



The 'Guest House' on Denman Road

by John Millen

The 'Guest House' was built in 1914 and it is still recognizably the same as it was when new. It was built for John Wood, his wife Annabelle and their rapidly expanding household. By 1921 their family comprised their 12 year-old son and five more children from age 8 down. They planted an apple tree orchard of which there are still ancient trees there today.

'Jack' Wood, as he was known, was one of Denman's pioneer loggers. He is seen in the photos of the 1906 logging operations of Howard McFarlan at Henry Bay. Jack, together with the Piercys and Eddie Graham, formed the Denman Island Logging Co shortly after World War 1. Unfortunately Jack died in a logging accident around 1924. To make ends meet, after Jack Wood died, Annabelle took in lodgers starting the role for this establishment that still continues. The Wood family lived in the house until about 1945 when Annabelle's house was sold to Mr. and Mrs Jack Burrough.

The Burroughs came to Denman after Jack's retirement. They were keen readers and took on the role of custodians of the travelling library. Jack died at age 97 in 1974. Around that time the travelling library was moved to Dora Drinkwater's house (now the Art Centre).

My own association with the Guest House began in 1991 when Donna Millen and I stayed there one night when we were looking to buy land on the Island. I remember that we slept in a very soft bed upstairs but I didn't venture into the kitchen. At that time I believe that Robert Okrainec was the owner, providing our accommodation.

In 1994 -95 the house was known as the 'Denman Island Guesthouse and Restaurant' when it was rented to Kyriakos Katsanikakis and Paula LeBaron with Deb Bishop. Their Greek Dinner evenings gained wide renown.

The present owners, Sheldon Rempel and Donna Wooley purchased the property from Robert Okrainec in 1998. Sheldon had, early in his career, spent a year working at Strathcona Park Lodge. Later, Sheldon and Donna had extensive experience managing Hostels in Banff National Park and at Kamloops. The Guesthouse location with 4 acres of land and a history of providing accommodation offered a business with a good fit to their background.

Sheldon had also, in Kamloops, started a business, in the back-to-basics line, that they called the Earth Club Factory, selling solar power equipment, grain mills and composting toilets. Sheldon continued his interests in selling these wares after coming to Denman Island.

Jenny Meyer took over management of the Guest House Bistro in September 2007 and ran a welcoming Kaffee Klatsch for a couple of years before she took on management of the newly created diner at the premises of the present Take-Out.

Donna and Sheldon have expanded the premises, accommodating larger audiences for music on summer evenings, serving pizza from the wood-fired oven or hosting their 'first ever' public performances by junior members of the Community School. But the core of their operation remains the welcoming coffee shop where friends gather for planned (or accidental) sharing of a drink or a meal and Island visitors may get their first glimpse of a community that thrives on its myriad of personal connections.