

This Place

Who Settled the ‘Settlement Lands’?

By John Millen

David Pickles, born in 1840, was a surveyor at the Baynes Sound Coal Mining Company’s workings, a few miles up the Tsable River, just south of Buckley Bay. When the mine closed in 1878 David chose to take up land on Denman Island. He selected a site well inland where there was some good dry, timbered land adjacent to the large, seasonally flooded and treeless swale that formed the headwaters of what is now known as Beadnell Creek. The land he claimed included an 80 acre block, which is now the east half of Denman Conservancy Association’s Settlement Lands. As well he claimed an additional 80 acres to the northeast and a 160 acre quarter section immediately to the east where he built his house and is the site of the existing residence.

The site of a cabin and barn in the northeast corner of the Settlement lands was part of David Pickles pre-emption but was likely, much later, occupied by one of David’s sons, Bert Pickles or possibly Arthur.¹

David’s initial claim was a pre-emption, obtained by staking and registering the claim and continuing to occupy it. To obtain a Crown Grant cost \$1 per acre at that time. David was later joined by his younger brother Abraham who claimed the 160 acres to the North of the Settlement Lands, a property which today is known as the Lake Farm.

David Pickles cleared his farm using oxen and with casual help. Then in 1889 he had a lucky break. At that time George Ford was one of the first colonial settlers on Hornby Island. He was successful there raising sheep and in the late 1880s went ‘home’ for a visit to London, England. On his return he had with him his widowed sister, Mrs. L Green and her daughter Annie Green. Due to bad weather their steamer did not stop at Hornby Island and they disembarked at the new Denman wharf. David Pickles was there meeting the steamer with his horse and buggy and he offered to give the Ford party a ride across the island. After waiting out the storm they were able to row across to Hornby. Annie became a frequent visitor to Denman Island and in 1890 she was the first full-time teacher at a new school at Beaver Creek near Port Alberni. David and Annie were married in 1891.

David and Annie Pickles had six children over the next dozen years. Four years into their marriage, after the birth of their third child, Cuthbert, David borrowed \$500 with a mortgage against his Quarter Section located in the area of the present Swale Farm. My presumption is that

enough to pay off the mortgage, repair the house and meet some other expenses. In March 1914 the Court approved terms for the sale of timber rights to the Squamish Timber Company. A month later in April 1914 the oldest Pickles child, Beatrice, was married to Patrick Doheny, owner of Denman Island's General Store.

But Annie's troubles were not over. Half of their land had still only been pre-empted and had not yet been granted by the Crown. On 22 February 1915 the Crown Grant of 160 acres that included the east half of DCA's Settlement Lands, was made to the family estate. Annie received a one-third interest in the land for life and the six children became tenants in common of the property.

In 1924 Arthur Pickles, Annie and David's second son, bought out the rest of the family to become the sole owner of the family's 160 acres that included the east half of the Settlement Lands. He didn't pay cash. His title was encumbered by agreements to pay out his sisters by installments and provide his mother with an annuity. His younger brother Ernest farmed the other half of the family's land, which is now called the Swale Farm. Cuthbert retained a Right of Way along the East side of the Settlement lands suggesting that he was then living in the northeast corner of that parcel. The whole family retained the coal rights under the family lands, but that part of the story belongs more to the other (west half) of the Settlement Lands.

Arthur kept the Settlement Lands' east 80 acres until 1963 when he sold it to Canadian Collieries. Subsequently it went through the hands of companies interested in harvesting its timber: Weldwood, John Hancock, Mike Jenks and finally it was transferred to Denman Conservancy in 2006.

The story of the western half of the Settlement Lands is very different from that of the East half, relating as it does more to the history of the whole region. In 1888 the Comox Valley region was humming with activity. The Dunsmuir family had acquired a huge area of land and coal rights and had started operating their first coal mine at Cumberland as well as their coal export wharf at Union Bay. The family's Union Coal Company owned all the coal rights in the adjacent parts of Vancouver Island.

On 30th April 1888 a Crown Grant of 464 acres on Denman Island was made to Thomas Watson Glaholm.² The land comprised a half-mile-wide strip fronting on Lambert Channel, in recent times owned by Dean Ellis, then running inland just over a mile to the Pickles Homestead and jumping over to the west of the Pickles land to include the west half of the present-day Settlement Lands. Thomas Glaholm and his family lived in Nanaimo and he worked as a teamster (in 1881) and grocer (1891)³ He flipped the Denman Island land in 1888 to Angus Rutherford Johnston of Nanaimo.⁴ Johnston had also been granted 976 acres that year in the southern half of Denman Island and had acquired additional land in the north part of the Island.⁵

Johnston took passage from Chile to California on a ship which was wrecked on the South American coast. He was one of only three survivors. Arriving eventually in California he joined further survey expeditions to Arizona and Utah. He came to Victoria in 1858 in time for the Fraser River and Caribou gold rush. He appears to have been quite successful in those gold fields. In 1877 he moved to Nanaimo and set up a grocery and building supply business.⁶

All of Johnston's Denman Island land was transferred 3 June 1890 to the estate of the late Alexander Alfred Green,⁷ formerly a banker in Victoria.⁸ At this time another prominent citizen Judge Crease also bought land on Denman Island.⁹ To this point it seems that all the owners of the acreage that included the Settlement Lands were speculating that the land would increase in value, perhaps due to the expected extension of the railway to Courtenay. Or possibly they hoped that coal might be found there. Much of the land they acquired had little value for agriculture. Enthusiasm for speculation in British Columbia land started early in Colonial times and continues unabated.

On 2 April 1895 the Green estate transferred all the land assembled by Johnston to James Dunsmuir.¹⁰ James had inherited his father Robert's estate of coal mines and railways and was at this time on his way to a political career which culminated with his 3 years as Lieutenant Governor of the Province. Heavily involved in Provincial politics James sold his Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway (together with the railway land grant) in 1905 to Canadian Pacific Railway, but he retained the coal mines and extensive coal rights.¹¹ In 1910 James sold his coal mines and related properties to William Mackenzie, promoter of the Canadian Northern Railway, who vested the land in Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd.¹² The transfer deed was vague, stating lands included in this deal were those of Dunsmuir's lands: 'in anywise relating to coal mines and fire clay'.¹³ We note that James' Denman Island land holding were transferred to Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd in 1915.¹⁴

Subsequent owners of this half of the Settlement Lands were:

Forestry companies Weldwood of Canada Ltd. (1966) ; Comox Timber Inc. (a subsidiary of the John Hancock Corp. of Massachusetts USA ; and 4064 Investments Ltd.

Developer 0736800 B.C. Ltd. and

Denman Conservancy Association in 2006.

Note: Winnifred Isbister's *My Ain Folk* is my source for some of this story.

¹ Pers. Com. Linda Schmidt

¹¹ Rekston, Terry *The Dunsmuir Saga* 1991

¹² Rekston, Terry *ibid*

¹³ Rekston, Terry *ibid* p. 224

¹⁴ Cert. of Indefeasible Title No. 22249

¹⁵ Cert. of Indefeasible Titles No. 379861I (1966) & S21289 (1987)

¹⁶ Cert. of Indefeasible Title EJ49132 (1995)

¹⁷ Cert. of Indefeasible Titles No. EL77132 (1997) & EX3434 (2005)

¹⁸ Cert. of Indefeasible Title No. EX135215 (2005)