washington community since the 1920s.

The Peach Queen contest was not, however, the first beauty pageant held in Penticton. Years before the first Peach Festival, Penticton held an annual "Miss Penticton" contest, but this predecessor was radically different in its execution. Rather than serving as a means to select a queen who would serve the community, it placed exclusive value on the physical characteristics of its contestants. It was simply an opportunity for local young women clad in swimsuits to parade in front of Pentictonites, as Mavis Stokes, a long-time Penticton resident who was heavily involved with local

¹² "Wenatchee Princesses Welcomed in Valley," *Herald*, 25 March 1948, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

beauty contests, recalled that the judging process only required girls to model swimsuits.¹⁴ After their initial presentation, the *Herald* published the candidates' photos and readers voted exclusively on the girls' appearance. The winner then received a crown, flowers, and various other gifts from local merchants.¹⁵ While in some respects the Miss Penticton pageant followed a basic formula similar to that of the later Queen Val-Vedette (presentation, followed by judging and coronation), the earlier contest relied exclusively on its contestants' appearance without any consideration of their personality and character.

Why then was the earlier Miss Penticton contest important to our understanding of the Peach Queen? It was significant because its precedent was ignored by Peach Queen organizers. The festival committee made no effort to link the traditions of the later contest with its predecessor, and the only mention of the earlier contest appeared in a 1961 edition of the *Herald* when the author indicated that the current Queen-elect was the daughter of a former Miss Penticton. The same article included a recollection from the winner's mother, Mrs. L. G. Smith, who noted that the earlier pageant was "a much simpler and less elaborate celebration."¹⁶ This represented the only effort to link Penticton's history of local beautiful girls competing in community pageants. Perhaps this was because the earlier contest was a much less elaborate affair, but overlooking the precedent also spared any need to consider a contest that exclusively assessed candidates' physical traits. Regardless of the reason, efforts were made to bolster Queen Val-Vedette as *the* queen who best represented the character of Penticton. The Queen Val-Vedette

¹⁴ Doug Cox, *Penticton: Now, Then and Way Back Then* (Penticton: Skookum Publications, 2007), 142.

¹⁵ Cox, 142.

¹⁶ "Hallie in Mother's Royal Footsteps," *Herald*, 13 April 1961, 1.

contest, associated with the Peach Festival from its inaugural staging, marked a shift in Penticton's history of beauty contests.

Public interest in holding a large-scale public fair existed in Penticton during the early decades of the twentieth century, but plans did not come to fruition until after the Second World War. The inaugural Peach Festival marked a new sense of optimism within the town. "What better way to exemplify the new spirit than to have a community wide festival?" commented local historian David A. MacDonald.¹⁷ Organized and unveiled in 1948, the first Peach Festival was celebrated with significant fanfare; and nine months before the festival opened, the *Herald* predicted that it would be "the greatest event in Penticton's history."¹⁸ Although the itinerary always included various events and attractions spanning an entire weekend, the Peach Queen contest was a central feature of the festival from the very beginning. The *Herald* featured a telling description of the contest's first crowning ceremony: "Penticton's long dream of a festival all its own... came true yesterday, when the first Penticton Peach Festival was highlighted by the crowning of its first queen." The coronation was described as "the realization of the hopes of a small group that has worked unceasingly since last December to bring reality out of a vision."¹⁹ The local newspaper depicted the crowning as *the* culminating moment for Penticton's efforts to stage the first Peach Festival. Framing the contest in such terms suggests its importance to the Peach Festival as a whole, since from the very first queen's crowning, the Queen Val-Vedette contest and its annual winners were a crucial attraction within the Peach Festival program.

¹⁷ David A. MacDonald, *Penticton: Years to Remember* (Penticton: City of Penticton, 1983), 61.

¹⁸ "Penticton will Greet Stars of Radio, Rodeo and Screen at Next Week's Peach Festival," *Herald*, 12 August 1948, 1.

¹⁹ "Crowning of Queen Lifts Lid on City's Big Three-Day Carnival," *Herald*, 19 August 1948, 1.

Judging

The Peach Queen judging process went through considerable changes over the years. Between 1948 and 1953 the winner was determined by a public vote with candidates literally required to sell votes to Pentictonites. The money raised through the sale of votes went towards helping finance the Peach Festival, and the girl who sold the most votes won the contest and was subsequently crowned Queen Val-Vedette. Advertisements were published in the paper featuring the candidates' photographs and encouraged the public to choose their favourite girl for the winner. Citizens were urged to "[b]e a booster!" and support their community by buying votes for the candidate who they felt was the prettiest.²⁰ In 1949, citizens were urged to purchase tickets with the assertion: "The tickets you buy will decide who will reign over the biggest celebration in our community's history!"²¹ Vote tallies were periodically recorded and published in the *Herald*, and a 'barometer' or progress report of the race was put on public display during the months of the contest. The *Herald* also periodically published vote tallies throughout the vote-buying period. The goal of the public voting system was to crown the most appealing candidate, which meant that the favorite local girl was chosen by Penticton's citizens as their representative.

If the queen was meant to represent her community, then it would make sense for the Peach Queen to be selected by public vote, as it would allow for the girl with the most community support to be crowned the winner. But according to this system, the candidates' physical appearance was blatantly emphasized over all other traits, as most Pentictonites only had access to the candidates through their images published in the

²⁰ For example, see the full-page advertisement in the *Herald*, 5 August 1948, 5.

²¹ Full-page advertisement, *Herald*, 14 July 1949, 5.

newspaper. Any efforts to promote candidates' personalities were negated by a voting process whereby voters assessed the girls by their published photographs alone. It was furthermore recognized that the girls' sponsoring clubs took over the responsibility of selling votes on behalf of their candidates. The sponsoring club with the largest presence in the community typically fielded the girl who won the contest. Because of the problematic implications of this system, former candidate Deena Clark Conway remarked that the selection process changed because of the "skull-duggery that went on."²² The public vote portion of the contest was gradually phased out, and was completely eliminated by 1954. The initial selection process was eventually deemed too problematic, and was relatively quickly changed so as to maintain the respectability of the Queen Val-Vedette contest.

Beginning in 1954, royal parties were exclusively selected by panels of judges with set itineraries of judging events. This represented a distinct shift away from the public's choosing their favorite girl in favor of a system whereby qualified judges selected the girl who best exemplified perceptions about Penticton and the Peach Festival. Events were normally spread across one or two weeks, and served as opportunities for the public and judges to assess the candidates' appearance, personality and "general intelligence." They also remained remarkably static throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Candidates had to appear on stage at one or both of the local theatres where they delivered prepared speeches. The *Herald* only once commented on the nature of their addresses in a 1962 article which noted that the girls spoke about "various aspects of the Peach Festival."²³ Girls were also interviewed on local CKOK radio, and beginning in

²² Cox, 91.

²³ "Queen Candidates Meet the Public," *Herald*, 25 April, 3.

1958, made television appearances on CHBC-TV in Kelowna. The combination of these events allowed the judges to systematically assess the physical qualities as well as the perceived character and intelligence of each girl. Media appearances also allowed members of the community a greater opportunity to access the candidates and form their own opinions as to who was most worthy of wearing the crown, while the ultimate decision remained with the judges alone. The relatively quick development of a set formula for judging events that emerged in 1954 remained in place throughout the rest of the 1950s and 1960s. This system gave credence to the Peach Queen contest's establishment as a reliable and respectable annual event that was determined by knowledgeable judges rather than the unreliable public.²⁴

Several elements of the judging process reflected this elitist approach to selecting a winner for the Penticton queen contest. First and foremost was that the judges' identities always remained anonymous. Although the number of judges varied over the years of the pageant's history, the public was never privy to the judges' identities. Indeed, their names were *never* publicized, even after the process was complete. Small hints were revealed in the pages of the newspaper over the years, as a *Herald* article from 1959 noted that all the judges were men, while an earlier article also remarked that the 1953 judging panel was composed of "prominent citizens."²⁵ Efforts were also made to ensure that judges' identities were kept secret from one another, and in 1961 Peach Queen organizers went so far as to arrange for five sets of judges to appear at five different

²⁴See Lavenda, 173. Lavenda notes that even judges who were not local residents were often better trusted to select a queen as they were perceived to be well-informed as to who would best represent a particular community to outsiders' eyes.

²⁵ "Nine Queen Hopefuls." *Herald*, 23 April 1959, p. 1; "Peach Queen to be Chosen Friday Night," *Herald*, 15 April 1953, 1.

events, meaning that there were twenty-five anonymous judges in total.²⁶ This secrecy provided the contest with the appearance of greater validity and respectability, as judges could never be accused of showing obvious favoritism, and no candidates could ever be accused of unfairly influencing the judges. But this system also meant that no explanation was ever given as to how judges were qualified to assess the qualities of local girls. The guarded nature of the judging process preserved the candidates' moral character and allowed for the selection of the queen who best revealed set ideas regarding community spirit.

The cautious approach to judging the Peach Queen contest extended to the careful presentation of the candidates to the public. The *Herald* almost always featured candidates' photographs that upheld perceptions of moral decency. These images were often published on the first page and functioned as a means to officially present the beauty of local girls vying for the crown. They were always staged in a specific manner that remained virtually unchanged during the period between 1948 and 1970. Figure 1.1, a common example of photographs included in the *Herald*, shows the Penticton High School candidate for the 1966 title in a typical pose, complete with carefully arranged hair and makeup. Most notably, the photograph only allowed the public to assess her facial beauty. Viewers would not have been able to scrutinize the bodies of Peach Queen candidates. This echoes what several scholars have argued about the nature of community beauty contests wherein organizers always strove to avoid presenting candidates in an overtly sexual manner.²⁷ The Val-Vedette candidates' photographs featured in the

²⁶ "Penticton Peaches Vie for Queen Val-Vedette XIV Honor," *Herald*, 29 April 1961, 1.

²⁷ See Brenda Foley, *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). She argues that while beauty queens cannot fully escape their association with sexuality, they are ultimately carefully monitored and manipulated to ultimately



Figure 1.1. Photograph of candidate Marilyn Jacobson. *Herald*, 17 March 1966, 3.

Penticton newspaper are another example of Peach Festival organizers' efforts to convey an air of respectability amongst candidates and the larger community of Penticton.

The public's inability to evaluate the bodies of Val-Vedette candidates was contrasted with the actual responsibilities of the judges. Judges in charge of selecting the eventual winner had considerable contact with the girls, albeit anonymously, and therefore had ample opportunity to appraise their physical features. Indeed, one of the primary judging criteria throughout the 1950s and 1960s was candidates' "beauty of face and figure," which would have required significant scrutiny of the girls' bodies.²⁸

uphold a wholesome image. This is done through such acts as constant smiling to suggest a "nonthreatening or submissive attitude" and waving like a queen to indicate decorum and control. Also see Roberts, Blain. "A New Cure for Brightleaf Tobacco: The Origins of the Tobacco Queen during the Great Depression" *Southern Cultures* 12, no. 2 (2006): 30-52. He makes a distinction between candidates' hints of *sensuality* and overt sexuality in contest proceedings.

²⁸ "Queen Candidates Meet the Public." *Herald*, 25 April 1962, 3. See Chapter Three for a more extensive consideration of Val-Vedette judging categories.

Including this category within the pageant's judging system while denying Pentictonites the same degree of access to the candidates' bodies avoided some degree of discomfort in recognizing the presence of the girls' figures as objects of sexual desire. It also illustrated the 'trust those who know better' approach to the Peach Queen contest, as the judges were required to view candidates as sexual beings. The public's lack of chances to view the girls' bodies was one method used to ensure that notions of respectability were maintained during the pageant, which ultimately conveyed a guarded approach to the selection of Penticton's Queen Val-Vedette.

Social Role

Candidates were also introduced to some members of the public through carefully staged social events. Girls' attendance on these occasions served as carefully coordinated opportunities for members of Penticton's upstanding citizenry to socialize with each other and observe their queen candidates. Indeed, the Peach Queen was a central feature not only of the annual festival, but also of Penticton's entire social season. The contest provided the community with the perfect excuse to host a variety of parties and events featuring important Pentictonites and members of other communities. The *Herald* commonly reported on these dances and parties in significant detail, and the organizational efforts of these events were described as often as (if not more so than) articles discussing the candidates and their efforts to win the crown. Although events varied throughout the years, this social season always featured public teas, garden parties, dinners and dances. These events proved to be crucial to the overall tone of the Peach Queen contest that constantly strove to represent an air of respectability.

The Princess Tea was the first social affair held every spring as part of the contest. Teas were not uncommon in the staging of local beauty pageants, but the Penticton example was well publicized within the community and was a central feature of Penticton's social calendar. A 1956 newspaper article even referred to it as an "early-season social highlight."²⁹ While it served the purpose of marking the beginning of the Peach Festival season, its primary purpose was to provide the first opportunity for all candidates to be officially introduced to prominent Pentictonites. It was open to all interested members of the public, but typical attendees included important figures associated with the local business and political communities. Members of the Penticton Chamber of Commerce, the mayor and aldermen's wives, and the wife of the president of the Penticton Board of Trade were almost always present. Anonymous judges also often attended, as for several years the tea served a double role as a social event and judging opportunity. The publicized presence of influential Pentictonites was an indicator of the overall tone of the contest and demonstrated that community leaders supported the Peach Queen and the image of Penticton that she conveyed. The contest would therefore have had to adhere to similar values as those upheld by Penticton's most respectable citizens. The tea's high profile coupled with the attendance of business and political leaders marked the event as an important social opportunity for Penticton's respected community leaders.

The presence of notable guests was not the only indicator of an emphasis on respectability as an organizing factor in the Princess Tea. The *Herald* often noted that an "appropriate decorative motif" was arranged that typically featured various different

²⁹ "Princess Tea Honors Royal Candidates in Traditional Manner," *Herald*, 6 April 1956, 3.

floral arrangements including orchard blooms and peach blossoms.³⁰ On some occasions, live music added to the tea's ambiance. A twelve-piece string ensemble of local musicians helped set a tone of respectability for the 1953 tea.³¹ The carefully arranged décor and atmosphere, coupled with the guest list featuring various virtuous members of Penticton's citizenry, ensured that the tea would uphold an air of propriety. This was in keeping with the overall tone and careful staging of the Peach Queen contest. The Princess Tea was one example of efforts to mould the contest's winner into a representative of certain ideas regarding the character of Penticton.

The emphasis on decency and specific values was further evident through the candidates' expected dress and behaviour at the annual Princess Tea. Figure 1.2 depicts a common scene at the tea, as candidates are shown dressed in respectable skirt suits, complete with matching hats and their sponsoring clubs' banners. The photograph shows the girls performing typical Princess Tea duties for Peach Queen candidates. They were required to serve tea and other refreshments to the guests, greet the public at the tea's entrance, and "generally perform with all the duties of a poised and modern young tea hostess."³² A 1965 article further remarked that the annual tea provided candidates with the opportunity to "learn that there is work to do in connection with royal duties" and that social graces are "an important facet of royal duties." An accompanying photograph depicted candidates receiving a lesson in folding tea table napkins by Women's Auxiliary members, suggesting that such tasks were deemed crucial to Penticton's royal

³⁰ "Peach Festival Candidates are Honored at Princess Tea," *Herald*, 4 May 1959, 5.

³¹ "Music and Spring Flowers Provide Lovely Setting for Successful Princess Tea," *Herald*, 15 April 1953, 2.

³² "Peach Festival Ass'n W.A. Sponsoring 'Princess Tea,'" *Herald*, 13 March 1952, 2.



Figure 1.2 Val-Vedette Candidates serving at the annual Blossom Tea. *Herald*, 24 April 1968, 6.

party.³³ Thus the candidates' responsibilities at the tea once again shed light on the importance of their adherence to expectations for respectable, middle-class young women. The fact that their roles as tea hostesses were meant to prepare them for life as Queen Val-Vedette (or a princess) was indicative of the overall expectations for the Peach Queen.

These expectations primarily involved the reassurance that while Val-Vedette would be a public figure representing Penticton and the Peach Festival, she would also be well equipped for her life outside the public realm. This, coupled with articles reporting on previous queens' lives as wives and mothers, meant that contest participants were still

³³ "Peach Festival Candidates Greet Public at Tea," *Herald*, 27 April 1965, 5.

expected to adhere to traditional notions of womanhood.³⁴ Queen Val-Vedette's public role required a demonstration of proficiency in domesticity associated with the private sphere. This follows trends whereby beauty pageants have been established as reaffirmations of women's traditional roles in the face of social change. For example, the first Miss America pageant was staged during a period when many were concerned about new, post-war roles for women, as exemplified by the Charleston-dancing, bobbed-hair flapper girl. Margaret Gorman, the first Miss America, was described upon her crowning as representing "the type of womanhood America needs...strong, red-blooded, able to shoulder the responsibilities of homemaking and motherhood."³⁵ After the Second World War many hoped that life would return to normal in the sense that women were expected to give up their paid work and fulfill their 'natural' roles as wives and mothers. There was a considerable degree of concern for 'feminine' responsibilities, as ideal women were expected to live in a world of "bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home."³⁶ Assurances that Val-Vedette practiced women's traditional duties despite her public role further gave the impression that the Queen and contest were respectable and presented Penticton, or at least its young women, in a positive light.

A second social event held before the crowning of the winner was the Blossom Coffee Party. Unlike the Princess Tea, it was not open to the general public and featured formal invitations sent to specific guests. The coffee party was notable for its emphasis

³⁴ The *Herald* published many articles announcing the weddings of previous Val-Vedettes, and one article outlining the lives of former queens noted that the majority had gotten married and had children. See "Former Peach Queens Now in Many Parts of the Globe," *Herald*, 24 July 1959, 3.

³⁵ Kimberly A. Hamlin, "Bathing Suits and Backlash: The First Miss America Pageants, 1921-1927," in *"There she is, Miss America": The Politics of Sex, Beauty, and Race in America's Most Famous Pageant*, eds. Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 35. Also see Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 268-269. Both Hamlin and Banner note that Miss America 1921 bore a considerable resemblance to movie star Mary, Pickford, who was perceived as the embodiment of innocence at the time.

³⁶ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Laurel, 1983), 36.

on honouring those responsible for the candidates' general behavior and well-being. It was staged to pay tribute to the girls' parents and sponsoring organizations. Other invited guests typically included the current royal party and important members of the Peach Festival Association and its W.A. But the emphasis on the candidates' parents was especially important, as Lavenda has identified in the Minnesota queen pageant proceedings where parents were presented as having been instrumental in establishing the girls' respectability and moral demeanor. If the parents were present, it was less likely that the candidates could be accused of impropriety. Emphasizing the presence of the parents also gave credence to the notion that potential Peach Queens truly were the daughters of their community.³⁷ So the Blossom Coffee Party provided an important opportunity for the Queen Val-Vedette contest organizers to promote the presence of the parents and, in effect, shed light on the parents' support for their daughters in competing for the crown. The Blossom Coffee Party was not just another event in the city's social season; it also reinforced the pageant's and Penticton's moral character.

Through their presence at the Blossom Coffee Party, parents were recognized for their role in raising some of the community's most outstanding girls, and thus served as reminders that effective parenting created upstanding citizens. Just as the Peach Queen was chosen so as to represent Penticton in a positive light, parents' participation within the contest proceedings reinforced ideals about family and the shaping of children into successful members of society. Scholars have determined that postwar concerns about

³⁷ Lavenda, 170. He goes so far as to argue that "the candidates' families are almost important to the contest as the candidates themselves."

traditional family and gender roles reached the point of obsession in the United States.³⁸ Similar anxieties were expressed by many Canadians, as evidenced by the fact that as in American society, Canada experienced a 'Baby Boom' whereby couples tended to marry younger and have more children than pre-Second World War couples. With these trends emerged a new approach to parenting which asserted that children were much more malleable than previously thought, and which expected parents to be more engaged in their children's lives.³⁹ The degree of a child's success in life was perceived to be very reflective of her or his mother and father's dedication to parenting, and Philip Massolin has argued that this was arguably the most child-focused generation in Canadian history."⁴⁰ At the Blossom Coffee Party, Queen Val-Vedette candidates acted as evidence of proper childrearing practices, and their mothers and fathers served as examples to other parents.

Another event featured as part of the Peach Queen contest was the Princess Ball, which served as the venue whereby the Queen and her princesses were named but not officially crowned. Much like the Princess Tea, the ball, often also known as the Blossom Ball, fit in with Penticton's social season and served as an opportunity for some of the community's finest to mingle with one another.⁴¹ In his 1969 *Herald* article, Charles La Vertu noted that amongst the attendees were prominent local politicians, members of the Peach Festival Association, the President of the Penticton Chamber of Commerce and his

³⁸ Susan M. Hartman, "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 97.

³⁹ Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 104-105.

⁴⁰ Philip Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 12.

⁴¹ For several years during the early 1960s, the Princess Ball was part of a larger "Blossom Day" itinerary that featured various local merchant offers and promotions.

wife, and various other prominent local businessmen.⁴² The Ball required attendees to wear their formal attire, and often featured a specific theme. The 1958 theme was “The Bluebird of Happiness,” meaning the ball featured such decorations as blue and white streamers, musical notes and coloured birds of happiness.⁴³ It also typically included musical selections by various local musicians or bands. Boasting a similar list of attendees and careful inclusion of décor and music meant that the Princess Ball was very comparable in nature to the Princess Tea. Arguably the only difference was the increased emphasis on decorative theme and formality. Therefore, the ball ultimately served a similar purpose to that of the tea: the Princess Ball was also meant to provide an opportunity to re-emphasize the respectable, social nature of the Queen Val-Vedette contest.

The Princess Ball quickly developed a reliance on tradition. The queen was always announced by Penticton’s Mayor and the two princesses by the Peach Festival Association President. Once the winners were revealed, the royal party was officially introduced to the ball’s guests. Upon their announcement, gift-giving became the central feature of the ball. First the current, soon-to-be retired queen presented the new winner with flowers. Beginning in 1963, the new queen was also presented with a trophy commissioned by the W.A. to the Peach Festival Association. The *Herald* noted that the trophy was engraved with the queen’s name and was passed on to her successor.⁴⁴ Subsequent winners were frequently photographed clutching the trophy after the

⁴² Charles La Vertu, “Jane Winter to Reign as Val-Vedette XXII,” *Herald*, 5 May 1969, 3.

⁴³ “Queen, Attendants will be Named at ‘Princess Preview’ Ball,” *Herald*, 28 March 1958, 6.

⁴⁴ “Queen Val-Vedette, Princesses Named at Gala Blossom Ball,” *Herald*, 6 May 1963, 5.

revelation that they would become the next Queen Val-Vedette.⁴⁵ The entire royal party was further presented with gifts which often held local significance. Throughout the 1960s they were typically given golden peach pins on behalf of the Peach Festival Association. Unsuccessful entries were also given smaller gifts as tokens of appreciation for their participation. The announcement of the winning royal party and gift-giving established a formula for coronation pageant proceedings, which gave further credence to the Queen Val-Vedette pageant's legitimacy in the community of Penticton. Namely, a queenly tradition was established that relied on longstanding customs and conventions. The development of the annual social period that started with the Princess Tea and ended with the Princess Ball provided the Peach Queen events with shape and meaning. These events were carefully organized and presented to the public, and allowed the contest and the queen to represent Penticton in a manner that suggested an upstanding and idyllic community.

Who organized these social events that established the Peach Queen pageant's important place in Penticton society? While it occasionally received assistance from outside organizations, the W.A. to the Peach Festival Association, also known as the Peach Festival Auxiliary, always played a crucial role in organizing the Peach Festival social season. Often solely responsible for some of the season's most popular events, the W.A. was primarily founded "to assist the association in an endeavour to facilitate the social activities of the Peach Festival."⁴⁶ It was typically the same group of women who always actively engaged with the W.A. Mrs. Beverly Ann Bella, former Queen Val-

⁴⁵ For example, see the adjoining photograph for "Skater Picked for Big Job," *Herald*, 3 May 1965, 1, and "Peach Festival Royalty for 1968," *Herald*, 25 April 1968, 1.

⁴⁶ "Many Representatives from Women's Organizations at Peach Festival W. A. Meeting," *Herald*, 10 June 1953, 7. Given that the W.A. *only* organized events associated with the Queen Val-Vedette contest, the auxiliary's efforts further illustrate the pageant's centrality to Penticton's summer social season.

Vedette I (Mary Ann Young), published an article in a 1964 edition of the local newspaper describing this small group of women and its efforts. She noted: “The Peach Festival Auxiliary, a hardworking civic-minded group, takes on at least 12 major projects in the short space of four months every year.”⁴⁷ The *Herald's* Women’s Page routinely featured coverage of the Peach Festival’s W.A. and its efforts to coordinate a Peach Queen calendar filled with teas, parties and dances. Given the W.A.’s central role in the organization of the contest and the relative absence of the actual Peach Festival Association (save for official purposes), it is debatable that the Queen Val-Vedette contest could have existed without the dedication of the middle-class women who comprised the W.A.

The W.A. fulfilled another crucial role within the Peach Queen contest. Auxiliary members routinely served as chaperones for candidates, queens and visiting royalty. This involved accompanying the girls to many of their appearances, including those out of town. When visiting queens visited the Peach Festival in 1953, they met with their assigned local chaperones immediately upon their arrival in Penticton, and before tending to any official duties.⁴⁸ For several years during the late 1940s and into the 1950s, one particular woman, Mrs. Graham Kincaid, served as the primary chaperone for the royal party. When interviewed by the *Herald*, she remarked that her role was to keep a “watchful eye” on the queen and princesses’ clothing and general “grooming details.” Most importantly, she commented on the virtuous nature of the royal parties: “I have never found it necessary to reprimand any of the girls during the years I have been chaperone... They have always conducted themselves with credit to Penticton and the

⁴⁷ “Wanted: More Help for Festival Fetes,” *Herald*, 11 April 1964, 5.

⁴⁸ “Plans, Countless Details for Social Events at Peach Festival Arranged by W.A.” *Herald*, 19 August 1953, 6.

group they were representing.⁴⁹ Another chaperone for the 1964 royalty was quoted as remarking that the contest was “a wonderful experience for the girls.”⁵⁰ Chaperones therefore testified as to the good nature of the candidates and their involvement with the Peach Queen contest. Although it seems unlikely that they would publicly condemn any observed impropriety on the part of their charges, it is worth noting that their positive opinion of the queen and her princesses was presented to the public through the *Herald*. This further reinforced the importance of Val-Vedette representing herself, and by extension the community of Penticton, in a morally virtuous manner. The presence of chaperones and their assurances of the royal party’s appropriate behavior meant that Penticton was properly personified by local girls free from overtly sexualized or generally lewd behavior. Penticton was portrayed in a positive light, and the contest itself further avoided any suggestion that its candidates were sexualized women capable of disrespecting their community.

The emphasis on the involvement of local women further gave credence to the notion that the Queen Val-Vedette contest was a respectable affair. As Sarah Banet-Weiser has noted in the case of the Miss America contest, organizers turned to the assistance of Atlantic City “society ladies” to assist in overseeing the pageant’s candidates. In this manner, contest organizers could ensure that the appearance of morality amongst the girls competing for the Miss America crown remained intact. This was part of the larger effort to increase perceptions of a moral character exhibited through the contest and to move away from the ‘cheesecake’ element associated with the Miss

⁴⁹ “Festival Royalty Chaperone’s Duties Happy Experience for Mrs. Graham Kincaid,” *Herald*, 25 August 1954, 6.

⁵⁰ “Active Month for City Girls,” *Herald*, 19 June 1964, 3.

America of the Pre-Second World War era.⁵¹ Lavenda has similarly noted that Minnesota Queen pageant organizers were characterized as married women between the ages of thirty and fifty who were respected members of the business class, giving further credence to the links between pageant organizers and prominent community members' expectations.⁵² As in the Atlantic City example, the 'ladies' of the W.A. in Penticton took over the organizational efforts of the pageant and its associated social calendar so as to ensure the maintenance of a sense of propriety. With the W.A. at its helm, the Queen Val-Vedette contest was much more than an opportunity for citizens to ogle beautiful local girls; instead, the W.A. fashioned a pageant involving 'young ladies.' Shaped by the W.A., the pageant and its organization deliberately strove to create an image of respectability, morality and proper femininity so as to guard against any unseemly features associated with the presence of uncontrolled female sexuality.

Coronation and Reign

Although the candidates participated in a variety of events and celebrations, certainly the most important public event was the queen's coronation, with the *Herald* frequently reporting that the proceedings attracted thousands of spectators.⁵³ It was also the event wherein tradition was ascendant. The entire process quickly developed a set formula that determined how the royal party entered the ceremony, was officially crowned, and left the proceedings. First, all parties involved, including the royal party-elect, current royal party, visiting dignitaries, visiting queens and other prestigious

⁵¹ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 39.

⁵² Lavenda, 171.

⁵³ In 1957, the *Herald* reported that a record number of 5,000 people attended the crowning ceremony for Queen Val-Vedette X, Carol Malmberg. "Big Festival Hails Peach Queen," *Herald*, 16 August 1957, 1.

Penticton community figures, processed towards the stage to the music of a local pipe band. All royalty, local and visiting, were often escorted by service units who made up an honour guard. For many years groups of young flower girls touted as “future royalty” also attended the coronation proceedings.⁵⁴ The coronation then gave the retiring queen the opportunity to ‘pass the torch’ to her successor in a very public and official manner.⁵⁵

Figure 1.3 captures this exact moment when the Queen-elect officially became Penticton’s newest Peach Queen. Marking the most important point in the coronation



Figure 1.3. Queen Val-Vedette coronation ceremony for Queen Fyfe Rutheford. *Herald*, 29 July 1969, 10.

⁵⁴ See “Future Royalty,” *Herald*, 4 August 1966, page 6; “Flower Girls Assist Royalty,” *Herald*, 22 July 1968, 5.

⁵⁵ The retiring queen was often quoted as repeating the standard speech while crowning her successor: “I place in your hands, the Royal Sceptre, symbol of your power and authority as Queen of Penticton and the Peach Festival... May you with this sceptre, command all your subjects to be happy and enjoy every minute of the Peach Festival festivities. Command also, the warmest welcome for all the visitors to Penticton, and bid them to the full our fair city and its Festival... [W]ith this crown, highest royal symbol, I declare that you are officially and fully the Queen – Queen Val-Vedette.” See “Queen Crowning to Open 1964 Festival,” *Herald*, 5 August 1965, 3.

ceremony, this moment also typically featured speeches and addresses from local and visiting dignitaries before officials and royal parties formed a procession that left the stage. The coronation ceremony ultimately served as the point whereby the Queen-elect became Penticton's official Queen Val-Vedette.

Certainly the ceremony was an important means to publicly herald the winner and honour the retiring queen. But the official introduction of a new queen also served as a crucial opportunity to extend influential Pentictonites' social calendar. Once the crowning ceremony was complete, those involved attended a wide variety of post-coronation events and parties. Since the initial selection of the queen provided the opportunity to commence Penticton's social season, so too did Val-Vedette's crowning provide a similar chance to extend the local social calendar. But post-coronation social events were important for an entirely different reason: they served as opportunities for the social citizens of Penticton to 'pull out all the stops' for other communities' royal parties and dignitaries. While many of these events were held in honour of Penticton's new royal party, others were also primarily held to serve as examples of local hospitality for all those who travelled to Penticton to participate in the coronation ceremony. This was crucial to the pageant's representation of Penticton's identity, since Val-Vedette's fellow representatives from other communities could report on the generous nature of the Penticton queen and her town. Events typically included teas, dinners, coffee parties and garden parties. An example of such a function was a 1959 luncheon hosted at the home of a prominent Penticton couple. The event was specifically held in honour of visitors from other communities, and required catering services for approximately two hundred and fifty guests. These same guests were to be received by the hosts and Mrs. Graham

Kincaid, W.A. President.⁵⁶ This luncheon, along with other events over the years, provided important opportunities for prominent Pentictonites to gather with each other, as well as means to bolster the community's image in the eyes of outsiders from other communities across British Columbia and Washington.

Arguably the most grandiose post-coronation event was the Queen's Ball.⁵⁷ It was routinely described by the *Herald* as a social highlight of Peach Festival's three-day celebrations.⁵⁸ Much like earlier seasonal dances, the Queen's Ball held an important place in Peach Queen social season. Also like the Blossom Ball which acted as part of the build-up to the actual coronation, the Queen's Ball typically featured a specific theme. The theme included such examples as 'Wonderland,' 'Twilight,' and 'Over the Rainbow.' The 1960 Queen's Ball, one of the more elaborate examples, included décor that was inspired by 'Melody in Waltz Time,' as it featured large silhouettes of waltzing couples in a Victorian style with arrangements of gladioli placed throughout the ballroom. Once again, peach blossoms were also included in the décor, as they were strategically placed on the dais where the new royal party was seated.⁵⁹ While the ball was certainly an opportunity to impress visitors, it also served as the first social event whereby the newly-crowned royal party was presented in full, official regalia. Thus the new queen and her princesses made official entrances and addresses to 'their' public gathered in the ballroom. In 1965, the royal party was seated on thrones situated front and centre during the ball's proceedings, and each visiting couple was introduced by the

⁵⁶ "Many Social Events, Attractions Arranged by Women's Auxiliary," *Herald*, 1 August 1959, 5.

⁵⁷ Social events held before the crowning were designated as 'Princess' events while those held after the announcement of the Peach Queen were known as 'Queen' events. This distinguished between functions held for all the candidates, and which may have served as judging opportunities, and those meant to honour the selected royal party.

⁵⁸ For example, see "Festival Royalty is Honored at Picturesque Queen's Ball," *Herald*, 16 August 1957, 3.

⁵⁹ "Penticton Peach Festival Royalty and Visitors Honored at Gay Social Functions," *Herald*, 4 August 1960, 5.

evening's Master of Ceremonies before making a "deep bow" to Penticton's new royalty as a sign of reverence for the characteristics that the royal party represented.⁶⁰ The Queen's Ball ultimately served as the premier social feature of the Queen Val-Vedette contest. The actual presentation of the new royal party gave it greater value as an important social feature in the contest's proceedings and the larger community of Penticton.

Conclusion

From its initial establishment in 1948 through to the end of the 1960s, Penticton's Queen Val-Vedette contest presented certain ideas about the Okanagan town. It represented itself not as a beauty pageant in the strictest terms, but instead as a more honourable means for beautiful local girls to showcase themselves and strive to represent the virtuous morals of the community. It exhibited several characteristics typical of the larger beauty contest model popularized after the Second World War, which essentially transformed pageants into what Brenda Foley refers to as "conservative confirmations of our social expectations."⁶¹ The Peach Queen contest strove to avoid any association with overt "cheesecake" and instead attempted to match the overall middle-class nature of some Penticton social circles. While emulating the Apple Blossom Queen contest in Wenatchee, Washington, Peach Queen events rejected some more questionable practices of other pageants. The contest also required the promotion of other features, including a careful judging system, calculated presentation of candidates, and the involvement of the W.A. to facilitate the moral virtuousness of the contest and its candidates. All of these

⁶⁰ "Over the Rainbow Theme Sets Mood for the Ball," *Herald*, 5 August 1965, 6.

⁶¹ Brenda Foley, *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 170.

elements ultimately led to the moulding of the pageant according to very specific community ideals. Contest organizers made deliberate efforts to present the contest as a viable option for attractive and honourable daughters of the community.

This had important implications for the meaning of gender within the contest. Candidates were certainly expected to be the embodiment of feminine ideals, but were presented as images of a very particular type of femininity. They had to conduct themselves according to staunchly wholesome notions of how women should behave and portray themselves, and were cast the roles of hostesses and servers in a steady stream of parties, dances and balls, as befitting women whose future responsibilities surely involved entertaining in their households and serving their future husbands and children. Their actions throughout pageant proceedings were monitored by members of the W.A., and once the girl who best exemplified local notions of respectable femininity was crowned, she was accompanied by an official chaperone to all of her royal appearances. Not only did these ladies ensure that candidates and royalty acted in a manner that showed respect to Penticton, but they also served as examples of feminine efforts to serve the larger social order of the community. It was expected that the girls competing for the crown would be presented to the public in feminine terms, but the emphasis on the feminine as moral and virtuous was ultimately reinforced by pageant organizers and the girls hoping to win the title of Peach Queen.

This emphasis on respectability was the ultimate hallmark of the Queen Val-Vedette contest. Through the contest's history, judging events, presentation of candidates to the community and judges, and heavy reliance on well-established royal traditions, the contest had an important place in Penticton and sheds light on one construction of the

community's identity and the gendered expectations for its young female residents. Some of these themes were evident in beauty contests staged in other communities throughout North America and British Columbia. But as argued in Chapter Two, not all pageants followed the same example set by Queen Val-Vedette and her reign over the "Land of Sunshine, Fruit and Flowers."

Chapter 2

Prince George's Queen Aurora of the Evergreens: Morally Acceptable Girl Watching

In 1964, the *Prince George Citizen* newspaper depicted a similar scene to those repeated in British Columbia throughout the 1950s and 1960s. “Judy Strom was crowned Queen Aurora VII at a glittering ceremony in Simon Fraser Park Tuesday night,” the article’s author, Vern Lacey, noted. “Her coronation provided the most glamorous spectacle of the year for Prince George and officially opened Simon Fraser Days.” As for the actual coronation proceedings, the same article described it as a “night of beauty” featuring visiting beauty queens from around the province. Lacey made a point of noting, however, that the new Prince George queen was the “fairest of all.”¹ From the article, it is clear that Prince George’s coronation ceremony served as an important highlight in a larger community festival, and served as a means to officially introduce the new Queen Aurora to her ‘subjects.’ While this was characteristic of beauty contests in other communities, it would be erroneous to suggest that Prince George’s pageant was a mirror image to other B.C. beauty contests.

While Prince George’s pageant featured characteristics that made it unique, it nonetheless shared similarities with one particular pageant, the Queen Val-Vedette contest. Queen Aurora’s pageant was directly inspired by the Val-Vedette tradition, and this was confirmed by the man at the forefront of the contest’s initial organization, C.B. ‘Chuck’ Ewart. When visiting local students at the secondary school in preparation for the first contest, he made a point of explaining how Penticton’s queen contest was organized. He asserted that Prince George’s pageant would be specifically structured according to the same practices and principles as the examples in Penticton and its

¹ Vern Lacey, “Night Glittered – A Queen was Crowned,” *Citizen*, 12 August 1964, 1.

inspiration, Wenatchee, Washington.² Because Prince George's organizers looked to the example of the Peach Queen contest, the two pageants shared various similarities in terms of their structure and character. Along with borrowing several features and approaches to its contest planning from Penticton, the shared approach helped lend a degree of formality to the crowning of Queen Aurora.

Still, this formality was somewhat offset by other local features of the Aurora pageant. One of the most obvious differences between the contests was that Aurora organizers adjusted the format of the pageant over several years, and ultimately fashioned a more casual and creative tone. Prince George may have absorbed some outside traditions and practices, but the Queen Aurora pageant demonstrated a local flair that sought a balance amongst tradition, middle-class values and local initiatives. The gendered presentation of the queen and candidates was also different, as organizers revealed a considerable degree of willingness to showcase the girls' bodies in sexually suggestive circumstances. This closely adhered to older notions of pageants as bathing-beauty contests rather than opportunities for candidates' personal advancement. And instead of primarily providing social opportunities for some townspeople during a contained period of several weeks (as in Penticton), Queen Aurora of the Evergreens was a much more prominent community figure who filled various roles and made a number of public appearances in Prince George throughout the year. The Queen Aurora of the Evergreens contest was marked by an insistence on tradition while frequently changing the contest's format, and the presence of sexualized candidates despite their more

² "Queen of the Evergreens' to Reign during Centennial," *Citizen*, 25 February 1958, 1. The *Citizen* reported that Prince George's contest was directly inspired by both Penticton's example as well as the Apple Blossom Queen contest in Wenatchee. Since I noted in Chapter One that Wenatchee's pageant originally inspired Penticton, this means that Prince George organizers borrowed from the contest that also served as the inspiration for Penticton's Peach Queen.

meaningful role in Prince George. This ultimately made it a complex and often contradictory community event.

In exploring the different forces that characterized the Aurora contest, this chapter is divided into three sections that examine its history in the community and its influences, the judging process, and the manner in which the candidates and winners were presented to the citizens of Prince George. All three factors illustrate the careful balance orchestrated by contest organizers to find a locally appropriate degree of respectability while introducing candidates and royalty as highly feminized community figures. Prince George's strong tradition of beauty contests lent itself to embracing some aspects of pageantry that are rooted in the tradition of 'bathing beauties.' Outside factors strongly influenced the judging process and were a means to ensure that candidates were viewed as honourable, despite the girls being presented in swimsuits and photographed in suggestive poses. This all created a unique set of circumstances whereby Queen Aurora emerged as a legitimate community figure who exemplified both the spirit of Prince George and a sexually suggestive beauty queen.

Contest History

Like other beauty pageants, Prince George's contest was staged as part of a larger public festival. But the Aurora pageant was different in that it was never fully entrenched within a specific community event. The town's annual celebration went through several notable changes over the years. The pageant was first organized in 1958 and was associated with a small event, Prince George Day. The next year, the contest was staged as part of the one-day Simon Fraser Day. When the festival known as the Simon Fraser Days and Exhibition was officially born in 1960, it served as the festival associated with

the Queen Aurora contest for the majority of the decade.³ Beginning in 1969, after the contest was cancelled in 1968, it became a part of the local White Spruce Winter Wonderland Carnival.⁴ The contest was associated with several different events throughout its history, rather than entrenched as part of a single community project from its inception. The changing association with different community festivals was reflective of the contest's larger variable practices. Contest organizers had to adapt to ensure that the pageant reflected the tone of the larger festivities, and therefore had to be willing to alter the pageant, sometimes on a yearly basis.

Queen Aurora of the Evergreens was not the first contest held to judge the beauty of local girls. The community actually had a longstanding tradition of staging various beauty pageants before 1958. Local girls' participation in contests went as far back as 1923, when Kathleen Brown was sponsored as the Prince George candidate at the Prince Rupert Fall Fair.⁵ This promotion of a beauty contest candidate is remarkably early in the history of beauty pageants, as the first Miss America was only crowned two years earlier. Local contests began a couple of years later, and were held in order to generate financial support for community projects. For example, the "Snow Queen" contests during the 1930s were held to fund the Prince George Ski and Toboggan Club's annual competition.⁶ The "Hockey Queen" pageant began in 1937 with the intention of jumpstarting fundraising efforts by the local hockey club for a covered ice rink. Much like the later Queen Aurora contest, these earlier pageants were characterized by

³ Jarvis Whitney, "City's Biggest Fair Ever on Next Week," *Citizen*, 10 August 1962, 9.

⁴ It was cancelled in 1968 because no local organization was willing to take on the financial and organizational responsibilities. The Jaycees took over the pageant beginning in 1969.

⁵ "Prince George Candidate in Queen Contest," *Citizen*, 2 August 1923, 3.

⁶ The contest was first held in 1931 and continued for several years. It raised funds by requiring the candidates to sell tickets, and the girl who sold the most tickets was crowned the winner. Thus the pageant was sometimes referred to as a "popularity and beauty contest" in the pages of the *Citizen*.

considerable fanfare, including dances and ceremonial introductions of royal parties. The procession to the coronation ceremony of 1938's Hockey Queen featured Boy Scouts and Girl Guides in drill formation, a page boy carrying the crown on a cushion, train-bearers for the queen, and finally the mayor acting as the queen's escort.⁷ The Queen Aurora example, while certainly one of the more prominent contests held over numerous consecutive years, was not the first beauty pageant to be supported by local residents. Indeed, Prince George had a surprising history of supporting pageants, as it essentially promoted local queens from the onset of modern beauty contests. Aurora simply fit in with a larger tradition of pageantry in Prince George.

While Prince George embraced beauty contests as important community events early in the history of pageantry, the 1940s were also a period of considerable interest in variants of the "Miss Prince George" contest. The contest was notable because of all the pageants throughout Prince George's history, it was the example best categorized as a "bathing beauty" pageant, and was even described in the *Citizen* as a "Bathing Beauty Parade."⁸ Like pageants in general during the 1940s, more obvious "cheesecakery" was present in the Miss Prince George pageant to the point where the winner was typically crowned while wearing her bathing suit and high heels. The first Miss Prince George contest was held in 1941 and an editorial in the newspaper described the proceedings: "At 10 p.m. with Charley Straw as master of ceremonies, ten lovely girls in stunning bathing costumes, a gift of their sponsors, marched on to the platform in single file."⁹ Most notably, Miss Prince George 1945, Georgina Patterson, later won the "Miss Northern B.C." title in Prince Rupert, and this automatically qualified her to compete in the Miss

⁷ "Miss Ceelia Goheen Wins Hockey Queen Contest," *Citizen*, 31 March 1938, 1.

⁸ "Merchants to Sponsor Bathing Beauty Girls," *Citizen*, 19 June 1941, 1.

⁹ "Celebration," *Citizen*, 3 July 1941, 4.

America pageant in Atlantic City.¹⁰ The *Citizen* expressed pride in Patterson, and she was the subject of considerable fanfare. The Knights of Columbus gave her letter of appreciation for the publicity she gave to Prince George and Northern B.C., and she later used her local celebrity status to help sell a record number of war bonds in Prince George.¹¹ The Miss Prince George contests of the 1940s set a precedent for beauty pageant practices that more readily displayed candidates' bodies in the northern township, and in particular, Miss Northern B.C. 1945 helped legitimize beauty contests in the community.

As a result of social changes arising during the Second World War, the displaying of local girls' bodies was common for pageant practices of the early 1940s. New wartime roles adopted by women fed into a pervasive fear throughout North America and Europe that femininity was threatened. Every effort was made to ensure that despite these changes both inside and outside of the home, women were still fundamentally dedicated to their 'true' responsibility to remain attractive and womanly. In her book, *They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, Ruth Roach Pierson concludes that even during the unique circumstances of the war, women's traditional qualities remained paramount and that any women who strayed outside these boundaries, especially servicewomen, were met with varying degrees of suspicion,

¹⁰ Patterson won the title of "Miss Congeniality" in Atlantic City, which Henry Pang argues is the title awarded to the girl who is "nice to everyone because she is seldom a very serious competitor." See Henry Pang, "Miss America: An American Ideal, 1921-1969," *Journal of Popular Culture* 2, no. 4 (1969): 693.

¹¹ "Northern B.C. Queen," *Citizen*, 16 August 1945, 2; "Pressing for Land Registry for Office in City," *Citizen*, 25 October 1945, 2. The *Citizen* published many articles that celebrated Patterson's importance to the community. For example, see "Georgina Honored by Jay-Cees," *Citizen*, 27 September 1945, 1, and "Latest Styles in Georgina's Wardrobe," *Citizen*, 11 October 1945, 2. Also see "Victory War Bond Sales in District Set New Record of \$400,000," *Citizen*, 15 November 1945, 1. Unit organizer Charles Dawson praised Patterson for her "conscientiousness and energy" that "[exceeded] all expectations."

condemnation and accusations of sexual impropriety.¹² For this reason, images of female sexuality during the Second World War were cautiously manipulated, ensuring the primacy of the male gaze and the concept of female passivity. Through their beauty, women could serve as morale boosters for soldiers and for this reason, “pin-up” girls and beauty queens were lauded for their femininity and service to the war effort.¹³ The images of bathing beauties in Prince George during the 1940s followed this larger trend, while serving as a precedent for more sexualized beauty queens in the northern community.

Although not so overt in its display of the candidates’ bodies as had been Miss Prince George proceedings, the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens contest nevertheless built on some of the less reputable practices associated with the 1940s model. The *Citizen* recognized that the crowning of the first Queen Aurora marked the beginning of a “dynasty” in Prince George.¹⁴ But the newspaper featured the argument that the Queen of the Evergreens had important predecessors. A 1966 article reported on the queen committee’s efforts to contact previous winners. It specifically noted that the town featured a Miss Prince George contest before that of Queen Aurora, and that it the committee was seeking contact with any previous winners.¹⁵ Two weeks later, the *Citizen* also featured a description of these efforts to trace the history of beauty contests in Prince George. It determined that the first Miss Prince George was crowned in 1941. The contest changed over the years, including such names as “Queen of Beauty,” “Popularity

¹² Ruth Roach Pierson, *They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986): 20-21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 144 and 146-147.

¹⁴ “Lavish Pageant Planned at Brigade’s Launching,” *Citizen*, 22 May 1958, 3.

¹⁵ “Now Here This,” *Citizen*, 15 June 1966, 1. The queen’s committee had already been in contact with the Prince George queen from 1951.

Queen” and “Sweetheart of Prince George” but effectively served the same purpose as the Queen of the Evergreens model. The article then concludes with the assertion that with Prince George’s long history of beauty queens, the 1966 Queen Aurora-elect was, in all intents and purposes, the twentieth Miss Prince George.¹⁶ Clearly there was a certain degree of recognition of earlier queen contests in Prince George’s history. Prince George made some effort to trace its pageant’s roots to emphasize a specifically local history of beauty queens.

The history of Prince George pageantry ultimately served as an important indicator of the Queen Aurora contest’s overall character. Directly inspired by the Peach Queen contest, local organizers adopted a similar format to the Penticton model. Still, the strong pre-existing tradition of pageantry before 1958 and the revolving relationship between the Aurora contest and local festivals exerted a direct influence on the Aurora pageant’s organization and presentation. Because Prince George’s contest was never as deeply rooted in a singular community event, organizers may have been more willing to experiment with pageant proceedings in order to maximize Aurora’s appeal to local residents. They may have felt the need to employ more questionable means of drawing locals’ and tourists’ attention to pageant proceedings. The history of beauty contests in Prince George meant that the Queen Aurora contest sought out a balance between middle-class queen traditions and more questionable, less overtly moral practices. It is therefore more understandable that local organizers promoted some pageant activities that were far less restrained than other B.C. queen contests, while at the same time promoting the contest as a viable option for the community’s teenage daughters.

¹⁶ “Ninth Queen Aurora is 20th Miss Prince George,” *Citizen*, 30 June 1966, 9.

Judging

When it came to judging the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens contest, practices were both conventional and innovative. The judging process featured some elements shared by other B.C. pageants, yet also featured novelties that distinguished Prince George contests. In keeping with common beauty contest traditions, an anonymous panel of judges selected the annual winner, as organizers felt that this best ensured impartiality and legitimacy for the annual contest winner.¹⁷ The *Citizen* explained that the judging panel typically consisted of five or six residents who were “chosen from all aspects of the community.”¹⁸ Candidates routinely met with the judges in such a manner as to ensure that the girls would be unable to identify who was assessing their performances. Contest organizers sometimes went to considerable lengths to ensure that the judges’ identities remained unknown. During one judging event in 1960, judges were part of a receiving line of 65 members of the public.¹⁹ On another occasion, judges informally and anonymously mixed with the candidates and other guests at another event.²⁰ Careful efforts to ensure that the judging process be regarded as impartial and anonymous fit in with other, larger efforts to ensure the respectability of beauty contests. In this regard, Prince George followed other communities with longstanding, morally-conscious beauty contest values. Trusting that perceived experts would impartially assess candidates’ qualities aligned with other judging practices in the province, and suggested some degree of effort to maintain the moral nature of the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens pageant.

¹⁷ For the first four years of the contest’s existence, selection of candidates was done by students at the local secondary school and school staff. Once the number of candidates was determined, anonymous judges had the final decision as to which girl would be named Queen Aurora of the Evergreens. See “‘Aurora’ Candidates to be Chosen Soon,” *Citizen*, 15 April 1959, 1.

¹⁸ “Aurora Entries Chosen,” *Citizen*, 20 April 1959, 1.

¹⁹ “Aurora Candidates Meet Contest Judges,” *Citizen*, 17 May 1960, 4.

²⁰ “Judging Ending for Candidates,” *Citizen*, 7 June 1963, 7.

Not all aspects of the contest's judging were as conventional as the anonymity of judges. Prince George embraced some elements of pageantry more associated with the "cheesecake" of bathing beauty contests. One judging event adopted by Queen Aurora organizers was an annual "swimming party" that served as a de facto swimsuit competition between 1962 and 1964. As part of its requirements, girls modeled swimsuits while serving lunch to the assembled guests. Clad in their swimsuits and sponsoring club's banners, the contestants' photographs appeared in the *Citizen* newspaper. Figure 2.1 is a typical example of such photographs. Posing in a line, smiling and emphasizing each other's bare legs, candidates for Queen Aurora of the Evergreens seem to be channeling the examples of girls in more traditional bathing-beauty contests. While this event was only held for three years and was replaced by a fashion show in 1965, queen candidates were still required to model swimwear as one of their outfits. Many candidates modeled two-piece swimsuits, and virtually all paired their suits with white high heels.



Figure 2.1. The six Queen Aurora of the Evergreens candidates pose at a swimming party judging event. *Citizen*, 6 June 1963, 1.

The public was therefore given the opportunity to assess the “physical charms” of all the girls vying for the crown along with the judges, while ultimately being reminded of the importance of a ‘swimsuit body’ for local girls wanting to represent their community.

Much like bathing-beauty contests of the war years, the swimming parties and fashion shows had important implications for understanding the role of gender in the Queen Aurora pageant. Always scrutinized, contestants’ bodies were presented as upholding the notion of respectability despite their appearance in swimsuits. Brenda Foley argues that the typical beauty contest candidate is a “civic female body” that is more ‘useful’ and therefore inherently virtuous. Since the exposure of her body benefits society, it can be enjoyed while remaining virtuous, and she is spared the same degree of scorn as other sexualized women (like exotic dancers). And while contests can never be completely dissociated with low-brow sexual entertainment, they can be presented as sites where female sexuality is carefully contained and supervised.²¹ Banet-Weiser has argued that swimsuit events comfort the audience, since they reaffirm a pageant’s dedication to the tradition of femininity. In effect, pageantry promoted “the seemingly changeless female body, fixed in age and the embodiment of heterosexual desire” that was contained, in large part, by the candidates’ silent acquiescence and choreographed movements.²² And since candidates were assessed by allegedly knowledgeable and reputable judges who were above inappropriate behavior, their participation in swimming parties and swimsuit fashion shows was deemed as acceptable decorum.

²¹ Brenda Foley, *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 7, 57.

²² Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 74-76.

If the swimming party and fashion show were suitable venues for candidates, why not actually refer to them as swimsuit events? Several scholars have argued that despite the events' perceived legitimacy, the presence of contestants in swimsuits has caused a considerable degree of anxiety for contest organizers. This is especially true of smaller, community-based pageants like Queen Aurora of the Evergreens. Lavenda has noted that this is primarily because organizers want to downplay any association with less respectable contests that do not necessarily exhibit smaller community values, as one woman involved with a Minnesota queen contest remarked: "We're not running a meat market like Miss America here."²³ Tice has similarly noted that when including candidates modeling swimsuits, many campus queen contests in the United States have traditionally resorted to various creative methods to downplay the presentation of "mute bodies," including listing candidates' achievements while they model swimwear.²⁴ And American Tobacco Queen candidates of the 1930s were primarily presented in terms of agricultural products instead of outwardly sexualized female bodies.²⁵ For this reason, many communities opted to omit such an event and avoid any uncomfortable ramifications of candidate swimsuit parades. But clearly Prince George organizers chose a different view on the matter. The inclusion of the swimming party and similar opportunities to feature girls wearing bathing suits contrast its pageant with other examples in British Columbia and provide further credence to the notion that the northern community was willing to embrace more problematic pageantry practices.

²³ Lavenda, "'It's not a Beauty Pageant!': Hybrid Ideology in Minnesota Community Queen Pageants," in *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests and Power*, eds. Colleen Cohen Ballerino, Richard Wilk and Beverly Stoeltje (New York: Routledge, 1996): 40.

²⁴ Karen W. Tice, "Queens of Academe: Campus Pageantry and Student Life," *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 273.

²⁵ Blain Roberts, "A New Cure for Brightleaf Tobacco: The Origins of the Tobacco Queen during the Great Depression," *Southern Cultures* 12, no. 2 (2006): 40.

De facto swimsuit competitions may have given the Queen Aurora contest a different character compared to other pageants, but they did not necessarily reflect the contest in its entirety. Contest organizers still emphasized the respectable nature of the contest, as evidenced by the insistence on anonymous judging. In addition, the pageant was primarily promoted as a learning experience for candidates. Every year from 1960 onwards, the girls went through an extensive training program to learn skills that were deemed valuable for potential beauty queens. Candidates' training typically lasted at least two weeks, and during some years continued for longer than a month before the judging process began. This 'charm' program focused on several aspects of the girls' personal presentation. They received training in "speaking, walking, sitting, posture, hair styles, make-up, and general deportment."²⁶ The Toastmistress club was usually responsible for this "rigorous training," which imbued the process with greater legitimacy and respectability, as it was directed by a recognized public speaking organization. Local hair salons also assisted the girls with hair and makeup. Literally, candidates were groomed for proper personal presentation within the confines of the Queen Aurora pageant. This ensured that while some elements of the contest were questionable, others maintained some sense of balance between outright "cheesecake" and respectable competition between local daughters.

The notion of respectability through the candidates' training program was emphasized to the point that contest organizers argued that it benefitted all candidates regardless of whether or not they actually won. One organizer remarked that while not every candidate could win the title of Queen Aurora of the Evergreens, they could all

²⁶ "Queen Aurora Carries Heavy Burden during Reign," *Citizen*, 16 April 1964, 1.

benefit from the training courses.²⁷ A full page article in a 1965 edition of the *Citizen* more bluntly asserted: “All candidates, and there have been 49 since the competition began, gain through the training offered whether or not they go on to represent the city.”²⁸ Courses in personal decorum benefitted local girls’ everyday lives, and possibly their plans for the future. Similar arguments were made in defense of the Miss America pageant.²⁹ One candidate testified to as much when she asserted that the public speaking classes and the “all-round experience” would aid in her future endeavours.³⁰ This gave credence to the notion that regardless of any questionable elements in the Queen Aurora contest, it nevertheless provided a larger learning experience for local Prince George girls who wished to gain valuable skills in personal presentation. It was ultimately viewed as a legitimate option for girls who wanted to better themselves.

Claims as to the beneficial nature of larger pageants are common. Just as the Miss America contest is a “scholarship program,” so too could the Queen Aurora pageant benefit its participants’ futures. Nevertheless, the implication that lessons in personal presentation and hygiene are essential life skills for young women is telling. In post-Second World War society, women’s roles as feminine helpmates were highly promoted and valued. Kathleen M. Barry’s book, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants*, touches on a similar subject. She argues that in the immediate postwar period, stewardesses were expected to excel in the “labour of femininity.” They were required to

²⁷ “Seek Goodwill Ambassador,” *Citizen*, 16 February 1967, 6.

²⁸ “Aurora, Queen of the Evergreens,” *Citizen*, 13 May 1965, 6.

²⁹ Henry Pang, “Miss America: An American Ideal, 1921-1969,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 2, no. 4 (1969): 689. Pang specifically argues that “these activities bolster one’s confidence and in part makes one more attractive to future marriage prospects.”

³⁰ Bernice Roberts. “Miss Jaycee, Judy Clark, Girl of Many Activities,” *Citizen*, 4 May 1961, 5. See Robert H. Lavenda, “Minnesota Queen Pageants: Play, Fun, and Dead Seriousness in a Festive Mode,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 101, no. 400 (1988): 174. According to Lavenda, girls competing in Minnesota Queen contests had similar opinions as to the beneficiary nature of their training programs and experiences leading up to their time on stage that were associated with their respective pageants.

appear and act as the epitome of the white, middle-class, heterosexual ideas for beautiful women but perform in such a manner as to make it seem natural and effortless.³¹ The same argument can be applied to beauty queens, as the concept of 'natural performance' has always been a primary feature of pageantry. The expectation that they master the feminine ideal in a seemingly unforced manner meant that participation in a training program to maintain highly cultivated femininity was required of girls aspiring to become Queen Aurora.

Presentation of Candidates

The swimming parties held in the early 1960s and the promotion of the training program indicated a highly feminized view of Prince George candidates. It is not especially surprising to note a similar pattern in the introduction of candidates in the pages of the *Citizen*. The newspaper made a point of featuring photographs of each individual candidate at the beginning of the judging proceedings, and often published photos of local candidates in unconventional poses. They were frequently shown wearing tank tops and noticeably short shorts. Figure 2.2 is a typical image released to the press. It shows 1967 Rotary candidate Diane Goodwin posing while wearing her sponsor's banner. The eye is immediately drawn to Goodwin's bare legs as the photograph displays her full body from a slightly upward angle and her right hand rests on her upper thigh. This image is in stark contrast to more conventional portrait photographs that primarily focus on the candidate's face. This is not the only manner in which candidates' photographs were presented in the local press, and for several years their poses were of a

³¹ Kathleen M. Barry, *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 4.



Figure 2.2. Photograph of candidate Diane Goodwin. *Citizen*, 25 April 1967, 6.

more traditional variety. But particularly during the 1960s, the popular introductory images of local girls vying for the Queen Aurora crown had a more overtly sexual tone. This once again points to the nature of the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens contest as a more nuanced pageant than other British Columbian examples; candidates, while ultimately presented as bright and successful local girls competing in a legitimate competition, were sometimes presented in a less respectable manner.

Nor did Queen Aurora organizers shy away from presenting the pageant winner in more questionable poses and circumstances. As a representative for the community of

Prince George, Queen Aurora of the Evergreens was often portrayed in the pages of the *Citizen* wearing a swimsuit or posing in an alluring manner. Figure 2.3 is an example of a less conventional representation of Queen Aurora. 1962 winner Pat Burns is shown leaning back behind what is presumably the Fraser or Nechako River, and is staring complacently at the camera. As in other introductory photographs of candidates, she is wearing very short shorts and the photograph accentuates her legs. The image as a whole emphasizes the presentation of bare skin and passive beauty. Other examples over the years also showed the queen lounging in a swimsuit or in similar positions.³² This does not mean that Aurora was meant to serve merely as a local pin-up girl, but it is certainly arguable that some images published in the *Citizen* pushed at the boundaries of



Figure 2.3. Photograph of Queen Aurora of the Evergreens Pat Turner. *Citizen*, 7 August 1962, 1.

³² For example, see untitled photograph, *Citizen*, 10 June 1964, 17. Retiring Queen Margaret Nicholson is shown studying while lounging on the beach wearing her swimsuit. The accompanying caption notes that Nicholson found a means to combat the tediousness of studying by working on her suntan at the same time. Similarly, in a 26 July 1967 edition of the *Citizen* includes a series of photographs taken of the royal party travel as “good will ambassadors.” One of the photographs shows the queen and her two princesses lounging in their bikinis in and around a swimming pool.

appropriate sexual presentation of pageant winners. This therefore matched the overall tone of the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens contest as a pageant that attempted to uphold notions of respectability while toying with its limits on several occasions, and ultimately presenting a highly feminized version of a local beauty queen.

Community Figures

If the early history, judging process and presentation of Queen Aurora of the Evergreen candidates suggest an attempt to strike a balance between safe and dangerous female sexuality, the actual role of the girls within the community of Prince George followed a similar trend. Candidates and winners were expected to show their dedication to the town in a manner deemed appropriate for young women, which meant that they often served Prince George through their continued mastery of traditionally feminine roles. Queen Aurora's femininity was seen as a community service, but despite efforts to stress her womanly nature, she was given a certain degree for self-expression through her numerous public speaking endeavours. Much like contest organizers' efforts to present a calculated sexuality within the contest's proceedings, candidates and queens assumed roles as both passive representatives and active self-promoters.

By 1960, local clubs and service groups sponsored candidates who, in turn, were fully engaged in representing their sponsors. They were introduced to the associations, and frequently attended club meetings where they listened to reports regarding club issues and projects.³³ Candidates also assisted their sponsors' community efforts. For Miss Kiwanis 1964, this involved posing for a photograph with an oversized "Spruce

³³ Clubs' meetings often included a dinner, at which point the sponsored candidate was introduced along with her mother and the President of the Queen Aurora Committee. Candidates were often presented with a gift as a token of the club's appreciation for her representation.

Dollar,” a publicity tool for Prince George tourism that local Kiwanis delegates promoted during their travels throughout Canada and the United States.³⁴ On another later occasion, Miss Rotary 1967 drew the winner of the Rotary Pipe Band raffle.³⁵ Participation in various sponsor club activities provided each candidate with visibility outside of pageant events in the role of ‘Miss Rotary’ or ‘Miss Jaycees,’ rather than as a queen candidate. Girls were presented as visible community figures who served a greater role than providing the public with a safe opportunity to view young women’s bodies.³⁶ In the nuanced tradition of the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens, they provided their service clubs with the opportunity of being associated with local beauty, while also representing the organizations’ endeavours.

The emphasis placed on Queen Aurora as a feminine community figure was evident in her various responsibilities and appearances throughout Prince George. For example, the annual winner modeled clothing at various local fashion shows. This was the case from the pageant’s inception, as the first Queen Aurora appeared in the 1958 fashion feature in the *Citizen* entitled “Fall Fashion Parade.”³⁷ Similar appearances also had a direct link to charity efforts, as Queen Auroras usually modeled for the hospital’s Women’s Auxiliary fashion show. The 1963 show was a particularly elaborate affair featuring various themes, a standing-room-only crowd and intermission entertainment provided by local performers. Queen Aurora was included in the wedding scene in which

³⁴ Untitled photograph, *Citizen*, 29 April 1964, 2.

³⁵ “Rotary Pipe Band Raffle,” *Citizen*, 27 April 1967, 5.

³⁶ This is especially significant since other communities, including Penticton, did not require their pageant candidates to represent their sponsoring clubs outside pageant events. Girls vying for the crown in the Queen Val-Vedette contest were only expected to represent their sponsors during official appearances and judging opportunities.

³⁷ Dianne Gray, “Our Models,” *Citizen*, 15 September 1958, 9. Alexander is specifically singled out amongst the models for having won the title of Queen Aurora, and is quoted as remarking that teenagers are ‘tops’ for fall fashion. One of the other featured models, Jill Ewart, went on to win the crown in 1959.

she was featured as the bride, complete with elegant wedding gown.³⁸ The Lady Lions and the 918 Wives Club of Baldy Hughes staged a 1962 Christmas fashion show featuring Queen Aurora as a fundraiser for children.³⁹ These shows provided a means to showcase the annual winner outside the actual pageant in a manner emphasizing her adherence to popular beauty and fashion practices. Several scholars have noted that fashion and modeling provided perfect opportunities for beauty queens to showcase themselves through an appropriate avenue, and Queen Aurora clearly followed this practice.⁴⁰ By modeling clothing, Aurora assisted in important community and charity events in a manner that reflected the larger concern for the careful display of her femininity.

Queen Aurora of the Evergreens was involved in other local endeavours aside from fashion shows. One of the distinguishing features of her reign was that her role extended beyond the pageant's confines. She had legitimate duties in Prince George wherein she was a visible presence at various local events unconnected with the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens contest. Her responsibilities also required her to be active in Prince George year-round, instead of only during the actual pageant months. The annual winner assisted various dignitaries in opening ceremonials and unveilings. She often dropped the puck at hockey games, revealed new community monuments and buildings, and drew the name of winners in various local contests. She was especially active during the March of Dimes, as over the years she officially opened the march's festivities and

³⁸ "Fashion Show Well Attended," *Citizen*, 25 March 1963, 3.

³⁹ "Ready to Take Off on Operation Reindeer," *Citizen*, 14 November 1962, 1.

⁴⁰ See Joan Sangster, "'Queen of the Picket Line': Beauty Contests in the Post-World War II Canadian Labour Movement, 1945-1970," *Labour Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 5, no. 4 (2008): 83-106. Also see Patrizia Gentiles, "Queen of the Maple Leaf: A History of Beauty Queens in Twentieth Century Canada," PhD dissertation, Kingston, Queen's University, September 2006. Sangster and Gentiles both argue that fashion shows reflected postwar notions of consumption and what Gentiles calls the 'beauty-industry complex.'

presented the trophy to the winners of its associated hockey game.⁴¹ Figure 2.4 is an example of a photo opportunity featured in the pages of the *Citizen* that emphasized Queen Aurora's presence in the community. It shows the 1964 queen with Mayor Garvin Dezell opening the new Canadian Acceptance Corporation office for the first time. By serving a year-long community role, Aurora was arguably a more important queen than other B.C. queens, as she appeared before a greater number of citizens, and not just a select group of prominent local politicians and businessmen. Winners of the Queen Aurora contest carved out a genuine community role, but the nature of this role revealed a



Figure 2.4. Queen Aurora 1964, Judy Strom, performing official duties at a public opening. *Citizen*, 3 November 1964, 3.

⁴¹ For example, see Pat Denton, "Top Sports Attraction at Coliseum on Friday," *Citizen*, 22 November 1961, 6. Also see "Press Ready," *Citizen*, 25 March 1966, 11.

great deal about how exactly she was meant to be perceived.

Many of the queen's appearances fit in with typical expectations for beauty queens as highly feminized representatives of their communities. Aurora's role was limited to that of assistant in official appearances and as part of the reward given to winners at local events (in relation to the presentation of trophies), which illustrated the continued emphasis on her dedication to both her community and her femininity. While Aurora's engagements sometimes allowed her the opportunity to interact with the public, most of her appearances required her to play the role of a silent assistant who, by her presence alone, helped publicize local events and projects. In the case of beauty contests staged amongst unions and the working class, queens' attractiveness was similarly used as a means to promote labour initiatives.⁴² And as Huma Ahmed-Ghosh has pointed out in the case of beauty queens in India, queens at local, regional or international levels brought "front page value" to communities' endeavours.⁴³ Queen Aurora served a similar role as an embodiment of various local projects, and provided an opportunity for them to be associated with a young, feminine and recognizable face in Prince George. But the public appearances of Prince George's queen nevertheless gave credence to the notion that Aurora of the Evergreens was a more complete presence in the northern town. She may have been used as a passive spokesperson, but was still visible within Prince George outside of contest-sponsored events.

As previously mentioned, Queen Aurora candidates went through a vigorous public speaking and modeling program before the judging process began. While these

⁴² Sangster, 99-104.

⁴³ Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, "Writing the Nation on the Beauty Queen's Body: Implications for a 'Hindu' Nation," *Meridians* 4, no. 1 (2003): 224.

courses supported the idea that the pageant prized the public display of feminine charms, training also allowed them to become a more legitimate, vocal presence within the community. Their training included components in public speaking, which candidates later used during their numerous opportunities to address city residents. Candidates' speeches rarely covered controversial topics, and frequently focused on outlining the reasons why they would be ideal crown winners. But when candidates were given the opportunity to select topics of their own choosing, their choices were often impressively diverse. An event marking the conclusion of the 1967 candidates' training program featured the opportunity for the girls to speak to a number of local Toastmasters. According to the *Citizen*, their selected speech subjects included Hurricane Freda, the advantages of a second language, life in Canada in 1967 and local entertainment.⁴⁴ It was typical for pageants to feature judging events that required candidates to make speeches, but not for preservation in the local newspaper such as the *Citizen*.⁴⁵ In 1970, in introducing the contestants to the public, the newspaper included the candidates' opinions on several contentious issues.⁴⁶ In these reports, the *Citizen* provided the public an opportunity to gain greater insight into each Queen Aurora candidate's individual viewpoints and perspectives. These opportunities for candidates to speak proved to be important features that allowed for the careful negotiation between the display of bathing beauties and the selection of a legitimate community representative.

⁴⁴ "Aurora Candidates Wind up Training," *Citizen*, 5 May 1967, 23.

⁴⁵ In the case of Penticton, the *Herald* often reported that candidates gave speeches, but makes virtual no reference as to the subject(s), as well as any other details about their talking appearances (for example, whether or not the topics were chosen by the candidates or were assigned to them).

⁴⁶ Candidates commented on issues such as world hunger, war in general and the Nigerian-Biafran War specifically, American racial issues, and the place of Aborigines in Canada.

From the contest's inception, the queen was expected to be present at various speaking opportunities. For example, Queen Aurora of the Evergreens 1958, Lynn Alexander, had the opportunity to give a speech to new citizens about the meaning of citizenship and the importance of Dominion Day at a local ceremony.⁴⁷ Speeches typically discussed the nature of the queen's role as representative for Prince George, as an article detailing the experiences of Queen Aurora 1962, Pat Turner, featured extensive direct quotes from the queen. She recalled her time as the winner of the pageant: "I grew up in Prince George and have a strong feeling for it. I found the most rewarding part of my duties was telling people all about the city." While the article is not particularly revealing or surprising, she also hints at her own personal motives for being a part of the contest, as she frankly admits that one of the reasons she originally entered the contest was for "personal glory."⁴⁸ On another occasion, Queen Aurora 1959, Jill Ewart, authored a short article about her expectations for the upcoming Miss PNE contest in Vancouver. She remarked on her anticipation leading up to the pageant: "I dream of winning, and of not winning, of presenting three wonderful speeches, and of forgetting lines in those same speeches, addresses in which I must speak of Prince George myself and of related matters. I have never before been bothered by insomnia."⁴⁹ These limited accounts and speeches of the pageant's winners provided a greater insight into their individual experiences within the Prince George pageant.

Why is it important that reports publicized the issues and views highlighted by Queen Aurora and the candidates? The greater willingness to publish each girl's concerns and thoughts, while not even especially prominent in newspaper coverage of the pageant,

⁴⁷ "New Citizens Presented Here," *Citizen*, 2 July 1958, 1.

⁴⁸ "Retiring Queen Aurora V Ends Happy, Busy Year." *Citizen*, 13 August 1963, 15.

⁴⁹ Jill Ewart, "Queen Aurora Excited, Apprehensive!" *Citizen*, 28 August 1959, 1.

nevertheless gives credence to the notion that Queen Aurora served as a more comprehensive community figure. Several scholars have noted that despite their prominence in the public eye, beauty queens did not typically have the opportunity to speak publicly. Lavenda has argued that in the case of Minnesota queen contests, contestants were silent throughout the proceedings.⁵⁰ Even Campus Queens were, according to Tice, “mute bodies” that were ‘contained’ by photographs.⁵¹ And in her study of ‘Hoa Hau Ao Dai’ beauty contests in Vietnamese-American communities, Nhi T. Lieu has commented on girls’ lack of speaking opportunities. Like candidates in swimsuit competitions, candidates’ bodies were used for civic purposes; their bodies conveyed their messages as they were rarely given the opportunity to speak.⁵² In providing opportunities for Queen Aurora candidates to use their public speaking skills, and the newspaper coverage of the presentations, Prince George organizers presented their contest as an opportunity for local girls to serve as greater community figures as opposed to beauty queens in the strictest sense. Their somewhat expanded opportunities to speak and be heard served as another example as to how the Prince George pageant did not always follow the same model of other B.C. beauty contests.

Conclusion

The Queen Aurora of the Evergreens pageant evolved its own unique set of traditions despite its connections to other British Columbian beauty contests. This may be explained in part by the circumstances surrounding its staging. Since the pageant was associated over the years with Prince George Day, Simon Fraser Day, Simon Fraser Days

⁵⁰ Lavenda, 169.

⁵¹ Tice, 262.

⁵² Nhi T. Lieu, “‘The Nation’ through Pageantry: Femininity and the Politics of Vietnamese Womanhood in the ‘Hoa Hau Ao Dai’ Contest,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 21, no. 1/2 (2000): 135-136.

and Exhibition, and finally the White Spruce Winter Wonderland Carnival, there was likely some effort made to increase the contest's appeal and legitimacy throughout the years of associations with changing local celebrations. Prince George was also a much more isolated community than many other B.C. towns necessitating greater flexibility in staging and presenting the pageants. Other contests, including Prince George's initial inspiration, the Queen Val-Vedette pageant in Penticton, could benefit from the proximity of a greater number of neighbouring communities. This surely allowed Penticton to draw from a wider regional audience for its beauty contest, which would have further strengthened pageant practices and traditions. Ultimately Queen Aurora's balance between morality and sexuality not only reflected local values, but also the realities of a beauty pageant less entrenched within community celebrations.

This Queen Aurora identity was not without its issues, as the contest was rife with contradictions and inconsistent messages as to the candidates' place within Prince George society. Pageant organizers hoped to create a contest whereby girls were both respectable daughters of the community as well as beauty queens more akin to pin-up girls and bathing beauties. This reflected not only the local identity idealized by some residents of the northern town, but also the gendered expectations for young girls in the 1950s and 1960s. The careful balance between the respectability and "cheesecake" manifested itself in the contest's proceedings through several channels, including the contest's history, judging practices and events, and the introduction of candidates and eventual winners into Prince George society.

It was important to some Prince George citizens that Queen Aurora and the candidates not be portrayed as exclusively objectified sexual creatures. In looking to

Penticton and Wenatchee as examples for their contest model, they clearly strove to maintain a sense of decorum throughout the pageant's proceedings and guard against candidates being placed in positions where their morals could be questioned. This was also evident in the judging system that upheld middle-class standards for assessing girls' bodies and characters, and the mandatory training course for all candidates as proof that the contest was a legitimate avenue for self improvement. Those involved in Prince George's beauty contest could have fun and 'girl watch' but it was important that some degree of propriety was upheld so that residents could feel secure in the choice of their beauty queen charged with representing their community. This speaks to the constant tension between the moral impressions of pageantry in contrast to the reality of scrutinized and exposed female bodies. Even Prince George, in its willingness to showcase candidates, had to ward off presenting local young women as *too* sexual.

Unlike some community-based beauty queens, Queen Aurora of the Evergreens was encouraged not to shun several provocative scenarios. Candidates were certainly not supposed to be lewd or immoral women, but organizers put them in situations where their bodies were associated with a considerable degree of sexual imagery. Their participation in glorified swimsuit competitions known as "swimming parties" and fashion shows, as well as published photographs emphasizing their bare legs and demure gazes brought a stronger degree of 'girl-watching' into the contest. This, combined with the largely promotional and assistant roles for Queen Aurora during her reign meant that the feminine nature of the contest was paramount. The gendered implications of this system ultimately conveyed the message that while Aurora was expected to appropriately represent Prince George and its sense of community identity, she had to accomplish this

in such a manner that her femininity and dedication to seeking the approval of the male gaze was at the forefront of her official duties. Queen Aurora of the Evergreens was portrayed in such a manner that her presence was supposed to strike a balance between showcasing the community's morality and its ability to produce desirable young women. But as discussed in Chapter Three, the representation of Queen Aurora and her fellow B.C. queens was very different on the larger provincial scale.

Chapter 3

Miss PNE Contest, Community Representation, and the Homogenization of Regional Differences

Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora of the Evergreens played important albeit variant roles within their respective towns. The Peach Queen was primarily expected to be a symbol of virtuousness and to provide social opportunities, and Queen Aurora served as a visibly feminine figure that was both portrayed as a bathing beauty and a community representative. Despite their differences, the two contests were contemporaries, and their winners often visited each other as ambassadors of their respective towns. It was not uncommon for the *Herald* and the *Citizen* to report on the two queens' visits to each other's coronation ceremonies and other events throughout the province.¹ One of the major shared responsibilities of the two contests' winners was to compete in the Miss PNE pageant. As its name suggests, the Miss PNE contest was held in conjunction with the Pacific National Exhibition, which took place over the annual Labour Day weekend. It served as the larger provincial contest where Val-Vedette, Aurora, and other British Columbian towns' queens competed for the opportunity to represent the entire province.

The Vancouver-based exhibition introduced the Miss PNE contest in 1947. It was part of a larger postwar effort to increase 'urban' interest in the PNE and to move it away from its reliance on farming and manufacturing exhibits. The beauty contest was structured in such a manner that various communities were awarded Miss PNE franchises

¹ For example, see "City Queen Participates in Carnival," *Citizen*, 31 January 1968, 1 and "Val-Vedette in Prince George," *Herald*, 14 August 1963, 7.

whereby they would select a queen to represent them in Vancouver.² It was typically the responsibility of individual franchises to fund their candidates' travel expenses. Once the candidates arrived in Vancouver, they had busy schedules that typically included attendance at various PNE shows and events, a B.C. Lions football game, and teas and pageant parties. As for actual pageant proceedings, according to a 1959 article published in the *Citizen*, candidates were required to make public speeches each evening of the exhibition, and to appear periodically on stage "for the benefit of the judges."³ A former Queen Aurora recalled having to give speeches in front of twenty thousand people when competing for the Miss PNE title.⁴ While organizers modified some elements of the Miss PNE pageant over the years, its basic structure remained largely unchanged.

How did the PNE contest factor into the character of Penticton and Prince George's pageants? Surely the larger provincial example influenced the communities' smaller contests, but how did the queens reflect that influence? Because the Miss PNE pageant was considered a major and prestigious event, Penticton and Prince George made a point of fielding a candidate for almost every year during the 1950s and 1960s. And the PNE pageant had considerable influence over virtually all of its 'franchises.' If individual communities such as Penticton and Prince George wanted their queens to be featured at the exhibition pageant, they had to ensure that their contests followed the guidelines and practices of the larger example. All of this had an important effect on the smaller franchise contests, as it determined the 'type' of girl who competed for the Peach Queen or Queen of the Evergreens crown. This chapter examines the advantages associated with

² David Breen and Kenneth Coates, *Vancouver's Fair: An Administrative and Political History of the Pacific National Exhibition* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), 110.

³ "P.G. Queen Aurora II Competes in 'Miss PNE.'" *Citizen*, 28 August 1959, 1.

⁴ Marian Bruce, "No Strings, No Rings for Former Queen," *Citizen*, 26 May 1966, 3.

entering candidates for the title, the contest's influence on franchise pageants' structures and specifically queens' name changes required to compete for the PNE title. The prominence of the Vancouver-based contest resulted in the trend whereby the queens held variant roles *within* their respective communities but were seen as much more interchangeable *outside* Penticton and Prince George.

Contest Prestige

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the PNE was one of North America's largest exhibitions, and it was a significant opportunity for B.C. communities to send a representative to its beauty contest. This was evident when the *Citizen* included an editorial originally published in Quesnel's *Cariboo Observer*. It noted that efforts to reinstate the "Miss Quesnel" contest would provide Quesnel with the opportunity to have its queen compete in the Miss PNE pageant. Specifically, the "publicity value" of the Vancouver-based contest was an opportunity not "to be taken lightly."⁵ Throughout the 1960s, the larger pageant featured roughly thirty candidates from across British Columbia, and newspapers reported that there was a waitlist for other communities wanting to enter their local beauty queen for the title of Miss PNE. When Prince George was struggling to continue the Queen Aurora contest in 1968, the *Citizen* cited Quesnel's earlier troubles and noted that according to the PNE rules, any community that failed to send a candidate to the Miss PNE contest two years in a row would lose its privilege to send any subsequent candidates to Vancouver.⁶ The struggles of the Quesnel and Prince George contests illustrate the importance of the PNE pageant opportunity, as both northern communities rationalized the need for a local contest in order to send a

⁵ "Let's Do It Right," *Citizen*, 14 May 1962, 2.

⁶ "Aurora's Last Chance," *Citizen*, 23 October 1968, 3.

representative to the PNE. This indicates the high level of prestige associated with the larger pageant.

Of course, the girl who won the provincial title received a great deal of esteem. The prizes awarded to Miss PNE varied over the years, and at various times included a driving course, an “individual development course” (a modeling and styling program), and a complete wardrobe.⁷ She always received a cheque for \$1,000. In addition to her winnings, the new queen wore a traditional cape and tiara. The right to wear the tiara was an especially notable honor as in 1968 the B.C. Faceters’ Guild took on the centennial project of constructing a new tiara worth \$2,500 and made of gold, silver, and 24 jewels.⁸ Once crowned, the winner would henceforth represent both her hometown *and* the whole province as Miss PNE at various fairs throughout Canada and the United States. For some years during the late 1950s, winning the title of Miss PNE automatically meant taking on the title of “Miss B.C. Lions,” at which point the lucky girl would also compete in the “Miss Grey Cup” contest.⁹ With all the prizes given to the winner, the title of Miss PNE held a great deal of meaning within the province.

The home community of the victorious Miss PNE also benefitted from its girl’s success. This was most evident in the example of Penticton, as the Okanagan town was fortunate to have two of its candidates selected as queen during the 1950s and 1960s. Queen Val-Vedette V, Joan Nagle, and Queen Val-Vedette VXIII, Fyfe Rutherford, were crowned as Miss PNE in 1952 and 1964 respectively. Not only was the winners’ service to the community celebrated but Penticton was also credited for its daughters’ success.

⁷ “Queen Aurora Travels to PNE.” *Citizen*, 17 August 1967, p. 3; “29 Beauties to Compete for Miss PNE,” *Citizen*, 20 August 1965, 7.

⁸ “Guild Presents \$2,500 Tiara.” *Citizen*, 7 June 1968, 12.

⁹ “P.G. Aurora II Competes in ‘Miss PNE,’” *Citizen*, 28 August 1959, 1.



Figure 3.1. Queen Val-Vedette V, Joan Nagle, crowned as Miss PNE 1952. *Herald*, 28 August 1952, 1.

This was especially evident in the case of Nagle’s 1952 win. The *Herald*’s front page story announcing her win noted that not only had she brought honour to the city, but that “Joan’s a very proud girl, and Penticton’s very proud *with* her, too.”¹⁰ The use of the word ‘with’ is telling, as it implies that the town had as much to be proud of as Nagle. An editorial published a week later added that as the whole province would be represented by Penticton’s queen, “[t]he rest of the countryside, it seems evident, is only too delighted to capitalize on what Penticton can produce.”¹¹ Focused on Penticton’s ability to deliver a winner, as opposed to Nagle’s individual accomplishment of being crowned Miss PNE,

¹⁰ “Penticton’s Peach Queen Wins Title,” *Herald*, 28 August 1952, 1. My emphasis.

¹¹ “Congratulations, Joan,” *Herald*, 4 September 1952, 3.

the Miss PNE 1952 victory demonstrated the benefits of entering a candidate in the Vancouver contest, since the sponsoring community could claim credit for producing the girl deemed worthy of representing all of British Columbia. The claim to prestige was surely an incentive for communities to enter local winners in the Miss PNE pageant.

What occurred when communities sponsored unsuccessful candidates? Prince George serves as a perfect example of this scenario, as none of its queens between 1958 and 1970 captured the Miss PNE crown. It expressed pride in its candidates regardless of the fact that they did not go on to win the title. A letter to the editor published in the *Citizen* emphasized the positive aspects of Queen Aurora II's participation in the exhibition contest: "She walked in beauty; she spoke proudly and well of her home town, 'The Spruce Capital of the World,' and was acclaimed a 'real jewel' by the master of ceremonies from Hollywood." The author found numerous reasons to be proud despite the fact that Prince George could not claim to be Miss PNE's hometown. The same letter noted that while there was only one winner, the other twenty-seven girls were all "runner-ups," which surely helped to soften the blow of the local candidate's loss by phrasing it in such terms that all the non-winners effectively tied for second place.¹² Prince George's candidates may never have won the title during the time period in question, but there was nonetheless the expression of pride in their ability to represent their town with poise and dignity. Even the unsuccessful communities had a reason to be pleased in their involvement with the Miss PNE pageant.

With a structure that remained largely the same over the years and that emphasized candidates' participation in various parties and speaking venues, the Miss PNE contest enjoyed a considerable degree of esteem across the province. Numerous

¹² Letter to the editor, *Citizen*, 25 September 1959, 2.

towns, including Penticton and Prince George, saw it as a legitimate opportunity to bolster community pride and to showcase local beauty on a provincial stage. Because of this incentive, local organizers were willing to adhere to various basic regulations established by the PNE. These rules were the standard for smaller pageants wanting to field a candidate for the provincial title. Because of the prestige associated with Vancouver's pageant, communities such as Penticton and Prince George shaped their respective competitions according to the Miss PNE example.

Influence on Franchises' Structure

The primary goal of the PNE contest organizers was to select British Columbia's most beautiful daughter who was not "just an 'oomph' girl."¹³ The avoidance of overt "cheesecake" was evident in the Vancouver-based pageant, and it was not be "just a bathing beauty parade either," since candidates would wear "summer playsuit attire, without hats, or suitable bathing costume attire."¹⁴ Evidently the pageant felt itself able to distinguish between "suitable bathing costume attire" and bathing suits. The Miss PNE pageant, like its franchises, strove to ensure a balance between the careful display of femininity and outright ogling of young women. It seems as though they were able to succeed, not only because of the popularity of the contest throughout the province, but because various groups supported efforts to send local queens to Vancouver as candidates. For example, Penticton's Anglican and United churches publicly supported Val-Vedette's efforts to become Miss PNE.¹⁵ Considerable efforts were made within

¹³ "Seek B.C.'s Beauty Queen," *Herald*, 21 July 1949, 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Also see "\$1,000 Grand Prize for P.N.E. Contest Winner," *Citizen*, 21 June 1951, 9. The *Citizen* article similarly stresses the notion that the Vancouver contest was merely an opportunity to view girls in bathing suits.

¹⁵ "Teen Town will Sponsor Drive to Select Local 'Miss PNE' Candidate," *Herald*, 9 June 1950, 9.

Prince George as well, since it was reported in 1959 that the town was third on the Miss PNE waitlist.¹⁶ This balancing act was reflected in the nature of the Val-Vedette and Aurora of the Evergreens pageants, albeit with a varying degree of emphasis on respectability. While the moral nature of contests spoke to local concerns, the fact that the efforts aligned with the larger Vancouver example strengthened the links between the Miss PNE pageant and its smaller franchises.

Local candidates not only answered to the general tone and character of the Miss PNE pageant, but also to its judging process. The *Citizen* stressed that any girls hoping to enter the Queen Aurora contest in 1966 had to qualify under the PNE rules.¹⁷ This insistence on adherence to the provincial rules was most evident when the larger contest changed its judging criteria in 1959. Before 1959 judging points were evenly divided between three judging categories: “beauty of face and figure,” “charm and deportment,” and “ability to speak in public, general intelligence and special abilities.” But with the new changes in 1959, candidates’ faces and figures counted for fifty percent of judging marks alone, with the other two categories worth twenty-five percent each.¹⁸ Articles published in the *Herald* and the *Citizen* after the release of the new PNE rules always echoed the same judging standards, meaning that the two towns changed their judging rules according to the larger contest’s new emphasis on comeliness. A 1963 edition of the *Citizen* included an article explaining that the local judging process was based on the “PNE standards” of 50 points for beauty, 25 points for personality and deportment (or appearance thereof), and 25 points for speaking abilities and intelligence.¹⁹ A similar

¹⁶ “Aurora Entries Chosen,” *Citizen*, 20 April 1959, 1.

¹⁷ “Aurora Queen Committee Lays Preliminary Plans,” *Citizen*, 24 March 1966, 3.

¹⁸ “Accent on Comeliness in Miss PNE Contest,” *Citizen*, 16 February 1959, 3.

¹⁹ “Queen Aurora Carries Heavy Burden during Reign,” *Citizen*, 16 April 1964, 1.

1962 article featured in the *Herald* outlined the same judging categories.²⁰ In dictating the manner in which local franchise candidates were selected as queens, the Miss PNE contest directly influenced smaller contests throughout British Columbia.

Peach Queen and Aurora of the Evergreens contest organizers had to consider more than just the PNE judging categories throughout local selection processes. As the *Herald* bluntly acknowledged, any girl wanting to become Miss PNE had to adhere to the larger pageant's "basic rules."²¹ This involved fulfilling several important requirements. Candidates had to be between the ages of 17 and 22 years old, and any local girls wanting to represent their community had to be single and never have had a marriage annulled or end in divorce.²² Candidates could also not have won their town's queen title during a previous year, making it impossible for a girl to represent her community more than once. These rules were taken very seriously, as evidenced by the resignation of one Prince George princess, Kerry Cyr, when she wanted to marry her fiancée during the year of her reign.²³ PNE guidelines and standards had to be vigorously upheld so that communities such as Penticton and Prince George could float local candidates. The PNE contest also influenced how smaller communities' judges evaluated candidates and determined which local girls were eligible to enter franchise contests. The associated benefits and merits of entering a local girl in the provincial pageant exerted a different influence on who was likely to emerge as successful local candidates in the Penticton and Prince George pageants.

²⁰ "Queen Candidates Meet the Public," *Herald*, 25 April 1962, 3.

²¹ "Festival," *Herald*, 10 April 1957, 6.

²² See "PNE Queen Age Studied," *Citizen*, 30 November 1964, 16. Miss PNE organizers investigated as to whether or not seventeen year old candidates were "mature enough" to compete in the Vancouver contest, but no changes seem to have emerged from their study.

²³ "Aurora Princess Steps Down," *Citizen*, 1 March 1967, 3.

Nature of Candidates

The PNE rules were not solely responsible for the similarities amongst candidates. Several scholars have claimed that candidates represent the 'every girl' of a particular community (geographical, cultural or ethnic). In the case of the Miss America pageant, Fair argues that while significant changes were implemented during Lenora Slaughter's tenure as pageant director, it was only decades later that girls exerted more individual choices in the national American contest.²⁴ He is not the only scholar to note the trend of uniformity amongst candidates in the national American pageant. Banet-Weiser has also considered the importance of typicality to the Miss America contest.²⁵ But scholars have noted that this trend was not limited to Miss America alone. Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green, when considering the explosion of popularity in beauty contests during the 1960s, examined the case of the National College Queen. Judges in the contest specifically looked for "the well-rounded average" as its queen, meaning that candidates attempted to emulate the idea of an 'average' college girl.²⁶ Undoubtedly, the trend amongst beauty contests was to have candidates resemble one another in various characteristics. But in the cases of the influence of the Miss PNE contest, it was directly responsible for some of the similarities between Val-Vedette and Aurora candidates. Its rules and guidelines were a convenient means to shape the nature of local franchise contests and their candidates.

²⁴ Fair, 29. For example, he cites Miss America 1974 as the first winner to declare that she "wanted more" than marriage for her future, and wanted to go to law school and become a lawyer.

²⁵ See "Chapter One: 'A Certain Class of Girl': Respectability and the Structure of the Miss America Pageant," in Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 31-57.

²⁶ Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green, *American Women in the 1960s: Changing the Future* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 331. Interestingly, Linden-Ward and Hurd Green note that qualities valued for the 'average' girl in the College-based contest were "blouse-ironing, hamburger cooking, serving coffee to the judges, decorating sandals, and debating the 'right and wrong hairstyles.'"

The age limitation was a prime example of the PNE's sway over Penticton and Prince George's queen contests. Because candidates had to be between 17 and 22 years of age, the restrictions effectively ensured that most British Columbian queens were in the process of completing, or had recently completed their secondary school education. This had a considerable effect on the nature of candidates, as they could thereby be more easily portrayed as 'girls' as opposed to women. Not only did this downplay some of the concerns surrounding sexuality associated with beauty pageants, but it also helped promote the notion that girls vying for the crown were their community's daughters.²⁷ When detailing candidates' pastimes and hobbies, local newspapers often noted that they were very active in school activities and clubs. Girls commonly expressed interest in such school-related pastimes as pep club, yearbook club, Teen Town activities, and such school sports as basketball and volleyball.²⁸ By emphasizing their close relationship with secondary school interests, the two towns' newspapers bolstered the image of candidates as young daughters of their communities. This was further underlined by the rule stating the candidates could not be married, engaged or divorced. Having young, unattached candidates further supported the image of the Peach Queen, Queen Aurora, and Miss PNE as nonsexual local girls worthy of representing their towns and province.²⁹

²⁷ Lavenda, 169. He argues that in desexualizing Minnesota queen pageants, organizers emphasize the fact that "the image of the candidates presented is of the community's daughters, not potential wives."

²⁸Both newspapers, and the *Citizen* in particular, often published articles detailing each candidates' background and interest. A quick survey of such articles throughout the 1950s and 1960s concludes that school activities were especially popular. Teen Town, a province-wide social club for adolescents, was a particularly common pastime, and was in fact first initiated by youth in Penticton. See Doug Cox, *Penticton: Now, Then and Way Back Then* (Penticton: Skookum Publications, 2007): 90.

²⁹ Miss PNE was similarly emphasized as a daughter of the province. For example, an article announcing the winner of the contest and published in the *Herald* in 1961 featured the headline "Farmer's Daughter Miss PNE." The image of a 'farmer's daughter' conjures up similarly wholesome ideas as secondary school-aged, unmarried community daughters.

With the PNE's influence in portraying candidates as local girls with bright futures ahead of them, local newspapers often reported the hopes that each girl had for her future. Candidates for Peach Queen and Queen Aurora frequently had aspirations to continue their schooling and eventually earn successful careers. Many hoped to attend university, and while some candidates expressed a desire to become lawyers and doctors, by far the most common goals for girls were to become teachers, nurses or stewardesses. For young women adhering to middle-class social values, these were thought to be appropriate careers.³⁰ The *Herald* and the *Citizen* further noted that throughout the years many candidates hoped to someday get married and have families. One of the more assertive candidates on her hopes for wifedom and motherhood, Judy Norrish, the Hotelmen's Association's candidate for Queen Aurora in 1963, commented that she looked forward to having a "hot stove and wet diapers" in her future.³¹ It was in fact common for the two newspapers to feature extensive coverage of former queens' marriages in the years following their reigns. Indeed, many articles noted that the brides wore their royal gowns as their wedding dresses.³² While Penticton and Prince George clearly had definite ideas as to the type of girl who would best represent their communities, their actual candidates were notably similar. This was at least in part due to the influence of the Miss PNE pageant, and the types of candidates valued by the Vancouver example.

³⁰ See "Chapter Four: Work," in Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Wood. The authors note that the process of becoming a stewardess was remarkably similar to competing in a beauty contest, as it required applicants' appearance to be scrutinized and emphasized such qualities as poise and 'smileability.'

³¹ "Queen Aurora Candidate Enjoying Training," *Citizen*, 31 May 1963, 8.

³² For Penticton examples, see "Former Peach Queen to Wed in September," *Herald*, 7 August 1965, 5; "Former Peach Queen Weds Penticton Man," *Herald*, 17 May 1967, 5. For Prince George examples, see "Halley-Smith Vows in U.S.," *Citizen*, 17 August 1962, 8; "Former Queen Aurora Exchanges Vows in St. Michael and All Angels," *Citizen*, 10 September 1963, 5.

The notion that the pageants and their organizers deliberately presented Penticton and Prince George queens in a specific manner touches on an important issue in the study of beauty queens. As Banet-Weiser has pointed out, there is a very real difference between perceptions of candidates and the actual character of girls competing for a crown in a small town pageant. This was especially true in the case of candidates' future plans. Banet-Weiser interviewed contemporary beauty queens, and one girl known only as Alice had an interesting comment regarding the voicing of her ambitions:

...I might not want to have a family at this point and I'm only thinking of my career, but it will probably help in my favor, especially if there are men in the audience, older men, to say 'Yeah, I want a career but a family is very important to me.' You never want to say you hate your father on stage! So, it's just that you kind of bend the truth a little, I guess you can out and out lie, but there are just some answers that are better than others.³³

Alice clearly understood the value of a carefully selected response. Although this brings up the notion of genuineness within beauty contests and speaks of a more recent pageant experience, it also demonstrates the timeless distinction between how beauty contest candidates portrayed themselves and others, as compared with who they actually were. While the candidates' true character and values were not presented to their communities, they were nevertheless carefully presented by their towns' newspapers to reflect specific ideas and qualities. These qualities were consistent despite the differences between Penticton and Prince George, and the varying roles of their actual contests within their respective communities. While the influence of the PNE pageant alone could not explain this, it nevertheless had a considerable influence on the manner in which various regional contests were organized and staged.

³³ Banet-Weiser, 97. Also see "Chapter Four: Performing Normalcy," in Brenda Foley, *Undressed for Success: Beauty Contestants and Exotic Dancers as Merchants of Morality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Contest Names

The two smaller towns were clearly willing to follow Vancouver's example in order to field girls for the possibility of winning the Miss PNE title. But in order to fully understand the lengths Penticton and Prince George organizers were willing to go through, it is worth considering the importance of their franchise queens' names. The meanings of the titles, Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora of the Evergreens, were very important to the communities and their contests. They applied to local customs and practices, and in the case of Penticton, tied in with the festivities of the Peach Festival. By first understanding the importance of the winners' titles to their communities, one is then able to understand just how influential the Miss PNE pageant was within British Columbia.

In the case of Penticton, Vedette was a popular type of peach during the first half of the twentieth century, and it is therefore logical that the winner's alternate name was Peach Queen. But Pentictonites ascribed specific meanings to the name Val-Vedette, and a Peach Festival program that was distributed during the 1952 festivities featured a section explaining the queen's name. It detailed the importance of peaches to the history and development of Penticton, and specifically noted the origins of the Vedette peach along with two other early varieties, the Valiant and the Veteran. Contest organizers emphasized certain qualities embodied by the Val-Vedette peach that made it the perfect symbol for local beautiful girls. It explained that the "three Vees" were of "supreme quality" and "luscious appearance." The program compared local beauty to the 'lusciousness' of Okanagan peach varieties, and provided a strong link between the town's beauty contest and one of its most important industries. Although the program

does not explain why the Vedette peach was chosen as inspiration for the queen's title instead of the Valiant or Veteran varieties, it was possibly selected because the name 'Vedette' conjures up feminine imagery.³⁴ An article written by the first Peach Queen and published in a 1965 edition of the *Herald* solidified the name's association with local customs and practices. She explained that her family chose the name of the queen, and it then received approval from Peach Festival organizers. She recalled that her family chose the name because it related to the Peach Festival, and because it sounded "feminine and regal."³⁵ Val-Vedette contest organizers created a contest that connected to the community's sense of self by linking local young women's beauty to the Peach Festival and the Peach, an important symbol of Penticton's and the Okanagan's prosperity.

Prince George ascribed similar meaning to the name Queen Aurora of the Evergreens. Rather than linking the pageant winner to the associated festival and the fruit responsible for an important local industry, the Prince George queen's name conjured up images of the north's topography. The title of Queen Aurora of the Evergreens relied on northern British Columbia's connection with forests and the Aurora Borealis. The *Citizen* revealed that the name was associated with the 'splendor' of the northern lights and the area's "close ties" with forestry.³⁶ When the second Prince George queen was crowned at her official crowning ceremony, it was reported that the "Aurora Borealis shimmered in the sky like a tremendous bank of neon lights."³⁷ At the 1962 ceremony, Ray Williston,

³⁴ Words ending in 'ette' are usually derived from French, and French grammar dictates that all words with this ending are feminine in nature. This wording is often similarly associated with femininity in the English language (e.g. coquette, pirouette, rosette).

³⁵ Beverley Ann Bella, "Queen Val Vedette, How It all Began," *Herald*, 7 August 1965, 5.

³⁶ "'Queen of the Evergreens' to Reign during Centennial," *Citizen*, 25 February 1958, 1.

³⁷ "Jill Ewart New Aurora Queen," *Citizen*, 20 July 1959, 3. Although the newspaper does not specify that the northern lights under which the queen was crowned were simulated, it is unlikely that they were real. The queen was crowned in the early evening in July, which is an unlikely time to actually witness Aurora Borealis.

Minister of Lands and Forests and the region's MLA, crowned the winner and then declared his hope that the forests would stay green during her reign, while in 1964 it was explained that the queen's coronation robe was meant to represent the forests and her crown was meant to signify the northern lights.³⁸ Prince George obviously went to considerable effort to tie the Aurora pageant to features of northern British Columbia, and thereby carefully linked the contest to the community's sense of identity. Queen Aurora of the Evergreens, like Queen Val-Vedette, held special meaning for residents of her town.

Contest organizers made their strongest efforts to entrench the name Queen Aurora of the Evergreens in local understanding of Prince George's identity in 1960, when they announced a writing competition for the official story behind the pageant's name. They called for legends explaining the emergence of Queen Aurora and her association with the northern lights. Particular interest was paid to entries from "persons who [had] knowledge of the legends of the country," which indicated efforts to give legitimacy to Queen Aurora and her role within Prince George.³⁹ There was reportedly a "mass response" to the call for entries, and a woman from McLeod Lake won the \$75 prize. Her story was chosen based on a judging system that considered "imagination, closeness of their [sic] link with Aurora, plot, characterization and adaptability for drama."⁴⁰ Financial restrictions prevented staging the legend as a central feature of Simon Fraser Days and the Queen's coronation ceremony. Finally published as a short booklet in 1975, the legend told the story of Aurora, an "Indian princess" who was renowned for

³⁸ "2,500 Witness Coronation under Threatening Clouds," *Citizen*, 15 August 1962, 1; "Queen and Princess Represent City in Okanagan Centres," *Citizen*, 11 August 1964, 5.

³⁹ "Fraser Day Group Offers Prize for Best Legend of Aurora Queen," *Citizen*, 11 February 1960, 3.

⁴⁰ "McLeod Lake Entry Wins Legend Prize," *Citizen*, 25 March 1960, 1.

her beauty. She sacrificed herself to the Ice King in order to save the forests and her people from eternal winter. Because of her sacrifice, she was named Queen Aurora of the Evergreens, and a “special rainbow” appeared in the sky.⁴¹ The legend further solidified the importance of Queen Aurora’s name to Prince George and its surrounding region. It served as another means to link the pageant and its name with Prince George identity.

While infused with local meaning, the queens’ names also revealed a great deal of the gendered expectations of their towns. They both stressed the importance of feminine beauty and regality, which was appropriate for a beauty contest. Comparing Val-Vedette to a peach suggests that like the fruit, local girls’ beauty and character need to be carefully cultivated. Further, the legend of Queen Aurora was especially telling, as the story explains that Aurora sacrificed herself because of an error she committed that would have damned her people to live in a frozen wasteland. She naively freed White Fox, a prisoner who was later revealed to be the son of the Ice King, and her sacrifice was the only way to ensure the survival of her people and her beloved forests. According to the legend, she asserted, “O, my beloved father, I deserve this punishment. I must make atonement for the sin I committed when I set White Fox free.”⁴² The idea of a woman’s sin damning mankind and deserving punishment is a well-established idea in Western culture. Naomi Wolf has gone so far to suggest original sin is more accurately depicted as *female* sin staining all women.⁴³ This also aligns with the idea that femininity is something that requires containment; just as Aurora is punished for disobedience, the legend implies that beautiful women should be carefully monitored and cannot be trusted to act properly without supervision. If they do stray from demands or expectations, they

⁴¹ Nancy Middleton, *Aurora of the Evergreens* (Prince George: Beekman Printing, 1975).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1990), 95. My italics.

should be disciplined and, if the situation calls for it, can be used as suitable sacrifices for the greater good. The imagery associated with both queens' names, but especially the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens legend, reflect larger expectations for young female citizens of Penticton and Prince George in the public eye.

The use of an aboriginal legend in the promotion of Aurora's name reveals the role of ethnicity in pageant proceedings. While it is possible that the Aurora story was rooted in some elements of aboriginal culture, it unfolds in a manner more akin to Western literary traditions than First Nations storytelling.⁴⁴ Its use of an Indian princess figure is telling, as it exoticizes the notion of aboriginal womanhood. According to Kim Anderson, the Indian princess has been a traditional image in Western constructions of aboriginal women, as this image has typically been associated with the concept of a virgin territory that can be used for colonizers' pleasure and profit.⁴⁵ Thus, the legend explaining the origins of Queen Aurora's name presents aboriginal femininity as 'the other' that is constructed as non-threatening and in accordance with Western values. It also shapes aboriginal culture as useful to the imagery associated with the Queen Aurora of the Evergreens pageant, while the pageant itself failed to include aboriginal candidates throughout the period between 1958 and 1970.⁴⁶ Queen Aurora organizers were therefore

⁴⁴ Possible aboriginal origins of the Queen Aurora legend were not explored as part of the research process for this thesis, but traditional First Nations storytelling themes, issues and practices are discussed in Jo-Ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008).

⁴⁵ Kim Anderson, "The Construction of a Negative Identity," in *Feminisms and Womanisms: A Woman's Studies Reader*, eds. Althea Prince, Susan Silva-Wayne and Christian Vernon (Toronto: Women's Press, 204), 230-231.

⁴⁶ "Indian Princess" contests were popular during the 1960s and 1970s as alternative beauty pageants for young First Nations women. Prince George staged the province-wide "Indian Princess B.C." contest as part of the "Indian Days" event in 1971, but aboriginal girls were never part of the Queen Aurora pageant during the 1950s or 1960s.

willing to borrow from a romanticized notion of another ethnic group, while at the same time using this 'otherness' as a means to reinforce constructions of Caucasian femininity.

Since the Queen Aurora legend emphasizes the role of race in pageantry, two Prince George examples in particular illustrate the degree of acceptance for non-white candidates in the 1950s and 1960s. Miss Rotary 1960, Terry Takeda, a Japanese-Canadian candidate, was described in a *Citizen* article as having "jet black hair and brown eyes" but it made no specific reference to her race. The article noted that she was born in New Denver, an interior British Columbian town now recognized as the base for a major Japanese internment camp during the Second World War.⁴⁷ Despite her different facial features and personal background, the *Citizen* never portrayed her as anything other than an 'everygirl' like her fellow candidates. "Miss Progress 1969," Louise Chong, was acknowledged as a Chinese-Canadian candidate but her introductory article noted that while she spoke some Chinese, she only cooked "Americanized Chinese food."⁴⁸ Between 1948 and 1969, Takeda and Chong were the only two non-white candidates entered the race for the Queen Aurora crown, and the lack of reference to their racial backgrounds suggests a degree of unwillingness to embrace candidates who were not Caucasian. Indeed, virtually all candidates who vied for the Peach Queen crown between 1948 and 1970 were white. Alternative contests such as the B.C. Indian Princess existed as an option in the 1960s but the message was certain; the big pageants were not colour-blind. The primacy of Caucasian candidates remained the norm throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

⁴⁷ Assuming that Takeda was approximately 18 years old at the time of her candidacy, she may have even been born in the wartime camp.

⁴⁸ "Miss Progress Plans to Study Medicine," *Citizen*, 27 January 1969, 6.

The predominance of whiteness was evident in B.C. beauty pageants of the 1950s and 1960s. Although scholars have varied in their definitions of whiteness, Steve Garner has identified it as a racialized identity that exists in contrast to other identities, and as a perspective in assessing social relations.⁴⁹ Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica and Matt Wray have similarly defined it as a social construction that is often associated with a sense of entitlement and social power.⁵⁰ Penticton and Prince George each had a substantial number of aboriginal citizens, and Prince George in particular had a historically important Chinese minority population, yet these groups were overlooked in the creation of an exclusively white pageantry tradition. The adoption of an aboriginal 'legend' written according to white literary traditions by a local woman of Scottish descent, coupled with the inclusion of only two non-white candidates in the two decades of pageantry in Prince George (and none in Penticton) meant that non-white perspectives were significantly marginalized. The two British Columbian towns presented themselves through their beauty contests as exclusively white communities.

PNE Contest Suppression of Queens' Images

Penticton and Prince George clearly made efforts to ascribe local and gendered meanings to their respective queens' official titles. But the Miss PNE pageant's influence was so great that it affected how Val-Vedette and Aurora were identified outside their respective communities. Although girls were expected to give speeches about their towns and generally promote the virtues of their communities, the larger contest did not provide much opportunity for queens to showcase the uniqueness of their hometowns. During

⁴⁹ Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2-3.

⁵⁰ Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al., "Introduction." in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 8.

their time in Vancouver, the queens' differences were stifled. Their actual participation in the Miss PNE pageant greatly shaped the perception of franchise queens outside their respective towns.

This was most evident during the actual presentation of the Miss PNE candidates. Many queens, not just those from Penticton and Prince George, had unique names that suggested local and regional differences. For example, the Kelowna queen was the "Lady of the Lake," and the William's Lake queen was the "Stampede Queen."⁵¹ As their titles suggest, and in keeping with the examples of Penticton and Prince George, many names referred to a particular event, pastime or feature of the towns that gave them a sense of pride and individuality. However, once the winners reached the contest in Vancouver, they were no longer referred to by their local titles. Instead, virtually all queens were known by the moniker 'Miss' followed by the name of their towns. Figure 3.2 illustrates this very clearly, as it shows the Prince George and Revelstoke candidates, known as Queen Aurora and the Ski Queen in their towns, wearing banners that read "Miss Prince George" and "Miss Revelstoke." This would not appear to be an especially significant feature of the Miss PNE contest, save for the explicit rule that all candidates had to wear their banners at all times except when on city streets.⁵² When the queens with regionally-specific names arrived in Vancouver, their unique titles and to at least a certain extent their individual identities were discarded or marginalized. The sense of local flair associated with their different names was not a part of the Miss PNE contest in order to ensure a degree of uniformity between candidates. While this makes sense within the context of the Vancouver pageant, it nevertheless shows that competing for the Miss PNE

⁵¹ "Visiting Royalty Colorful Sight," *Herald*, 5 August 1967, 5.

⁵² "Judy Clark Off to Seek PNE Title," *Citizen*, 25 August 1961, 7.



Figure 3.2. Prince George candidate Marilyn Kos and Revelstoke candidate Rona Stevenson at the Miss PNE pageant. *Citizen*, 26 August 1970, 3.

title stifled candidates' individual community-based identities.

Prince George contest organizers initiated an innovative means to make their queen more visible regardless of her name change while in Vancouver. All royal parties were bequeathed official wardrobes that consisted of their coronation gown and robe, as well as at least one other outfit or dress for less formal duties. An annual feature of Queen Aurora's wardrobe was a "tartan suit" that was typically used as her travelling outfit. The 1958 Queen's suit featured the B.C. centennial tartan pattern and subsequent Auroras wore similar patterns for many years.⁵³ By the mid 1960s, it was an important feature of Aurora's wardrobe, as it was routinely described as a tradition, and a 1965 article in the

⁵³ "Leave Tartan to Scots Chamber Prexy Advises," *Citizen*, 29 April 1962, 12.

Citizen noted that “the colors [sic] and styles have varied from year to year but the suits have remained constant.”⁵⁴ Queen Aurora also wore it during the Miss PNE contest, as evidenced in Figure 3.3. In the photo, the indistinct title of Miss Prince George is visible on the banner adorning the queen’s suitcase, but is somewhat negated by the distinctive clothing worn by 1959’s Queen Aurora. The *Citizen* confirmed the suit’s role as a marker for the queen when an article featured the remark, “[royalty] is recognized either by the sparkling crown and sweeping green robe or when informally dress [sic], by their tartan



Figure 3.3. Queen Jill Ewart and a stewardess pose while boarding a plane scheduled for Vancouver. *Citizen*, 28 August 1959, 1.

⁵⁴ “Aurora Party Displays the Royal Wardrobe,” *Citizen*, 27 August 1965, 7.

suit.”⁵⁵ While surely not as effective at making Prince George’s queen stand out as the use of the title Aurora of the Evergreens, the tartan suit nevertheless helped ensure that she would be at least recognizable to people who were familiar with Prince George’s pageant.

Conclusion

The guidelines and traditions put in place by the Miss PNE contest had far-reaching consequences for British Columbian towns vying for the provincial title. The glory of participation, judging criteria and nullifying of candidates’ unique titles squelched meanings ascribed to towns’ local beauty queens. The complexities of wanting to represent Penticton or Prince George as well as the whole province meant that a compromise had to be made, and given the relative size and influence of the pageants involved, local communities shouldered that compromise. Smaller towns were both responsible for the financial burden of sending a candidate to Vancouver and adhered to the rules established by the PNE. These rules were not inherently disadvantageous to franchise contests, but they directly affected the method by which local queens were selected and the type of girl who could compete for the title. This meant that candidates’ highlighted qualities and aspirations were largely the same regardless of the differences between B.C. communities. These similarities amongst individual queens, combined with the name change during the PNE proceedings, meant that any uniquely local circumstances and considerations were not be factored into the selection of Queen Val-Vedette or Queen Aurora of the Evergreens. The image of these two beauty queens was, at least during the PNE, negated by their presentation as Miss Penticton and Miss Prince

⁵⁵ Bernice Roberts, “Aurora, Queen of the Evergreens,” *Citizen*, 13 May 1965, 6.

George. The differences ascribed to towns' contests and winners that were so prized throughout the majority of the year were quelled in August. The PNE pageant held considerable influence over the rest of British Columbia, as the smaller contests were willing to overlook the individual identities of their queens in order to compete for the provincial title.

Conclusion

The meanings of beauty contests are still highly contested, and greater study is needed to make larger conclusions about the role of beauty contests throughout Canada. It is clear, however, that when newspapers such as the *Herald* and the *Citizen* featured long and descriptive articles detailing their respective town's beauty pageants, they were not merely reporting on local happenings. In describing the elaborate selection process, coronation proceedings and their queens' time in Vancouver for the Miss PNE contest, they were also giving important insight into events that reflected a specific construction of their communities' identities and expectations for their young female populations. The Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora of the Evergreens pageants detailed how certain community members envisaged their town's image that was promoted to both other citizens and outsiders as proof of its gendered successes. But this carefully constructed sense of community was ultimately cast off once the queens participated in the larger Vancouver beauty contest. The pageants were thus important to local identity but this did not transcend to the provincial level.

One of the biggest concerns stemming from the study of these three contests is what they reveal about the nature of gender in Canada during the 1950s and 1960s. The popularity of pageants during these decades meant that beauty contests reflected larger views on women and their roles in society. With Miss America driving the standard for beauty pageants across North America, it is clear that Canadian women looked to their American neighbors for guidance in feminine practices. By the 1930s, the "made up women" came to represent the "American way of life," and beginning in the 1950s, the

use of makeup amongst teenage girls was associated with the passage into womanhood.¹ Beauty contests followed this trend, as queens such as Val-Vedette and Aurora used their contests to announce their feminine success and transformation into young women. As feminist critiques have noted, the association between womanhood and beauty is problematic, as it assumes that women's greatest social contributions are made through their adherence to exclusively feminine roles. Some of the Second Wave Feminist concerns regarding beauty contests therefore merit recognition, as they emphasize the exploitive nature of North American pageants.

These concerns about the exploitation of women shed light on a problematic aspect of beauty pageants, as young women and their sexuality were used to promote community ideals at a time when women were usually marginalized. Despite efforts to tone down candidates' sexuality (to varying degrees) during the Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora of the Evergreens contests, these pageants illustrated that sexuality was always a factor during pageant proceedings. If beauty contests at their base level are ultimately "girl-watching" as Frank Delford has argued, then candidates' young, attractive, and frequently exposed bodies can never be fully ignored, and were a primary concern of judging practices.² In her article examining Labour Day beauty queens, Joan Sangster has provided an important discussion of the role of sexuality in beauty contests. She argues that pageants followed popular culture trends, as post-Second World War society featured a heightened visibility of women's sexuality through swimsuit fashion, advertising, and the rise of skin magazines as "big business." After wartime anxieties

¹ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 239 and 252.

² Frank Delford, *There She is: The Life and Times of Miss America* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 8-9.

about women's work and increased roles outside the home waned, the postwar use of women as passive, sexual beings reinforced "the masculinist and patriarchal proclivities" that traditionally characterized Canadian society.³ Thus the popularity of beauty contests across North America, including such smaller examples as Queen Val-Vedette and Queen Aurora of the Evergreens, was part of larger trends regarding the role of gender in society and expectations for young Canadian women.

Sangster offers a rebuttal to Third Wave Feminism's consideration of beauty pageants, as Third Wave feminists argue that pageantry allows candidates the opportunity for individual choice and personal expression. They have therefore exhibited a degree of reluctance to overtly criticize pageants, but Sangster argues that this perspective tends to overlook the role of gender oppression, class relations, and capitalist commodification in beauty contests.⁴ Her argument borrows from Second Wave feminist critique, which remains relevant to the study of beauty pageants despite additions to historiography over subsequent decades. While Second Wave feminists have been mocked for their protest at the 1968 Miss America pageant, their concerns over the exploitive nature of beauty contests remains valid, as the Penticton and Prince George contests reveal the willingness of pageant organizers to use candidates' bodies to promote specific ideas. Even at the small-town level in British Columbia, pageants ensured that scrutinized female bodies projected larger notions of community and femininity.

When considering the Penticton and Prince George contests in the 1970s and beyond, one wonders if they followed any larger pageant trends. Looking again to the Miss America example, it faced growing criticism and claims of irrelevancy. As Second-

³ Joan Sangster, "'Queen of the Picket Line': Beauty Contests in the Post-World War II Canadian Labour Movement, 1945-1970," *Labour Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 5, no. 4 (2008): 85.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

Wave Feminism continued to undermine its staging and it was increasingly characterized as being demeaning to women, the pageant faced heightened scrutiny from many members of the American public. It remained a popular television event and was watched by millions of people although, at the same time, it became a target of what many thought to be legitimate criticism. Some even considered the pageant an antithesis of American culture.⁵ In her book detailing the history of the contest, A. R. Riverol notes that initial critiques of the pageant from the 1920s and 1930s that had been abandoned in the 1940s returned with a vengeance. But rather than focusing on the morality of candidates, protesters attacked the contest as not only damaging to women but also as out of touch with current events and realities. Laurel Schaefer recalled her time as Miss America 1971, “Being a Miss America during the Vietnam War was not the easiest thing in the world...some thought the concept of Miss America rather frivolous...Protests at Miss America functions were not uncommon.”⁶ Of course, contest organizers made attempts at adaptation, but the changes failed to appease critics.⁷ John Fair goes so far as to describe the Miss America contest as “impervious to change” as it entered the 1970s; and since Miss America served as the standard for beauty contests, it is possible that similar criticisms emerged in regards to small pageants.⁸

Although there remain many questions as to the history of beauty contests in British Columbia, this thesis has explored three specific examples. When the unknown writer of the *Herald* article quoted at the beginning of the introduction described the

⁵ Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin, “The Miss America Pageant: Pluralism, Femininity, and Cinderella All in One.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 1 (2000): 111.

⁶ A. R. Riverol, *Live from Atlantic City: The History of the Miss America Pageant Before, After, and in Spite of Television* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992), 92.

⁷ *Ibid.* Riverol describes some small format changes made beginning in the 1970s, but notes that they were largely intended to better format the pageant for television audiences.

⁸ John D. Fair, “Mr. and Miss America Contests: A Tale of Contrasting Cultures in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the Georgia Association of Historians* 23 (2002): 24.

ceremony whereby Carol Malmberg was crowned Queen Val-Vedette X in 1957, the author asserted that many people within the province felt the contests were important opportunities for individual candidates and their larger communities to claim a particular identity. Similar scenes occurred throughout the years in Penticton, Prince George, and Vancouver during the Miss PNE contest. Regardless of any controversies that have resulted from their presentation, beauty contests have been, and remain, important events to illustrate particular values and ideals upheld by communities in regards to their expectations for their young female members. The complex meanings assigned to Queen Val-Vedette, Queen Aurora of the Evergreens, and Miss PNE ultimately contribute to a growing historical awareness that beauty pageants are legitimate research subjects and can reveal a great deal of information about notions of community identity and the construction of gendered expectations.

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