

## Mysterious Metcalf Bay

by Graham Brazier

The body of water we know today as 'Metcalf Bay' has a curious history. To begin with, there doesn't seem to be a distinctive 'bay' on Denman Island's south-east shoreline. Certainly no Horseshoe Bay, or Deep Bay or even Buckley Bay equivalent. The shoreline takes no sudden dips or jogs, only one gentle curve. Even mappers are not in agreement as to its precise location. Some maps locate it at the junction of McFarlane and Lacon Roads while others indicate it is south of there and still others show it to be north.

Its naming also has a curious aspect. It seems as though it was a clumsy attempt to honour James Metcalfe, who, in 1883, acquired 167 acres bordering Baynes Sound, for \$12. The B.C. Geographical Names Office confirms that a decision to name the body of water 'Metcalf Bay' was made by some undisclosed authority at some undisclosed time in the past. Nevertheless, Mr. Metcalfe's property included the land where, many years later, McFarlane Road would meet Lacon Road, though there is no hint of a bay at that location.

A couple of years later, the 82 acre property to the south, where there is a slight curve in the coastline, was acquired by Thomas Pickard for \$82. Jim Kirk, in his book, "My Ain Folk Revisited", referred to this property as "The Flats' below Metcalfe Bay" (where, by the way, he put the 'e' back in to Metcalf). It was here in 1886 that Thomas Pickard and his neighbour and relative John Picket farmed and, according to Winnifred Isbister, opened the first store on Denman Island. While this might be hard to imagine today there is considerable evidence that the Picket family, who acquired the 152 acres of waterfront adjoining Metcalfe's to the north in 1891, went on to have a long and vibrant presence on Denman Island life as well as a connection with its past.

The Picket's may be the only family to have had any continuing relationship with Indigenous residents of a previous era who, according to Winnifred Isbister, "spent their summers camping at Metcalfe (she also put the 'e' back into Metcalf) Bay. In 1956 archaeologist C. E. Borden confirmed the long-time presence of Indigenous occupation of Metcalf Bay when he reported unearthing the remains of plank houses at this site.

Only two years after they bought the property the Picket's attracted the attention of the *Daily Colonist* newspaper of Victoria; first, when they reported that their sheep had 'been lost to wolves' on their property and, secondly when they planned 'a grand picnic' to celebrate the 24th of May. Curiously it was reported that Mr. and Mrs. Pickett (yes, Pickett with 2 't's) would host the gathering at 'Mt. Pleasant, Denman Island.' However, that all changed when, on the 21st of May the *Daily Colonist* reported: "The house of Mr. J.H. Picket, of Mt. Pleasant, Denman Island, has been visited by Death. On Monday their youngest son, Cecil, aged two years and six months, accidentally fell into the well in front of the house and, when his body was found shortly after, life was extinct. Deep

sympathy is felt for the parents in their bereavement. The body was interred on Wednesday afternoon, Rev. J. Robson, B.A., officiating. Nearly all the residents were present, also friends from Union [Bay], where the parents are well known.”

Unpleasant as the event was, it's hard not to notice and puzzle at any reference to a mountain on Denman Island, particularly, in light of the fact that the highest elevation is a paltry 58 metres in contrast to 330 metres on neighbouring Hornby Island. Nevertheless the next reference to happenings at Metcalf Bay and the Picket family in the *Daily Colonist* was a more pleasant event in which it was announced that the ancient game of golf was being given 'a good start'. In June of 1923 a new nine-hole golf course was opened on the property of James Aston which overlooked Metcalf Bay. The *Colonist* reported numerous prominent Denman residents including "Captain and Mrs. C. Lacon, Mr. and Mrs. Reginald Lacon, Mr. Michael Bell-Irving, Mis Coburn, of Victoria: Mr. and Mrs. Fred Piercy, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Picket, Mr. Thomas Shaughnessy and the Misses Shaughnessy" all took part in the opening round.

So it seems that quiet Metcalf Bay has had a rather vibrant history that included a substantial Indigenous village as well as, not only, Denman Island's first store, but also its first golf course. Yet there is no tidy summary for the references to 'Mt. Pleasant, Denman Island'.

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