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Between Orchard and Highway: Roadside Produce Stands as Rural Artifact and Enterprise

Résumé

Fruits famille-construit, détenue et exploitée se dresse bientôt poussé vers le haut le long des principales routes du sud de l'intérieur de la Colombie-Britannique dans les années 1950, quand les ventes « ferme » étaient le seul moyen de vendre les fruits en dehors de la coopérative de la province, système de commercialisation. Les peuplements de fruits début n'étaient souvent pas plus que les caisses de produisent affichée à l'endroit où verger a rencontré road, mais au fil du temps certains est devenu central dans les opérations de verger de leurs propriétaires et ont été élargies et améliorées. En utilisant deux des fruits longs de BC stand opérations comme études de cas, cet article retrace l'émergence, l'évolution et la persistance de cette forme familière et pourtant souvent négligé de l'architecture vernaculaire commercial et agricole, qui est une caractéristique du paysage de la région depuis plus d'un demi-siècle.

Abstract

Family-built, owned, and operated fruit stands sprouted up along the major roads of British Columbia's southern Interior in the early 1950s, when "farm-gate" sales were the only way to sell fruit outside the province's co-operative marketing system. Early fruit stands were often no more than crates of produce displayed at the point where orchard met road, but over time some became central to their owners' orchard operations and were further enlarged and improved. Using two of BC's longest-running fruit stand operations as case studies, this article traces the emergence, evolution, and persistence of this familiar yet oft-overlooked form of vernacular commercial and agricultural architecture, which has been a signature feature of the region's landscape for more than half a century.

Produce stands can be found along rural roadsides across North America. They have little in common beyond being located on the roadside and having been erected with the purpose of selling local produce to passing motorists. The material form of produce stands was—and remains—simpler and more disparate than most other roadside enterprises. A produce stand might be a bare-bones affair—a few boxes of fresh-picked fruit set out on wooden table topped with a canopy. A produce stand could also be a great long building outfitted with electrical appliances and floodlights, selling prepared foods and products harvested from distant fields.

In "The Great American Roadside," his 1934 paean to rural and small-town entrepreneurialism, James Agee observed that "there are stands and there are stands. Stands that started on shoe-strings and still dangle therefrom and stands that started on shoestrings and have become whole shoe stores" (1934: 63). The fact that roadside produce stands are so disparate and mutable in form, so often ephemeral and impermanent, straddling the boundary between farm field and highway network, may explain why they have escaped the notice of agricultural historians and historians of automobility. A produce stand is at once an extension of the orchard and homestead as well as a commercial enterprise, but is neither a traditional agrarian venture nor a universally common roadside business. Produce stands also resist easy categorization in that they do not clearly fall under the rubric of material culture or vernacular architecture. Stands that are little more than a card table or upside-down bin can dissuade architectural historians from studying

them, while stands that are substantial buildings may steer material culture scholars away from them. Thus they have eluded historians toiling in those fields as well.

The in-between-ness of roadside produce stands and the disparate nature of their material form is further complicated by diversity in terms of place and of products sold. Produce stands could be found in many agricultural districts of North America but in some regions became synonymous with a particular crop, just as certain agricultural products were cultivated as signatures of place by boosters, farmers' organizations, and tourism promoters. Stands in Florida and California were closely associated with citrus fruits, for example, while pecans and other nuts were common roadside fare in southern states like Georgia. In some such instances, produce stands were so numerous as to become regionally iconic and at the same time taken for granted. In other cases, roadside stands showed crops being grown in surprising corners of the continent—peaches in wintry Ontario and Wisconsin, for example. But wherever they were located, produce stands were simultaneously shaped by concerns that were common for their operators, and by place-specific social, cultural, economic, and environmental contexts. Common concerns include the question of how to get a mobile, capricious market—the motoring public—to stop at and patronize a particular stand; and how to protect both produce and vendor from the elements. Place-specific contexts include seasonality and harvest times, marketing board regulations, ordinances related to agricultural and commercial practices, health and sanitation rules, and zoning and building codes.

Roadside produce stands can best be understood as one of the constellation of artifacts—tools, buildings, vehicles, landscapes—that were located at the intersection of agrarian life and North America's burgeoning automobile culture during the 20th century. Like all cultural artifacts, they were manifestations of the conditions, values, and aspirations of specific communities at a historical moment. Seemingly timeless in that they involved rural producers selling their harvest in face-to-face transactions, they were at same time quite modern, tied to the fast-growing popularity of automobile travel to, through, and within rural areas. Historians have traced how the

distrust and even outright hostility many rural and small-town residents felt toward speeding, gawking, and trespassing motorists during the 1900s and early 1910s—the age of the automobile as "the rich man's plaything"—dissipated after the First World War, when automobile ownership became viable for farmers and merchants.[1] Before the war it had been common for auto tourists to camp in farmers' fields and they often enquired at the back porch, farm gate, or packing house seeking foodstuffs for immediate consumption or to take home with them. After the war, many thousands of rural Americans and Canadians hoped to gain by establishing commercial businesses that would supply the needs and wants of the motoring public. The rise of the roadside economy saw rural residents adopt a new visual language, using signage and sometimes whimsical architectural forms to catch the eye of passers-by.[2] Millions of motorists patronized these establishments, ignoring middlebrow critics who decried visual clutter and ramshackle structures and called for regulation of the roadside.[3] Many rural producers profited by selling fruit, vegetables, meat, milk, and eggs to the tourist homes and diners that fed the motoring public. But direct sales also beckoned, particularly for farmers whose property fronted onto a major road. This led a vast proliferation of roadside stands.[4]

Roadside produce stands spread unevenly. They mushroomed during the interwar years in California, Arizona, Florida, and Georgia, which had extensive orchard industries and were popular touring destinations, but other agricultural districts did not see their first produce stands until decades later. This article examines the distinctive history of roadside stands in British Columbia, Canada's westernmost province. It begins by tracing the specific socioeconomic context in which produce stands emerged and proliferated in BC during the 1950s: namely the tenuous nature of its orchard industry, the marketing system that orchardists and government established at mid-century, and the road-building boom that occurred after the Second World War. It then examines two family fruit stand operations, taking into account cultural historian Thomas Schlereth's assertion that when "reading" vernacular artifacts "the smallest details can yield ideas" and therefore that "whatever has been added is important; whatever has been

removed tells a tale" (1980: 195). It concludes by detailing the controversial status of the seemingly "innocent" fruit stand in BC during the 1950s and 1960s and their eventual integration into the orcharding industry.

Shaky Roots: Orcharding in British Columbia

Only 2 per cent of British Columbia is suitable for agriculture.[5] Within that limited land base there are a few environmental niches where tree fruit can be grown commercially, mostly in the lowlands of the southwestern Interior, which are hot, semi-arid, and even in places desert-like. Commercial orcharding began in the 320 km-long (200-mile) Okanagan Valley in the 1890s and was well established there by 1910.[6] However, outside the Okanagan, it is clear that through the first third of the 20th century, orcharding never took root as firmly as growers, boosters, and politicians would have liked.[7] Success in the Okanagan spurred numerous poorly thought-out land development schemes around the southern Interior, resulting in an array of marginal orcharding endeavors (Lang 2003; Phillips 1984; Riis 1973). By 1920, commercial fruit growing had really only taken hold in the Okanagan, the adjacent Similkameen Valley, and a few small outlying localities.[8] Fruit-growing failed to become a stable agrarian bulwark in a provincial economy based on unstable resource extraction industries. The rise of roadside fruit stands during the 1950s can in large part be traced to these shaky roots.

Orcharding in BC was neither as lucrative nor idyllic as most growers had expected. Irrigation was essential. Hired labour was expensive. Trees suffered from pests and disease (Dendy 1999). Frost, hail, and wind gusts could devastate crops, and severe cold snaps could kill even mature fruit trees. Getting fruit to market was a constant challenge. Prior to 1950, growers were entirely dependent on railways to ship produce out of the region. Long-distance road transportation was not viable due to the primitive state of BC's highway network: the mountain roads linking the southern Interior to the cities of the Pacific coast and the Prairies were too rough and too roundabout for hauling delicate, perishable fruit (Bradley 2017; Francis

2012). Furthermore, a bountiful crop could have adverse effects on a grower's bottom line. During the interwar years, good fruit harvests across the Pacific slope caused prices to plummet. The price packing houses and wholesalers would pay for a unit of fruit sometimes fell below what many BC growers had paid to have it picked (cf. Bennett 2006). Cutthroat competition reigned during the 1920s and 1930s with deleterious effects on growers' living standards and the viability of small orchards. Most Interior fruit farms were family-owned smallholdings: a 4-hectare (10-acre) orchard was considered quite large outside the central Okanagan Valley. For their owners, the yardstick for agrarian success amounted to achieving what one Osoyoos grower called a state of "semi-prosperity." To make a living from the orchard without being dependent on off-farm wage labour was to be doing fairly well (Cumine 1983; Sproule 1993).

The BC Fruit Growers Association (BCFGA) advocated the establishment of cooperatives and marketing boards to stabilize prices (Dendy 1981; MacPherson 1986). In 1939, it convinced the provincial government to pass legislation that established a central selling authority called BC Tree Fruits (BCTF). The new single-desk marketing system mandated that all orchard fruit grown in the Interior had to be sold onto the domestic market through the offices of the BCTF. The only exception was the sale of small quantities from a grower's own orchard directly to neighbours or passers-by for personal consumption.[9] Little fruit was actually sold this way but the sale or barter of produce at the farm gate was a longstanding agrarian practice. The state-backed imposition of single-desk marketing was an illiberal exercise, so acknowledging growers' right to sell their own produce in face-to-face transactions on their own property helped placate those who perceived the new regime as an attack on both rural tradition and individual rights.

Farm gate sales drew little attention or complaint in the early years of BC's single-desk marketing system. The 1940s was a good decade for most orchardists due to Canada's tightly regulated food market and an absence of competing imports. There were also very few tourists driving past growers' orchards looking to purchase cherries, peaches, apples, or apricots because pleasure travel was sharply curtailed by wartime gas

rationing and because Canada's far western highway network remained underdeveloped. Even in the late 1940s, it was not quick or convenient to drive between the main fruit growing districts of British Columbia's southern Interior and the population centers of the Pacific Northwest or the Prairies. The exemption of farm gate sales from BC's single-desk marketing system would only become significant—and controversial—during the 1950s, a desperate decade that saw hundreds of roadside stands spring up to sell fruit along the main roads of the southern Interior.

Rise of the Stands

The rise of roadside fruit stands was both abrupt and rapid in British Columbia. This sudden blossoming is explained by two factors beyond the permission—or at least omission—of farm gate sales in the provisions of BC's single-desk marketing system. The first was the enormous increase in automobile travel through BC's southern Interior: there would have been little reason for fruit growers to build and operate roadside stands without new and improved roads and thousands of motorists travelling along them. The second, more pressing factor was the dire financial straits that many growers found themselves in during the 1950s. After a decade of relative stability and prosperity, a period of troubles began for Interior orchardists with the killer cold of winter 1949-1950. Growers all around the southern Interior suffered losses. The marginal, northernmost growing area around Kamloops was hit hardest. It lost more than half its trees and never recovered. More than 25 per cent of fruit trees were killed around Oliver and Osoyoos in the south Okanagan, where soft fruit predominated. Individual orchards could be devastated even in areas where the overall damage was not too bad. For example, the Paynter family lost hundreds of peach trees at Westbank, across Lake Okanagan from Kelowna (Sheila Paynter, personal communication, June 19, 2008). The loss of mature, productive trees could devastate smallholders, who faced a five- to ten-year wait before any newly planted trees would bear fruit.

On the heels of this environmental disaster came the announcement by BC Tree Fruits that the returns for the 1949 growing season were terrible. Under single-desk marketing, growers did not get paid upon delivery of their fruit to packing houses overseen by the BCTF. Instead, they were issued a receipt and their produce was added to large pools of marketable fruit. Returns were only announced after all accounts had been settled and the final price for various types and grades of fruit calculated. Payment therefore came many months after fruit had been picked and transported to the packing house. Returns for 1949's apples—the industry's mainstay crop—were barely half of what they had been the previous year (Dendy and Kyle 1990: 96). Thus, in the spring of 1950, fruit growers all around the Interior were desperate for cash to cover mortgages, operating loans, and day-to-day expenses. Many were also faced with the cost of planting new trees to replace those killed in the winter. As the first crops of 1950 started coming in, BC's single-desk marketing system, which had elicited few complaints during the prosperous 1940s, offered no prospect for getting much-needed cash.

This crisis was hardest on small-holding growers, and a premonition of tough times that would prevail throughout the decade. However, it happened to coincide with an unprecedented number of auto tourists driving through British Columbia's fruit-growing regions. They arrived via the new Hope-Princeton section of the southern Trans-provincial highway, which had opened in November 1949, and shortened the trip between Vancouver and the Okanagan by more than 160 km (100 miles). The provincial government promoted it as the gateway to a playground of sunny beaches and verdant valleys.[10] The influx of traffic provided new opportunities for roadside commercial activity in the southern Interior. All around the region, plans were afoot to provide the motoring public with food, gas, and lodging, as well as more regionally distinctive products. Unlike would-be moteliers or drive-in restaurateurs, orchardists whose property fronted on an arterial road did not need to construct or finance elaborate new buildings. All they required to sell their fruit directly to passing motorists was a spot that was visible from the road, where they could display their produce and automobiles could safely exit the flow of traffic. For cash-strapped growers, roadside selling was an ideal arrangement: they would have no uncertainty about the ultimate value of produce moved this way, and

selling to passersby from their properties did not violate BCTF marketing regulations.

The earliest stands were provisional structures. A card table or kitchen chair could do the trick for displaying small quantities of fruit. A box or bin flipped upside down could accommodate more. Sheila Paynter of Westbank recalled that in 1950 "our very first fruit stall [was] two planks resting on apple boxes" (Sheila Paynter, personal communication, June 19, 2008). With an hour or two of work, a grower could build a rudimentary display rack similar to a sawhorse or stile. A couple days was enough to build a small, simple enclosed stand that would protect fruit and seller alike from dust, precipitation, and especially the hot, glaring sun. Whether jury-rigged or purpose-built, the material for making a stand was readily at hand: even the smallest orchard had a supply of 2x4s, shiplap boards, and plywood sheets. Building material that could not be salvaged or repurposed at home could readily be acquired from one of the southern Interior's many sawmills, including those that produced "shook"—the wood components that packing houses assembled into boxes for storing and shipping fruit.[11] The Campbell brothers reported spending $6 to build their first fruit stand at Summerland in 1951. They worked at a sawmill and could get culled lumber, and therefore only had to pay cash for nails and roofing paper (Dale Campbell, personal communication, June 19, 2008).

Stands were as cheap to operate as they were to build. They required little in the way of labour costs, as family members not participating in the harvest could do the selling. Wives tended stands in addition to their other home and farmyard tasks. Schoolchildren worked on weekends and summer holidays when tourist traffic spiked. Fruit was sometimes even sold on the honour system from unattended stands, with buyers asked to leave payment for the fruit they took. Sheila Paynter recalls that "cherries were put in tin-tops [and] we'd just leave them out there with a sign, 'put the money in the can'" (Sheila Paynter, personal communication, June 19, 2008). Such arrangements were suited to smallholding orchardists, many of whom grew a limited range of produce: a 3-acre (1.2 ha) mixed block of cherries and apricots, or 5 acres (2 ha) of peaches, for example. Packing houses sometimes turned down small lots of fruit, less popular varieties, and fruit deemed overripe, so roadside selling could be a dependable way to move a large percentage of a grower's harvest.

Not only were early fruit stands rather provisional structures; they were also often altered from year to year. Comprised primarily of wooden boards, beams, and sheeting, and never growing above one storey in height, they could easily be modified, enlarged, or even skidded to a new site. Walls, windows, and doors were added, sometimes repositioned. Rooflines and footprints were extended, then extended again, or enclosed. Additions were built and rebuilt using more permanent materials. Moveable awnings and canopies were frequently used to protect produce from the sun. Families that ran fruit stands could operate them one year but not the next if the harvest was less than expected or the packing house appeared likely to offer better returns. Ownership was changeable too: fruit stands were sometimes leased out, or sold, or abandoned when growers experienced ill-health or retired or when children moved away.

The provisional, mutable nature of early roadside fruit stands adds to the difficulty of tracing their history. There is little documentation to draw on since they were built without blueprints or permits. Some photographs exist but our interviewees indicated that it was uncommon to photograph their stands, and those who did rarely do so with documentary intent.[12] Yet it is precisely the changeability of fruit stands that makes them valuable objects of study in the material culture of agraria. Photographs used in conjunction with oral interviews illustrate how stands changed and offer insight into their history and the larger history of orcharding in British Columbia. The two following case studies are drawn from a wider survey of fruit stand owners and operators, and examine longstanding family operations for which visual sources and some historical records exist. While these stands are atypical for their longevity, they are nonetheless representative of early stands in terms of form, materials used, construction methods, development and renovation, and involvement of family. Thus they thus provide a measure by which to examine the changes in the appearance and function of early fruit stands during the 1950s and 1960s.

Case 1: The Parsons of Keremeos

Four generations of Parsons have grown fruit in the village of Keremeos, beginning with Harold Parsons who settled there in 1908. Each of his three sons Bob, Doug, and Walter built and operated their own stands during the 1950s; Doug's son Maurice and daughter-in-law Marilyn ran a stand from the late 1960s to the 2000s; and a Parsons stand still operates today.[13] According to Maurice and Marilyn Parsons, the family's initiation into roadside selling was serendipitous. Bob had grown watermelons one year and when the packing house refused to accept them, he left them out beside the road. Unexpectedly, motorists stopped and asked whether they were for sale. "I guess he decided 'hey, there's something in this,' and he built a little place" (Maurice and Marilyn Parsons, personal communication, June 13, 2008). Bob's experience encouraged Doug and Walter to do the same.

Bob Parsons built his fruit stand in 1950. It was one of the earliest in Keremeos, although Maurice points out that everyone who could was building one that summer. The stand was located beyond the western village limits on the north side of Highway 3, BC's southern trans-provincial highway. Bob's stand was the last that motorists saw when bound for Vancouver, making its location ideal for "capturing" pleasure and business travellers on their way home from the Interior. Initially this stand was a small, simple structure: speaking to researchers from British Columbia's Royal Commission on the Tree Fruits Industry in 1957, Bob explained "we had a stand open in '50. Of course, it was just a little building with a few boxes" (BCA, November 27, 1957: 12).

Two photographs show Bob Parsons' fruit stand from a similar vantage point in different years during the mid 1950s; Figure 1 is the earlier of the two. The stand's core structure was a timber-frame building roughly 3.5 m x 3.6 m (12 x 14 ft) in size with a relatively low-pitched roof and no gutters.[14] (By this time, the building was substantially larger than the original.) Its southern and eastern (sunward) facades were shaded by a low overhanging roof that extended approximately 6 feet (183 cm) beyond the core structure and was supported by posts around its perimeter. Beneath this overhang or canopy was a low wooden platform which raised the produce above the dusty, unpaved parking area. The depth of the overhang on Bob Parsons' stand and the fact that its east-facing roof would soon be extended even further emphasizes how much the sun's summer trajectory influenced the layout of produce stands. The fruit on display was usually quite ripe and required protection from the sun's rays. More shade allowed more produce to be kept at hand, ready to restock shelves or fill large orders.[15] When sales were good enough for a stand operator to expand, expansion more often than not took the form of extending a roofline or canopy rather than enlarging the walled building. Many fruit stands had the greater part of their total footprint located "outside," open to the air while protected from sun and rain.

These photos do not provide a detailed view of the stand's interior but they do show that the southern and eastern exposures of the structure were open-faced and that boxes of fruit were set out on angled surfaces, making the fruit easily visible to motorists on the highway. The cut-outs for the window openings may have been hinged along the bottom edge so that open windows became display surfaces for fruit boxes to sit on; this arrangement was employed by many other stands, including by brother Doug Parsons. The display surfaces would be supported by 2x4s propped underneath and/or chains secured to ceiling beams. When raised, they could be bolted shut from inside to secure the stand overnight and during the off-season.

Signs identifying the stand were mounted on the roof where they were clearly visible to approaching vehicles. The large signs were about 1.2 x 2.4 m (4 x 8 ft) , the size of a standard sheet of plywood. Figure 1 shows that signs emphasized

Fig. 1
Bob Parsons' fruit stand and Highway 3 at Keremeos, ca. 1954.

identifying the nature of the structure ("Fruit Stand"), with the Parsons name in smaller lettering. The photograph taken a few years later shows the signs repainted, with the Parsons name more than doubled in size on one and the addition of "Bob" to the Parsons name on the other. Signage was an important way for operators to differentiate their stand from competitors as fruit stands proliferated during the 1950s.[16] In this case, Bob Parsons likely added his first name to distinguish his stand from those of his brothers. The stand also had several small signs to identify what produce was available. Painted on strips of board or plywood, these generic signs were ubiquitous fruit stand features. Many operators affixed them to utility poles and fence posts along the stretch of highway leading to their stands.

Following his brother's lead, Doug Parsons and his young sons built a fruit stand around 1952. It too was on the north side of Highway 3 but as indicated by the streetlamp on the adjacent utility pole, fell within the village boundary of Keremeos. There was no electrical power to the stand, as was typical for the 1950s, so the streetlamp would have been a useful source of illumination, allowing the stand to stay open after dusk at the height of the selling season. Fruit stand operators report working from before sun-up until 10 p.m., seven days a week, when fruit was being picked and demand was high.

Doug Parsons named his stand the Fruit Bowl to differentiate it from other stands. It is quite typical of early stands. The footprint was approximately 2.1 x 3 m (7 x 10 ft.) with a roof extension projecting over the facade by approximately 1 m (3 ft.) The walls were likely framed using 2x4s and faced with plywood. Here again the location on the roadside and the trajectory of the sun were crucial factors in the design of the stand. Set approximately 3.6 m (12 ft) back from the road surface, the south-facing facade was exposed to the sun all day. Openings were cut into the south and east facades, with hinged flaps attached along the bottom edge. Being able to open up two sides of the stand encouraged air circulation, which gave some respite from the heat for both operator and produce. The low, flat-pitched roof reduced heat absorption, while the overhang and skirting attached to its edge helped protect the fruit on display from the glare

Fig. 2 and 3
Doug Parsons' fruit stand as seen by eastbound and westbound motorists, Keremeos, ca. 1952.

Fig. 4
Doug Parsons' fruit stand, Keremeos, ca. 1956.

of the sun. Colourful stripes on the skirting added an eye-catching flourish.

Initially the east facade of the stand—which could be expected to have some relief from the sun during the afternoon—was not protected by an overhang. However, photographs show a roof was later extended over the east face, creating a large shaded area approximately the same size as the original building. This significantly increased the amount of produce that could be put out on display and likely created more comfortable conditions for the seller as well. Nine kilogram- (20 lb-) boxes of fruit can be seen displayed on a rack beneath this roof extension. The west facade featured a mural with images of fruit and the stand's name. Maurice Parsons recalls the Fruit Bowl mural was painted by his schoolteacher Lloyd Rees. This colourful mural would be visible to eastbound motorists, travelling toward Keremeos town centre. These vehicles were on the opposite side of the highway but the mural alerted their occupants to the stand's presence, increasing the likelihood they would remember its location and drop by when driving back through Keremeos. This remained more or less the form of the stand for the next twenty years, with the main change being further extension of the canopies.

The relatively stable form of Bob Parsons' and Doug Parsons' fruit stands during the 1950s suggests their sufficiency as a solution to the crisis that BC's growers were facing. It also shows that stand owners who successfully incorporated roadside selling into their larger orchard operations tended to maintain the material form of their stands, making incremental improvements to these structures and their associated signage rather than more extensive changes that would have required substantial capital investment.

Case 2: The Fernandes of Osoyoos

The Fernandes family built their first fruit stand in Osoyoos, BC, around 1960. Joe Fernandes immigrated to Canada as a labourer from Madeira, Portugal, in 1953 and after working at various jobs bought a Texaco gas station and acreage just beyond Osoyoos town limits in 1959. The property was steeply-sloped beyond the cleared gas station area and had little in the way of orchard, but Joe planted fruit trees and grew ground crops while waiting for them to bear fruit. His wife Maria and their children joined him in 1960.[17]

The Fernandes fruit stand was located adjacent to the gas station, which was the last roadside commercial operation that eastbound motorists saw when leaving the Okanagan Valley on Highway 3. It was located on the first curve of the long, steep stretch over Anarchist Mountain, where the highway climbed 820 m (2,700 ft.) in under 16 km (10 miles). Typically, locating a gas station or fruit stand on a tight curve would not have been considered optimal but it proved an appealing stop for eastbound motorists about to tackle the mountain and for westbound motorists whose brakes and endurance had been worn down by the corkscrew descent. Having an established gas station actually made the site a good one for a fruit stand. It drew customers and also distinguished the stand from dozens of others in the district—Joe's daughters, Laura and Cidalia, report that motorists continued to pull in for gas many years after the station closed. The Fernandes women and children tended the gas station and fruit stand while the men worked in the orchard. Laura and Cidalia recall being told by their parents to "go pump gas, go sell fruit" and moving seamlessly from one to the other over the course of the day (Laura Garcia, Cidalia Harfman, and Lucy Wright, personal communication, June 21, 2008). The proximity of the Fernandes family's first fruit stand to their gas station was unusual, but depending on family labour and trying to add extra sources of revenue was typical of many rural roadside entrepreneurs.

Photographs taken by family members during the 1960s and 1970s illustrate how their stand was expanded and improved. The first Fernandes fruit stand was a small structure "about the size of a kitchen." The original building was the enclosed structure that can be discerned left of centre in Figure 5, with a cantilevered awning supported by angled posts. The stand had tripled in size by 1964-1965, taking up all the available space between the gas station and freestanding Texaco sign. The staggered roofline visible in Figure 5 suggests the extension was built in at least two stages. As seen in Figure 6, the new sections were comprised of little more than a flat gutter-less roof made of 4x4 beams and lumber supported on 6x6 posts. This provided shelter from the sun for fruit and workers, but little more: there were no walls

or doors initially. Produce was either moved to a different location overnight or kept in place and covered by tarps. Family members do not recall concerns about theft: "we just used to close, [we] never had to lock anything in those times." The stand's proximity to the gas station and family home contributed to its security.

Although the extension was rudimentary, care was taken to present the fruit in an appealing way. Whitewashed posts ensured that the stand was clean and sanitary.[18] Unlike most early fruit stands, the Fernandes stand had an overhead light to illuminate the space and the fruit. Proximity to the gas station made "installing" electricity in the stand a simple matter of running a line over. While the fruit stand was significantly expanded, improvements were incremental, largely functional, and intended primarily to create more shade and storage space, as with the Parsons' stands in Keremeos. The initial expansion of the fruit stand did not make it a significantly more permanent structure. Inexpensive building materials and simple construction techniques were used; it was only provisionally electrified and still largely open to the air.

Later photographs show significant efforts to improve the Fernandes stand. The back of the extension was walled off and side-walls of what appears to be pressboard were added at both ends, affording better protection against the sun and greater privacy for the Fernandes home.[19] A drop-down panel or garage door was installed to allow part of the facade fronting on the parking lot to be completely open or closed. A greatly extended roofline provided yet more shaded area. Two large signs with the single word "Fruit" were mounted on the roof where they could be seen by motorists approaching from either direction. By 1966-1967, the Fernandes fruit stand had taken on the appearance of a permanent structure. Plywood facing provided smoother surfaces and the stand was painted inside and out. Overhead garage doors had been installed, permitting the entire facade to be open during business hours and closed—and locked—at end of day. The addition of these doors can in part be explained by changes to the number and type of products being sold. Several photos of the Fernandes family's stands from this period show coolers containing bottles of pop, with jars of jam and pails of honey
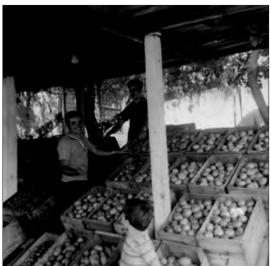

Fig. 5 (above) *Fernandes fruit stand and Highway 3 at Osoyoos, ca.1966.*

Fig. 6 (left) *Fernandes fruit stand, Osoyoos, ca. 1964.*

stacked on top. Signs advertising "cold cherry cider" are visible in the 1970 postcard.

The growing variety of products sold at the fruit stand was accompanied by an increased number of signs. While many interior signs simply identified the different types of products available—cherries, peppers, apple cider—others welcomed and thanked customers, suggesting they "send ... friends here," and saying "see you again." Exterior signage also received greater attention. In 1964-1965, the two hand-painted signs atop the roof simply stated "Fruit," but a couple years later signs with the word "Market" were mounted adjacent to them, reflecting the more diverse offerings found within. One of these "Fruit Market" signs was also raised 2-2.4 metres (6-8 ft.) above the roofline so as to increase its visibility to westbound motorists. In addition, a

Fig. 7
Garcias fruit stand, formerly Fernandes, Osoyoos, ca. 1970.

new sign proudly identified the fruit stand and its produce as "Fernandes' Own."

Joe Fernandes was well known for experimenting with strategies to promote his fruit stands. His daughters recall the value he placed on using signs. Sign making, like fruit selling, was a family activity: "he would outline them for us and we'd paint them." Gina was adept at painting colourful fruit signs "with faces, et cetera [...] The sun, the weather is really tough on the signs. [...] They only last about three or four years. Then the paint is gone, you've got to replace them. We got to do something new, like new colours." Joe's most famous promotion was the greenhouse where he experimented with growing bananas and other tropical plants. Signs out front advertised greenhouse tours for a fee of $1. His daughters remember "Dad got lots of free advertising for that: 'the banana capital of Canada!'" Joe rarely ran out of ideas for things to sell at the fruit stand, including baby cacti taken from the fringes of the orchard. "Dad even sold Osoyoos rocks at one point!" (Laura Garcia, Cidalia Harfman, and Lucy Wright, personal communication, June 21, 2008).

The Fernandes family saw orchards and fruit stands as good investments. Joe wanted all of his children to be able to continue working at them, and each of the Fernandes daughters ended up having their own fruit stand, with three of them operating close together at one point. "He wanted to make work for all of us. He'd kind of build [a stand] up and said 'you're going to buy this' because he was going to shift [to a new location] down the road" (Laura Garcia, Cidalia Harfman, and Lucy Wright, personal communication, June

21, 2008). The original Fernandes fruit stand changed names and ownership around 1970, becoming the Garcias fruit stand after Joe sold it to his daughter Laura and her husband John Garcia. Not only does the growing number of Fernandes family fruit stands demonstrate the centrality of family links to fruit stands as rural enterprises, but the fact that so many of the family's stands were located in close proximity to each other and could remain profitable is evidence that each stand as an artifact contributed to a new agricultural-commercial landscape. In this landscape, produce stands became signatures of community while the sheer number of stands assisted in the overall success of each one, contrary to the expected rules of commercial competition.

Objects of Controversy

Where the British Columbia Interior had had a handful of roadside fruit stands at most prior to the summer of 1950—and quite possibly none—by the summer of 1953 at least 300 operated in the "growing area" where single-desk marketing was officially in place. Five years later there were more than 350.[20] But while fruit stands were popular with the motoring public, their relationship to the larger orcharding community was a fraught one during the 1950s when, as orchard industry historian David Dendy has put it, growers were "restive and unhappy" due to poor returns and rising costs (Dendy and Kyle 1990: 99).[21] Many smallholding families were compelled to seek work off the farm. Others decided to sell out, particularly after a killing cold in November 1955 took many young trees that had been planted to replace ones lost in 1949-1950.

The hundreds of new fruit stands that lined the region's roadsides became objects of resentment and even outright hostility from many growers because, as Chris Garrish notes in his history of single-desk marketing in BC's tree fruit industry, fruit stands were widely perceived as "direct refutation" of co-operative principles. "[Not] all growers would have the ability to establish these types of operations and would, therefore, not be able to enjoy a privilege that had been afforded to a lucky minority" (2002: 13). Under these conditions, the colourful signs that caught passing motorists' eye and lured them to the side of the road could be veritable

red flags to frustrated growers whose only option was to sell their fruit through the BCTF and wait for payment many months later. At the annual BCFGA conventions, delegates called for fruit stands to be strictly regulated. As early as 1951, the clause that exempted farm gate sales was revised to clarify that it only permitted the sale of non-commercial quantities of fruit. At the 1955 convention, growers from Keremeos, where roadside stands were especially abundant, warned that "if we don't take care of fruit stands, they will take care of us."[22] Growers argued that fruit stands should be licensed and demanded that the BCTF restrict their operation to bona fide orchardists. As the popularity and profitability of fruit stands grew, the idea of setting one up began to appeal to the entrepreneurially-minded, who did not let the fact that they were neither orchardists nor landowners stand in their way.

British Columbia's provincial government—which provided the legislative framework for single-desk marketing—was reluctant to support a crackdown on fruit stands. Neither the populist Social Credit party—which came to power in 1952 thanks to the support of rural petty producers and small-town business owners—nor its leader Premier W. A. C. Bennett, who represented an Okanagan riding, were strong supporters of marketing boards.[23] A compromise was struck. Rather than regulating fruit stands, limits were imposed on the quantity of fruit motorists could purchase at fruit stands and transport out of the growing region. Initially, the limit was set at five boxes of fruit per vehicle, only two of which could be cherries, but there was frequent tinkering with this formula in later years. Beginning in 1953, fruit stand operators were required to display an official BCTF notice that informed customers of the "regulations governing quantities" of fruit that could be taken out of the growing area.[24] These restrictions were very unpopular. One operator sought permission to take down the "Fruit Board sign" because it "antagonizes people. I have one sign marked all over with nasty remarks and I didn't solicit them. [Customers] object to seeing that sign [...] saying that they are restricted" (BCA November 27, 1957: 47).

Each summer, the BCTF hired inspectors to monitor fruit stands and the highways leading out of the province's growing areas, staffing checkpoints at major highway junctions on the lookout for vehicles carrying too much fruit.[25] Often called the "fruit police," these inspectors did not actually have police powers but could lay charges of contravening BC's marketing laws. Most violators opted to turn their "over-purchase" over to the inspectors, who took it to a packing house. If it was too ripe to be shipped—as it usually was—it was sold (back) to a fruit stand. Control and inspection were hotly contested topics at BCFGA conventions during the 1950s and 1960s, but editorials and cartoons occasionally mocked the BCTF and BCFGA for what many British Columbians perceived as penny-ante bureaucracy.[26]

Conditions improved for Interior growers during the 1960s. The last push for a crackdown on roadside stands came at the BCFGA convention in 1964. Some delegates suggested that Department of Highways regulations on setbacks and traffic safety could be used against stands. The department had the power to order the removal of shoddily built or dangerously situated structures from its rights-of-way, which in most places extended 15 metres (50 ft.) beyond the highway centerline, and in a few rare instances had exercised this power against fruit stands. In effect, growers proposed to thin out the stands by using their cheap, flexible, undercapitalized form as a weapon against them.[27] This scheme was not pursued, but by the mid 1960s some fruit stand operators might well have supported it, for while most stands remained small, family-run operations, a few had expanded into larger, semi-commercial operations. This was the case with the Fernandes/Garcia stand. These larger operations bought produce from other growers, sold a wider variety of products, and hired waged workers during the busy summer tourist season. As they sought to distinguish themselves from smaller competitors, striking signage and high standards became more important. In numerous interviews, long-time fruit stand operators spoke approvingly of the hygiene checks conducted by BCTF inspectors and complained about marginal competitors who ran shabby or unsanitary stands, sold culls, or advertised prices to undercut better-established stands. Semi-commercial stands were seen as long-term ventures by their owners, who made substantial investments in them, and worked to cultivate a good reputation

with the motoring public in order to draw repeat customers.

It was rare to find a fruit stand wired for electricity in the 1960s but increasingly common in subsequent years with rise of semi-commercial stands. Electrical power allowed for installation of refrigerators and even walk-in coolers, which reduced spoilage by allowing greater control over the ripening process.[28] Refrigeration also allowed products like soft drinks and ice cream to be added to the growing array of products sold at semi-commercial stands, including honey, jam, syrup, pies, fruit ciders, postcards, and handicrafts (Dale Campbell, personal communication, June 19, 2008). In the late 1960s, a handful of very large commercial fruit stands were built in major Okanagan cities. The largest were the Valley Fruit operations at Kelowna and Vernon, which were housed in buildings which featured a facade made of a dozen or more double-wide garage doors. The owners of Valley Fruit did not own orchards. Instead, they purchased fruit from growers and trucked it to their stands (and other stands as well). They opened earlier and closed later in the season than grower-owned fruit stands, and sometimes even sold Christmas trees in December. Such operations were so large as to challenge common understandings of "fruit stand," but were very rare in 1970. The majority remained small and grower-owned. Increasingly, however, more diverse types and forms of stands were appearing, many of them semi-commercial and commercial in nature.

The drive to regulate roadside stands lost its urgency in the late 1960s as they became integrated into BC's orchard industry. In 1972, approximately 12 per cent of the total volume of orchard fruit passed through fruit stands, accounting for 20 per cent of total value.[29] At BCFGA conventions, delegates now called on the BCTF to ensure roadside operators received a steady supply of good produce and to pay for radio advertisements during the tourist season that would provide information on current availability and prices at roadside stands. Efforts were even made to stabilize fruit stand sales. When a Bartlett pear price war broke out between fruit stands in Keremeos, the BCTF negotiated a temporary minimum selling price in that district in order to protect operators' returns (KMA January 1972). The BCFGA membership's sup-

port for single-desk marketing split during the early 1970s, when rising food prices turned public opinion and many politicians against marketing boards (Dendy and Kyle 1990). With support from growers declining, the BCTF voluntarily opted to relinquish control over domestic sales in 1974, ending the province's era of single-desk fruit marketing (Garrish 2002). Regulations on the quantity of fruit that visitors could purchase at a stand were cancelled. No longer did the "fruit police" patrol the province's highways. Fruit stands, which had been part of BC's agrarian and roadside landscapes for a generation, lost any taint of controversy that lingered around them within the larger orcharding community. By the 1980s, Keremeos proudly branded itself the "Fruit Stand Capital of Canada" and put up large signboards that bore that slogan to welcome motorists entering town. This promotional slogan and campaign clearly built on the nostalgic appeal of the region's early fruit stands, which had shaped the landscape's popular identity. To most motorists in the 1950s and 1960s, the fruit stands glimpsed when travelling between communities like Keremeos, Osoyoos, Summerland, Westbank, and Kelowna had appeared no different than roadside produce stands elsewhere in rural North America—simple structures where consumers purchased fresh produce direct from the farmer in a face-to-face transaction. And this was largely true. In terms of form and function, these often taken-for-granted works of agrarian material culture and vernacular-commercial architecture had many essential aspects in common. But looking closely at the roadside produce stands of British Columbia shows that they were products of a particular environment and political economy. The early fruit stands of the southern BC Interior were materially tangible expressions of the desperate straits that orchardists found themselves in as a result of their industry's shaky roots and the constraints placed on them by provincial marketing-board regulations.

Today, fruit stands are still found along the arterial roads of British Columbia's southern Interior: old ones and new ones, small ones and big ones. But they are fewer and farther between than during their heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. Fruit stands built or substantially renovated after 1973 were manifestations of very different socio-economic conditions, which saw

relations between orchard and highway, grower and produce, vendor and consumer, become more distant. Many of the growing number of commercial stands are completely separate from any family orcharding operation. In addition to the deregulation of the orchard industry, urban sprawl, changing farm demographics, highway widening, and, most recently, the rise of corporate viniculture in the region have done what regulation and growers' resentment did not: thinned out the stands. The extent to which this post-1973 trajectory mirrors that of produce stands in other parts of North America is a question that agricultural and material culture historians will have to answer by looking more closely at these familiar yet unstudied artifacts of 20th-century agraria.

Notes

1. See for example Belasco (1979), Berger (1979), and McCarthy (2008: Ch. 1).

2. See Gudis (2004), Jakle and Sculle (2004), and Marling (1984).

3. Bluestone (1990).

4. Historians of roadside America, John Jakle and Keith Sculle, observe that produce stands "seemed to evolve naturally," and attribute their popularity with travellers less to the quality or price of the food they offered than to their "defying the perceived domination of big business" and "satisfying the motoring formula of finding novelties in unexpected places on a journey of discovery" (Jakle and Sculle 2008: 116-17).

5. Ruth Sandwell points out that the dearth of agricultural land in British Columbia helps explain why the category "rural" has been so underutilized by historians of that province (1999: 3-14).

6. Orcharding has been one of the best-studied aspects of BC's generally underexamined agrarian history and much of the literature has focused on the earliest orcharding communities, which drew on the moneyed classes of Britain and its colonies. See Barman (1986); Bennett (1996); and Koroscil (1986).

7. On the orchard industry in 20th-century British Columbia, see Dendy and Kyle (1990); and Garrish (2002).

8. The south Okanagan was transformed from desert to rich agricultural land by a massive state-backed irrigation and soldier-settlement project (Murton 2007: Ch. 5). On similar projects in western North America, see Fiege (1999).

9. The clause in the 1942 contract between the provincial government, the BCFGA, and the BCTF read: "The Company [BC Tree Fruits Ltd.] hereby states that it is its intention not to withhold any consent necessary to permit bona fide sales by the Grower in the immediate vicinity of his lands for sale or consumption at the place of purchase."

10. On the provincial government's efforts to promote the new route, see Bradley (2011). On its role in tourism promotion generally, see Dawson (2004).

11. The volumes of wood required were very large, because at least five million boxes of fruit were shipped out of the BC Interior each year during the 1950s (Webber 1999: 170).

12. When asked why they had so few photographs of their fruit stands, several families we interviewed pointed out that the stands were their everyday workplaces during the summer months and unless there was a special reason to take a photograph, it just did not occur to them.

13. Doug's son Maurice recalled that everyone who could build their own fruit stand did so: "my dad did [...] my uncle [Bob] built his own [and] Walter built his." (Maurice and Marilyn Parsons, personal communication, June 13, 2008).

14. In 1957, Bob Parsons described his stand as follows: "Its 12 feet and there are two of them together. We live in one, and it's 12 feet x 14 feet I think, and then there's a little alley space of

about 3 feet, and then the other one is about the same size. Then we have a verandah all around it—just a shelter like made of three-ply." BCA November 27, 1957: 12.

15. Marilyn and Maurice Parsons recalled that many customers wanted to purchase large quantities of fruit for canning and ambitious operators therefore had to have lots of fruit on hand. "Back in 50s and 60s that meant big boxes, not just small 20-pound [9 kg] boxes like today" (Maurice and Marilyn Parsons, personal communication, June 13, 2008).

16. Historical geographer Paul M. Koroscil observes that BC's early fruit stands were typically, but not always, identified by their owners' surnames (2000: 164-67).

17. On the Fernandes family and other Portuguese immigrants' involvement in BC's orcharding industry after the Second World War, see Teixeira and Da Rosa (2009: Ch. 12).

18. Oil companies constantly reminded their service station franchisees of the importance of cleanliness and neat appearances (Spellman 2004).

19. Family fruit stands were often located a short distance away from the family residence, allowing women to both work in the fruit stand and the home. Several interviewees noted that the proximity of the fruit stand was both convenient and awkward, as determined fruit buyers would often not hesitate to knock on the kitchen door hours after the fruit stand had closed for the day, disrupting family meals and rest.

20. "Growers Move to Control Roadside Stands Closer," *Vernon News*, January 20, 1955; "Roadside Fruit Stands Are Popular," *Penticton Herald*, January 20, 1956; "Roadside Fruit Stands Less in '58, Meet Told," *Kelowna Daily Courier*, January 21, 1959.

21. The provincial government's 1958 Royal Commission on Tree Fruits concluded that growers with 7.5 acres (3 ha) or less could not expect to make a living off their acreage alone, and that orchards less than 5 acres (2 ha) could not be regarded as commercially viable. At that time, 70 per cent of Okanagan and 90 per cent of Kootenay orchards were smaller than 10 acres (4 ha). (Dendy and Kyle 1990: 90, 106).

22. "Opposition to Limiting Fruit Stand Operation Fades When Vote Called," *Country Life in British Columbia* (February 1955). Also see "Growers Move to Control Roadside Stands Closer," *Vernon News*, January 20, 1955.

23. "Kiernan Asks Fruit Industry to Help Self," *Country Life in British Columbia* (February 1955), 11; "Kiernan and Fruit Board Disagree at Policy Level," *Country Life in British Columbia* (February 1956), 10. On the Social Credit government's position toward co-operative marketing, see Dendy and Kyle (1999: 101); and Hak (2004). Also see "Consumer Relations Could Mean Profit or Loss," *Country Life in British Columbia* (February 1955), 6.

24. See for example *Country Life in British Columbia* (July 1955), 13.

25. Most of these checkpoints coincided with weigh-scale stations, strategically located so that government transportation inspectors could monitor the permits and weight restrictions required of commercial trucks.

26. See for example Len Norris editorial cartoon, *Vancouver Sun*, September 18, 1964; and, in response, "Fruit Men Deny Retail Controls," *Vancouver Sun*, September 24, 1964.

27. "Fruit Stand Sales Annoy Growers," *Kelowna Daily Courier*, January 22, 1964. One instance of a fruit stand being ordered removed from the roadside is detailed in the BC Department of Highways in-house magazine *British Columbia Road Runner* 4, 3 (September 1967), 6.

28. BCA, "Private Hearing Fruit Stand Operators": 59.

29. British Columbia Legislative Assembly, *Select Standing Committee on Agriculture, The Sale of Fruit and Vegetables Directly from Farms or Roadside Stands in British Columbia* (Victoria, 1978), 9.

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