

From The Archives

If you have lived on Denman for no longer than 20 years or so, your only source of local news and information on paper has been *The Grapevine* and *The Flagstone*, the longest running Denman Island publications. Before these two, publishing on the Island was a more short-term affair. While organizing the Denman Archives over the past year or so I have come across quite a variety of publications whose lifespan was much shorter. As far as I know the first mass circulation Denman serial was the infamous *Rag and Bone* founded by Des and Sandy Kennedy and Manfred Rupp. It was the feisty opinionated voice of the 70s counter culture, which was at times wacky but never dull, full of art, poetry, psychedelic fiction, and even cooking recipes, along with the usual editorials, reports and notices. As with many publications then, it took an ever-changing cast of characters to get each issue out, from writing and editing to typing up the stencils and hand cranking out each page on the Gestetner machine. Many islanders worked on *The Rag and Bone* over its six year, 35 issue existence from May '74 to July '80.

Prior to 1974 Denman news could be found in the Comox papers, one of which was known as the “greensheet” because of its green front page. Numerous islanders submitted regular pieces over the years, from births, weddings and obituaries to feature articles. And we shouldn't forget what is most likely the earliest Denman newspaper, *The Clarion*, produced by the elementary students at the school. The Archives holds issues from perhaps the 1930s or 40's with news, art and fiction in that telltale purple of the mimeograph machine.

After the demise of *The Rag and Bone* it was only a few months before others took up the challenge of getting island news into print. *High Tides* ran for 63 issues from Feb '81 to Feb '88. Perhaps *High Tides* was a sign that the battles of the 70's over the Hall, Ratepayers, the preschool etc. were easing. Marcus Isbister, from a long-established Denman family is listed as “chairman” in the *High Tides* masthead along with important contributors to the old *Rag and Bone*, such as Des Kennedy and Paul Bailey, who continued to write for the new publication. *High Tides* was somewhat less opinionated than *The Rag and Bone* and a bit more of a newsletter with ads. Hillel Wright was writing regular pieces in *High Tides* at the time but by 1987 he was feeling he wanted a bigger outlet for more literary work so he launched *Minus Tides* which ran intermittently until the last issue in 2017, published shortly before Hillel moved to Sointula where he passed away within a year or so.

Only months after the closure of *High Tides* in Feb. '88 another publication started up. This time it was a private endeavour by Mike Comeau of the general store. The *Denman Island Newsletter* was just 2 legal size sheets of blue paper, mostly of notices, event listings, and ads. It existed for only a year and a half until Nov. 89 when it evolved, or shrunk, back to letter size on cream paper as *The Islander* published by Mike's daughter Teresa. *The Islander* turned into *Island Life*, an expanded version under the editorship of Tim Wees, who had also edited *High Tides* for a while. It then lost content and again changed masthead to simply *Denman Island*. Around this time, 1993, Wes Michin and Hillel Wright decided that Denman needed more than a 4 page publication of announcements, notices and ads, so they started *Tideline* in order to have an outlet for longer pieces of opinion and literary writing, but the financial realities of competing for advertising dollars with 2 other publications, *Denman Island* and *The Grapevine* proved too much and *Tideline* ceased publishing within a year.

By 1995 only very minimal publications were available on Denman, so a group of islanders decided to launch the *Flagstone* in June '96, using the collective, non profit model. Corinne Borge was the first editor. She and Sean Woods had just taken over Abraxas Books and Sean soon took over the publishing of *Minus Tides* in 1998 when Hillel Wright was in Japan.

The *Island Grapevine* was launched on Hornby in 1991 by Tony Chumak and was taken over by Jennie Carrouthers, a Denmanite, by the end of 1994. Jen added *Denman Island* to her publishing empire around Mar. '95. Two similar publications competing for some of the same ad revenue would

not make sense so *Denman Island* was folded sometime in late 1997 and *The Island Grapevine* progressively became more of a Denman publication.

Over the last 20 years there have been a number of more occasional publications which are more literary, more opinionated, and more idiosyncratic than the *Flagstone* or the *Grapevine*. *Iris*, a journal of poetry by Jos Kollee, Ron Sakolsky's yearly anarcho-surrealist *Oystercatcher*, the anarchist *Herring Bone*, Shiela Nopper's *Stitches*, Slug's occasional chapbooks of poetry and Gary Piercy's comic book *Funky Mellow Underground* are some I am aware of. And if you frequent the Guesthouse, you may find various other Denman publications which appear and disappear from the pile of reading material there.