

Aloha from the Archives - the Spencer Family postcards

by Reto Tschan, West Vancouver Archivist

While many in West Vancouver will be delighting in the return of snow to the North Shore Mountains, for others the dark, cold and wet of winter can mean only one thing: escape to warmer climes! Perched on the Pacific Rim, West Vancouverites are easily tempted by the tropical islands of Hawai'i. And, indeed, we have been making that particular journey since tourism came to the remote archipelago in the early 20th century.

Thomas Arthur Spencer and his wife Catherine Isabel Potts, for example, were visiting the Hawaiian Islands when travel was by Matson Navigation Co. steamer, and Duke Kahanamoku – the original 'Big Kahuna' – was first popularizing the ancient Hawaiian sport of surfing. The Spencer's collected these three postcards of their travels in the 1920s – reminders that while times have changed, the allure of sun and sea, not to mention Hawaii's extreme geology, remains.

Tourism in the early 20th century was still a preserve of the wealthy. The Spencer family owned a number of business interests in the province including a retailing empire, the *Victoria Times* newspaper, and 250,000 acres of ranch land in the interior of B.C. Arthur, who was also known as "Dean", and his brothers Christopher

and Victor were actively involved in the family business begun by their father.

In 1913, Arthur and Catherine built a home in West Vancouver on an estate which stretched from Mathers to Queens. The Spencer House, (see article and photos by Carol Howie in September, 2012 issue of "Memories") as it became known, was believed to have been designed by leading architect Samuel MacLure, and was featured in a 1918 promotional brochure for the District. Gardening was a favourite pastime of Arthur's, and the property was extensively landscaped and contained several large greenhouses. Renowned for its beauty, spacious lawns, rare shrubs and trees, the estate was featured on a Gardens Beautiful Tour in 1939.

The Spencer Family fonds contains many more postcards from Hawai'i, plus those from other trips taken to Europe and Egypt. The postcards were never sent; instead the Spencer's collected them in two albums as souvenirs of their travels. The Spencer family fonds also contains a family photograph album. Several images featuring the Spencer estate, as it then was, can be found online by searching at archives.westvancouver.ca.



upper left
West Vancouver Archives,
Spencer family fonds 018.
Steamer Day, Honolulu



lower left
West Vancouver Archives, Spencer Family fonds 018.
Tourists Scorching Postcards, Volcano of Kilauea

right
West Vancouver Archives,
Spencer Family fonds 018.
Duke Kahanamoku the original 'Big Kahuna'

