

This Place

A Perch?

By John Millen

(Geek alert: this article contains numbers and geometric concepts)

The property donated by Judge Crease to the Anglican Church, at the corner of Denman and Northwest Roads had an area of one acre and 16 perches. We know about acres but what is a perch? Answer: an old English land measure – sixteen and a half feet long. When Judge Crease referred to a ‘perch’ he meant the area of a square with sides one perch in length.

George Drabble surveyed many of the first settler’s land pre-emptions on Denman Island, including Judge Crease’s land. He is known to have been in Comox as early as June 1864.* He surveyed in the woods with a chain and compass. We are interested in the chain. It was 66 feet long, made with 100 links – note the decimal system creeping in. Much of the land survey dimensions of that era were based on the length of a chain. The road allowances were one chain wide. These days new roads are surveyed to be 20 meters wide which is 4 1/2 inches less than a chain. Settlers usually obtained rights to the land by claiming and having surveyed a pre-emption. These were often a quarter Section, that is a square a half mile (40 chains) to a side. An acre is 10 square chains and a furlong – still used in horse racing parlance - is 10 chains long. (The length of a Cricket pitch is one chain – but who cares about that?)

The survey chain itself was a light-weight steel chain of 100 links. And a perch? That was 25 links, one quarter of the chain. The 16 perches referred to above, in the land area Judge Crease donated to the Church, was one square chain or one 10th of an acre.

Today we see the Denman Anglican church located on a small town-sized lot of about a quarter acre. Where, then, is the more than one acre of land donated by Judge Crease? Most of it is under pavement.

Northwest Road in that vicinity was located entirely on the church land and Denman Road swings across the middle of the original church lot to avoid the creek gully.

Until quite recently that portion of Denman Road was not ‘gazetted.’ That is it had not been surveyed and still belonged to the church. The problem has now been remedied. The Anglican Church land now comprises two pieces of about one quarter acre each. The church is on one of those pieces and the creek gully across the road is on the other. (The Islands Trust mapping system has not yet caught up with these changes, but the Regional District map is up to date.)



* *The Wilderness Profound* by Richard Mackie