

Qui Si Sana

Finding Health on Lake Crescent

Richard H. Engeman

In the summer of 1913, Dr. Louis Dechmann employed the Seattle photographic firm of Pierson and Company to take a series of photographs at Qui Si Sana, a "health and biological institution" he had recently constructed on the north shore of Lake Crescent on Washington's Olympic Peninsula. Forty-six of the photographs were mounted on linen and bound into a souvenir album that Dechmann distributed that Christmas to friends and followers of his idiosyncratic health regimen. The photographs reproduced here from that album give a unique glimpse into the ideal healthful life prescribed by the good doctor, and they represent both the regional growth of alternative, "natural" health care and the particular vision of one of its more flamboyant practitioners.¹

Qui Si Sana was a short-lived institution—it operated from about 1912 until 1918—but it was built with great care. The name, an ungrammatical Latinism, meant "Here one gets well" according to Dechmann's publicist, Fitzherbert Leather; others rendered it as "Here find health." The facility embodied its owner's medical ideas: Dechmann rejected the germ theory of disease and the medical profession's standard pharmacopoeia, and he stressed the importance of proper diet in preventing and curing disease. Dechmann's treatments for existing conditions emphasized not only basic nutrition but also the use of numerous dietary additives or "nutritive compositions" (the 12 principal ones being known collectively as Dech-Manna, manufactured for him by the Germania Pharmaceutical Company of Portland), hydrotherapy, and radium treatments. Perhaps Dechmann's most bizarre therapeutic technique was the use of extensive body wraps of linen or wool soaked in water and vinegar, a procedure he recommended for nearly all diseases.²

Little is known of Louis Dechmann's life. He was born in the Moselle River valley of Germany, perhaps about 1865, and came to Seattle from Brooklyn, New York, in 1909. Seattle city directories list him from 1909 until 1923, his profession given variously as physician or biologist; in his own publications he usually referred to himself as a "biologist and physiological chemist." The extent of his

formal training and education is unknown, but he peppered his publications with references to many medical and biological science writers, particularly German writers of the naturopathic school.

An older daughter, Jennie, resided with him in Seattle from 1909, but his wife, Marie, is not listed in city directories until 1912. There were six Dechmann children: Jacob, Jennie, Louise, Marie, Hans, and Louis. The last four appear in the Qui Si Sana photographs, as does their mother. The family name vanished from the directories in the 1920s, but the second son, Hans, apparently returned and was a Seattle resident at his death in 1961.

Shortly after his arrival in the city, Dechmann began publishing various pamphlets and books outlining his medical theories. The title of a 1910 pamphlet contains several elements that recur in later works: "Dare to Be Healthy!": A

1. The principal sources of information on Louis Dechmann and Qui Si Sana are: Genevieve H. Miller, "Vanished Spas in the Wilderness," *Frontier Times*, Vol. 47, n.s. 81 (December-January 1973), 8-12; Jervis Russell, ed., *Jimmy Come Lately: History of Clallam County* (Port Angeles, Wash., 1971), 409-11; Harriet U. Fish, *Tracks, Trails, and Tales in Clallam County, State of Washington* (Carlsborg, Wash., 1983), 70-71; and Smitty Parratt, *Gods and Goblins: A Field Guide to Place Names of Olympic National Park* (Port Angeles, 1984), s.v. "Camp David Junior." Also see [Fitzherbert Leather], "Qui Si Sana" ([Piedmont, Wash.], [1912?]), and [Gregers M. Lauridsen and A. A. Smith], *The Story of Port Angeles* (Seattle, 1937). The photograph album and a biographical file on Dechmann are located in Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

2. The most succinct summation of Dechmann's philosophies can be found in his *Valere Aude: Dare to Be Healthy: A Vademecum on Biology and the Hygienic-Dietetic Method of Healing* (Seattle, 1915), 9-57. Among the principal tenets were that the cells of the human body comprised "twelve distinct tissues" (nerve, bone, cartilage, etc.) and that the degeneration of one or more of these tissues, through lack of proper nutriment, was the cause of disease (e.g., degeneration of nerve tissue would result in such conditions as neuralgia, asthma, and epilepsy). Efficient blood circulation was an important part of health, and moist packs played a role in encouraging circulation to particular parts of the body. See also his *Infantile Paralysis and Its Rational Treatment* (Seattle, 1916).



This portrait of Dr. Louis Dechmann appeared in his Christmas album. *Qui Si Sana*, he wrote there, was "my 'biological home' . . . a work of real love."

Hygienic-Dietetic Study; The Secrets of Procreation and the Rearing of a Healthy and Happy Race." Only a reproduction of the cover of this pamphlet is known to exist. In 1913 he published an 80-page booklet with 20 photographs, *Postal Souvenir of "Qui Si Sana,"* the only known copy of which the Washington State University Library now reports missing; it may well have included some of the photographs from the Christmas album of the same year.³

Between 1915 and 1919, Dechmann published six books on such topics as the hygienic-dietetic method of healing, the treatment of infantile paralysis, the biological teaching of eugenics, the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918-19, and the medical establishment's suppressing of "the most wonderful and even beneficial discoveries . . . because the scientist does not belong to that caste and believes in absolute freedom." Copies of these works are now in the University of Washington Libraries.⁴

The sanatorium-resort at Lake Crescent was probably built in 1912 and 1913, just after Dechmann purchased the property

from Elmer Day; the photographs show buildings and grounds that are still new. The investment must have been considerable, by one account about \$40,000, and the project was a highly visible one in remote Clallam County. "Settlers in the vicinity speculated as to where [Dechmann] had come from and where he had obtained the money for his unusual venture." At first, however, the unique character of *Qui Si Sana* was probably not so apparent, for other resorts were springing up around the lake, and two at nearby Sol Duc and Olympic Hot Springs also emphasized therapy as well as restfulness.⁵

During the few years that it operated, *Qui Si Sana* was a place for Dr. Dechmann to put into practice the therapies he advocated in his numerous publications. He coupled a regimen of diet and exercise with various hydrotherapy and radium treatments, and frequently lectured to patients in the main hall of the pavilion. Despite his vaunted position as a family man and the repeated references in his works to the sanctity of home and family, Dechmann acquired a reputation as a womanizer. Rumors likely flourished when a local young woman, Meah Hanson, became the model for a statue of Hygeia, "a maiden in the full bloom of health," which was one of the adornments of the *Qui Si Sana* grounds. Historical accounts describing the doctor as a "great admirer of female pulchritude" are supported by some of his own publications, particularly *Within the Bud*. In this 300-page treatise, Dechmann set forth his views on marriage, child rearing, and eugenics in the form of a series of moral discourses by "the Master" to a number of young female disciples—their names derived from Greek legends—who came to study with him in the fastness of his mountain retreat by the shores of a majestic lake.⁶

Within the Bud was published in 1916, and at about the same time, Dechmann changed the name of his sanatorium to *Eugenika*, "goddess of the better race." Although several accounts state that the resort was first named *Eugenika* and that it was changed to *Qui Si Sana* to avoid presumably controversial implications, the name change clearly happened the other way around. But it is true that the name *Eugenika* may indeed have contrib-

uted to the failure of Dechmann's project.⁷

By 1917 Dechmann was party to several situations that presaged the demise of *Qui Si Sana*. As several accounts note, the immediate cause of the doctor's abandoning the sanatorium may have been a controversy with an adjoining landowner, David Thompson, over water rights on a small creek that touched both properties; the two men reportedly "became involved in litigation," and Dechmann "faded out of sight and no one knows what happened to him." Some articles also allude to problems caused by his attentions to women and to his having "found himself in debt"; one writer suggests that his German background was a factor in his departure.⁸

America's entry into World War I brought troubles for Dechmann: he was a German, and he was suspected of being an agent of the German government. According to a report by a Washington State Secret Service operative in December 1917, Dechmann "caused [trouble] months ago at Lake Crescent by raising the German flag above the American on his flag pole and refusing to take it down." The agent, whose report on affairs in Port Angeles cast suspicion on

3. Miller, 8.

4. Dechmann, *A Message to the Thinker! Organizations Often Hindered the Development of the Greatest Discoveries* (Seattle, 1918).

5. Russell, 409; Miller, 9 (qtn.).

6. Russell, 409; album (1st qtn.); Miller, 12 (2d qtn.).

7. Dechmann's "positive" eugenics (i.e., promoting the improvement of future generations by "increasing the proportion of individuals of desirable types," chiefly through diet and hygiene) would not have been so well known to the public as the "negative" eugenics associated with laws for the sterilization of criminals, epileptics, and the insane and with suppressing the immigration of "undesirables." The term was also sometimes linked to birth control. Eugenics was thus an altogether ambiguous basis for the name of a sanatorium. See *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (1931), s.v. "Eugenics." Parratt, s.v. "Camp David Junior."

8. Russell, 411; Fish, 70 (last qtn.).



Some of the sanatorium's guests pose on the front porch of the grand pavilion, designed by the Seattle architect Charles F. Hermann. It is a fine day in June, wrote Dechmann in his album, and the dogwoods are in bloom. Here the lodge and its forest setting suggest the ideal healthful life envisioned by the proprietor.

socialists, Germans, persons described as pro-German, members of the Industrial Workers of the World, and non-naturalized residents, alleged that Dechmann and "his plant" (i.e., Qui Si Sana) were being "taken care of" by the German government.⁹

Shortly after that report, Seattle police arrested Dechmann on a disorderly conduct charge and several days later turned him over to federal officers. The brief newspaper accounts indicate that his crime was having "expressed pro-German sentiments" and that he was "suspected of being an agent of the German government." They describe him as "among the best known Germans in the Northwest" and as the "former proprietor of a sanatorium at Lake Crescent." No further information on this incident has yet come to light.¹⁰

In 1918 Dechmann published *A Message to the Thinker!* a tirade against the medical establishment for what he felt were efforts to suppress or discredit naturopathic health systems like his. One statement unfavorably compares doctors to scientists and implies that Dechmann's academic degree, if indeed he had one, was not in medicine.

The next year he republished his *Valere Aude* in a 458-page revised edition twice the length of the 1915 version, and he also issued a short work, *Spanish Influenza (Pan-asthenia): Its Cause and Cure*. In March the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* also published a four-article series by Dechmann on the latter topic, which suggests both that the newspaper felt his medical views had some merit and that it was willing to forget that a year earlier it had reported his arrest as a German sympathizer.

Qui Si Sana (now Eugenika) ceased operating in 1918, and the litigious neighbor, David Thompson, acquired the property and its complex of lodge, cabins, bathhouse, dock, gardens, and statuary. In the ensuing years the place was used

by a local Rotary Club and as headquarters for a hiking group, the Klalhane Club, before Thompson in 1936 turned it over to Clallam County for use as a youth camp. As Camp David Junior, named for Thompson's son, it exists today, but few of the features that characterized it in 1913 are extant. None of the original buildings stand, although paintings and other furnishings from the lodge interior have been incorporated into its replacement. The statues of Hygeia and Motherhood have vanished. □

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9. Report of Op[erative?] 43, Port Angeles, Dec. 16, 1917, Washington State Secret Service Papers, Washington State Archives, Olympia (copy in biographical file).

10. *Seattle Daily Times*, Jan. 20, 1918; *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Jan. 22, 1918.



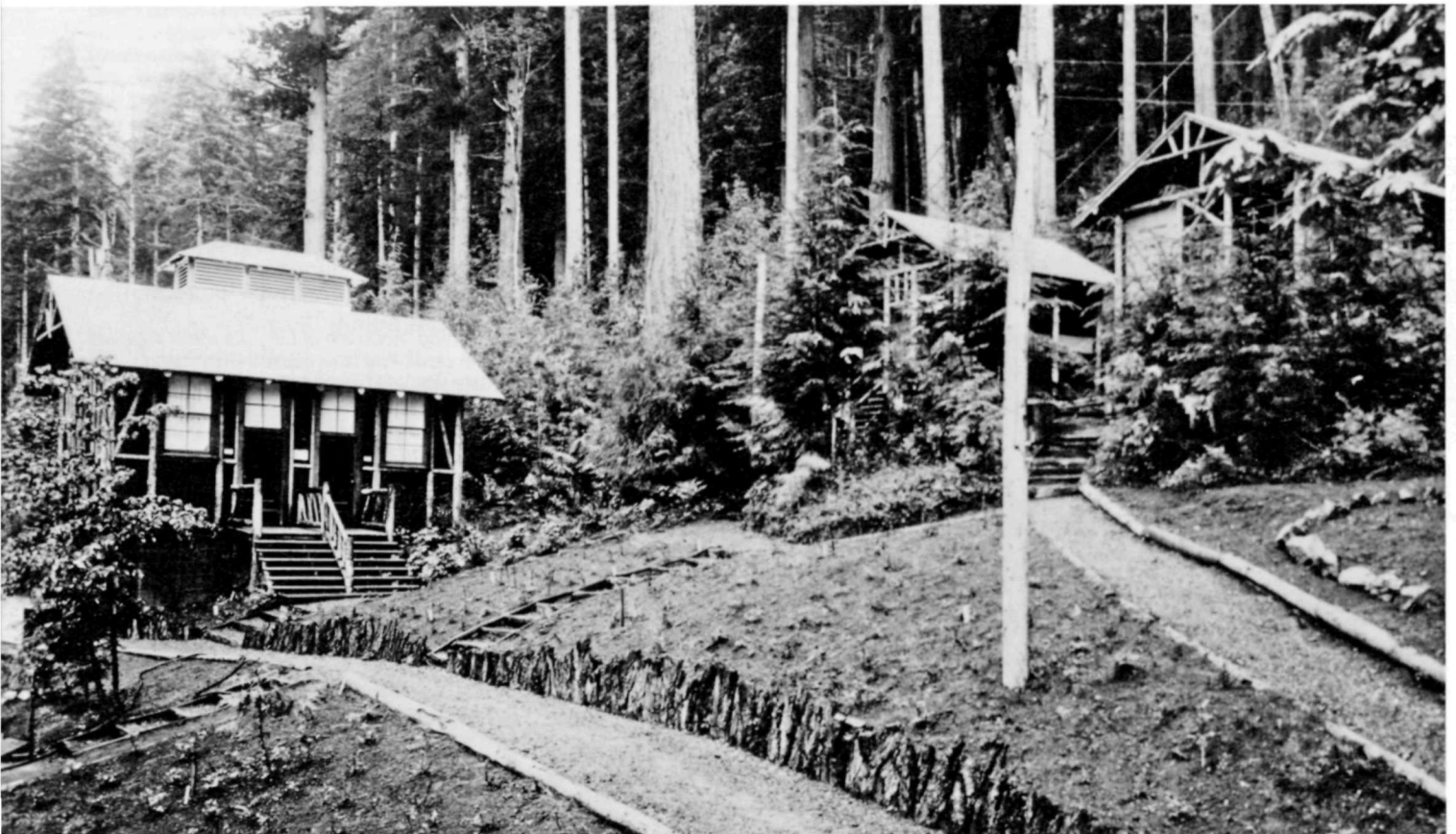
A solitary relic of the earlier forest stands guard over Dechmann amid some of the new plantings. The noted Seattle nurseryman Peder Sandved supplied Qui Si Sana with 5,000 imported roses of 325 varieties, "all from famous Trier on the Moselle," according to Fitzherbert Leather, as well as rhododendrons, tulips, and 8,000 assorted berry plants. "We had fine berries as late as October from this lovely bed," Dechmann noted. Just beyond the doctor are the statues of Hygeia and Motherhood.

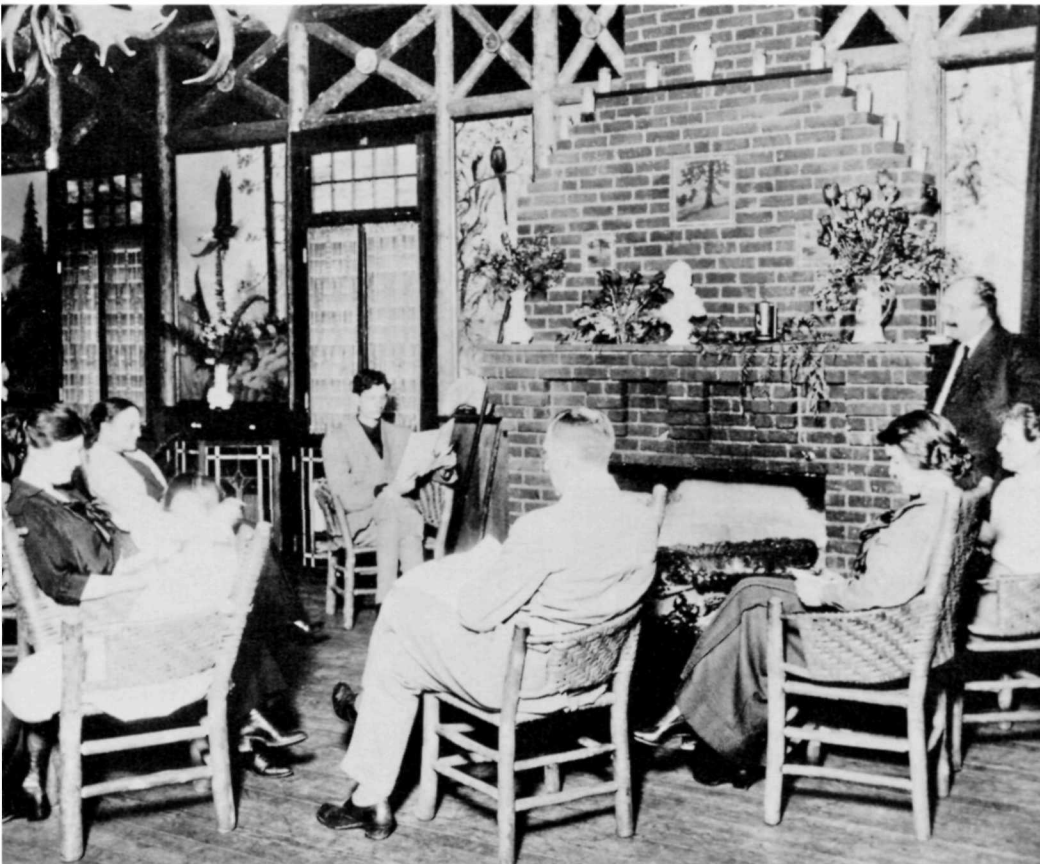
A stunning "Fountain of Life," its water supplied by the creek that later caused Dechmann trouble with his neighbor David Thompson, rose in front of the statues of Hygeia (center) and Motherhood (not visible) and splashed into a small pond with water lilies and trout. At the left is a makeshift track used to haul supplies up from the boat landing; the electric lines carried power from Qui Si Sana's own generator.

"I delight in this picture," Dechmann wrote in his album. "The upper statue, the Goddess of Hygeia, a maiden in the full bloom of health, hold[s] aloft the torch of truth, and deliver[s] the wreath of reward as to the fond and glorious mother at her feet." Variations on this motif appear in several of Dechmann's publications. The photograph also shows something of Qui Si Sana's grounds, replete with fruit trees, strawberries, and rock-lined paths.

Marie Dechmann and the youngest son, Louis, pose before a modern porcelain hygienic water fountain. Within the frame of this photograph, all is the product of the hand of man and the vision of Dr. Dechmann: precise rock border, cultivated plantings, the fountain and lodge, and the carefully dressed woman and child.

At the left is the bathhouse, with separate entrances for men and women; at the right are two of the guest cottages, supplied with electricity from a generator on the grounds. A passion for outlining the edges of paths and trails, elsewhere manifested in rock, is here revealed in peeled logs, bark-covered slabs, and finished lumber.





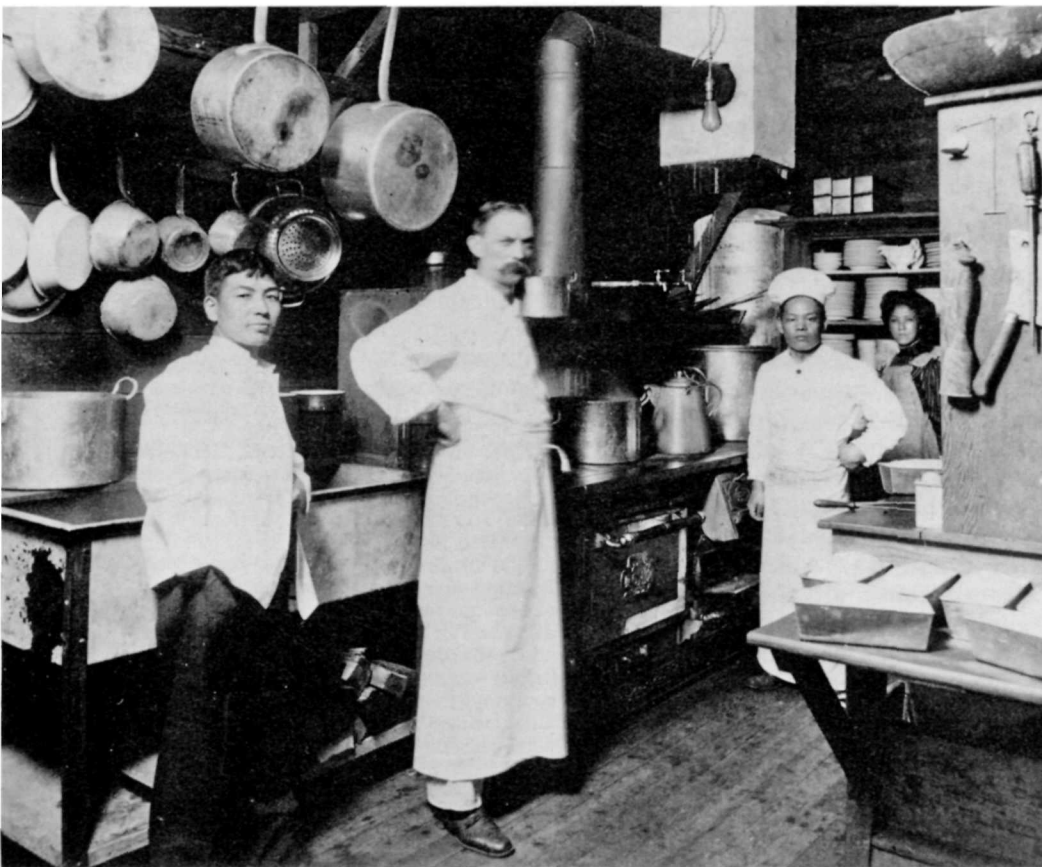
Dr. Dechmann sits at one end of the main hall of his lodge, a building he called the grand pavilion. His fondness for nature is apparent not only in the rustic architecture (note the cedar walls and bark-covered beams), but also in the indoor plants and paintings. The lodge displayed 28 oil paintings by the Seattle artists and fresco painters Alfred H. Richter and John N. Fuchs, some of which survive at present-day Camp David Junior. Dechmann wrote that "with these paintings life is typified—they are all nature scenes, and beginning with the birth in the first panel each succeeding painting tells some lesson of life and nature thereafter."

The central feature of the pavilion was the fireplace, and here guests settle near it, reading and relaxing in sturdy hickory chairs. Dechmann stands at the right; he noted proudly that the fireplace burned four-foot logs and that above his head were "some grand Darwin tulips, picked that day in the gardens."

Qui Si Sana had a bathhouse with two bathrooms, one for women, one for men, each equipped with porcelain tubs, marble massage slabs and an electrical massage device, a shower bath, and rubber-tiled floors. The Dechmann regimen for invalids included vinegar-and-water "packs" applied to various parts of the body; in some cases the prescription included radium and saltwater baths. Temperature was important in Dechmann pack and bath treatments; while healthy persons were advised to bathe in water between 59 and 64 degrees, invalids were initially treated with slightly warmer waters.

Qui Si Sana's rustic theme was carried out inside the open-air cottages, where hickory-wood beds clad in bark had headboards and footboards made of rattan. Guests could sleep "practically in the open air" while maintaining privacy by adjusting the shades on the generous windows around the room. The beds, with mattresses of pine needles, were on casters for ease of access.





At one end of the pavilion was the dining room, here adorned with German and American flags. The Dechmann "hygienic-dietetic method of healing" placed great emphasis on diet, but it was definitely not an austere program. The Qui Si Sana table was ably and amply supplied from a garden that the publicist Fitzherbert Leather said included 95 different kitchen herbs and 600 varieties of vegetables, "all raised according to biological laws." Although patients with particular conditions were advised to increase, eliminate, or reduce their intake of certain foods, or to add proprietary supplements, the object was to be able to return to "ordinary" food.

Separated from the main lodge but connected to it by a covered walkway, the kitchen at Qui Si Sana was well equipped and staffed. In 1915, according to a later historian, two parties of conventioning newspapermen and county treasurers toured Lake Crescent on the ferry Storm King. Although the itinerary called for a late lunch on board, when the ferry landed at Qui Si Sana shortly after noon, its passengers encountered "huge kegs of foaming beer" and a buffet that included enormous Beardslee trout "baked and garnished as only a very excellent German chef could prepare." Despite that anecdote, the sanatorium's chef might have been Chinese, as this photograph attests.

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Cover Illustration

The idyllic qualities of Lake Crescent's Qui Si Sana sanatorium are very apparent in this tableau of mother and children on a pier framed by a rustic trellis and flower boxes. For a history of the "health and biological institution" and its founder, see pages 18-25. (Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries)