



## Japanese on Denman Island

by John Millen

Early in the twentieth century Japanese labour was quite extensively used on Denman Island. However the first record we have of Japanese presence on the island was that of the entrepreneurial Kawamura family who, in about 1895 bought a 77 acre property from Andrew McDonald at the south end of Lacon Road. The Kawamuras established a very successful vegetable farm selling to the ready markets for miners at Cumberland and caterers to logging camps along the shores of Baynes Sound. In 1911 (census) the Kawamura household included his wife and three young Japanese men, boarders, who were being paid \$400 per year. In addition there was an adjacent Japanese household, a couple with two young children and a boarder doing farm work. A pair of Chinese labourers lived nearby who each declared an annual income of \$400, excellent pay for Chinese at that time. Later in 1911 the Kawamuras sold their farm to H. R. Lacon and moved away.

In that 1911 census we also find Mrs Elizabeth Graham (recently widowed) hosting a major logging camp, as well as accommodation for the school teacher and the foreman of the stone quarry. This family of James and Elizabeth Graham was unrelated to the large Graham family which originally settled on the east side of the Island (viz. Graham Lake). The James Graham property was located on Denman Road between the top of the Big Hill and the Old School. At that convenient location they had previously provided accommodation for a succession of school teachers.

Among the 33 boarders at the Graham's camp were 13 Japanese labourers and one Chinese cook. While the census records their work as logging it seems likely these same Japanese labourers were those who were employed doing the earthwork for the Quarry. It is recorded that Japanese worked on the grade of

the cable-railway that transported the blocks of stone from the Quarry down to its dedicated wharf, located about 500 meters south of Denman West ferry dock (which is also the site of Denman's original Public Wharf).

Japanese labour was also used (before the era of backhoes) for the extensive ditching needed to improve farms occupying the beaver-swamp lands of Denman Island. The method developed was to bury heavy charges of black powder along the line of the proposed ditch. The resulting explosions formed a ragged ditch which was then cleaned out and trimmed by Japanese hand labour.

Around 1910 Eddie and Alby Graham built and operated a sawmill a little North of the Denman West ferry terminal. They also made use of Japanese labour for their mill, which continued operation until about 1920.

In the 1921 Census there were no Japanese recorded on Denman. In one household that year a couple of retirement age were supported by two Chinese: one labourer and one student aged 15.

While most Japanese who came to Denman Island were single labourers, there were Japanese families in BC and also some who were entrepreneurs. In 1923 Eikichi Kagetsu purchased timber rights to 3000 acres adjacent to Fanny Bay across Baynes Sound from Denman Island. At Fanny Bay Kagetsu established a major logging operation served by rail. His workers were mainly Japanese whose families were housed in a village near Cowie Creek. Kagetsu also brought seed oysters from Japan for raising in Baynes Sound and planted them at Fanny Bay. Some say he was the first to do this but there are some other claimants to that role.

When Japan entered World War 2, all Japanese residents of British Columbia were removed to camps in the interior and their property confiscated. Kagetsu's timber rights were taken over by H R Macmillan and his equipment sold off. Of those Japanese who boarded SS Prince George at Union Bay Wharf to be transported to Vancouver, 120 were from Fanny Bay and more than half of those were children.