

## This Place

by Graham Brazier

Material evidence of the lives of those who preceded our pioneer settlers on Denman Island is most often found in the numerous archeological sites which dot our coast-line. Occasionally, however, it turns up in unexpected places. Who would have thought, for example, that the visit of an elderly and ailing woman in the summer of 1933 would have any relevance to an investigation of the indigenous Pentlatch people of Denman Island? As it turns out, Josephine Crease, who stayed with the Ormiston family at Denman Point (name changed from Village Point in 1929) for ten days in August of 1933, made several sketches 'in the woods' which *may* have something to contribute to our appreciation of Pentlatch culture.

Josephine, at 69 years of age, was a prolific landscape painter. She trained at King's College, London and, in 1922, was a founding member of the Victoria-based Island Arts and Crafts Society where she exhibited her work annually up until 1941. She was also a member of a prominent Victoria family; her father, Sir Henry Pering Pellow Crease, was British Columbia's first Attorney General and both her mother and, at least, one sister were well-known artists in the Victoria area. Evidently Josephine had sketched on Denman Island in 1924 but, as no diary has come to light for this time period, little more is known of her earlier visit.

Fortunately, she made daily entries in a diary during her 1933 visit. These recorded many aspects of her daily life, including details of her train journey from Victoria to Buckley Bay on August 15, 1933 (10:15 a.m. - 4:10 p.m.), as well as the impact of a sweltering heat wave that had settled over the whole island and was the cause of some discomfort while she was here; unfortunately, her handwriting is often challenging to decipher and she never mentioned the subject of her sketches. She only noted that she went 'sketching in the woods' on three or four occasions. It is, however, evident from her diary that sketching was an integral part of her visit and it is evident from her surviving work that the sketches she made on Denman Island were a departure from her usual landscapes.

Though she didn't mention it in her diary, she seems to have been drawn to several 'Indian Carved Poles' which stood in various locations on the Ormiston property on the shores of Baynes Sound. The three paintings that survive are of poles which depict some identifiable symbols, such as the thunderbird. However, other creatures depicted are more ambiguous and have been the source of some conjecture. One critic wrote, "this work is not as accomplished as her landscapes". which may simply be another way of saying that, perhaps Josephine's eye was not accustomed to recording detail that would satisfy anthropologists. In addition, her decision to show other work at her 1933 exhibition suggests that she may not have been pleased by them. In any case, the fact that the poles were located on a property adjacent to Denman Point, where an extensive native village had once been located, raises the possibility that they could be remnants of the old Pentlatch village which had escaped documentation by anthropologists and may offer some insight into their culture.

Alas, the only 'expert' opinion I have been able to find was one offered by Alice Ravenhill, who, in 1938 was described as a "Late Lecturer, London University, Kings College for Women, Extension Lecturer, Universities of London and Cambridge, Lecturer, Training of Teachers Department, London County Council, etc.". Her conclusion was that the poles were 'most probably Kwakiutl' which would suggest that they had been removed from a location on Northern Vancouver Island and installed to serve as garden decorations on the Ormiston property.

What became of the posts and the paintings will have to be another story.