



## Prinetown on Denman Island

by John Millen

When Boyle Point Provincial Park was established in 1989 the small beach, accessible by a steep trail on the west side of the point, was known locally as Betty's Beach. A Denman Islander, Betty worked an oyster lease off that beach and had a small cabin with a surprisingly generous water supply system on the small flat area above the beach. The establishment of the Park meant the end of that era with the negotiation of the cancellation of the oyster lease and the replacement of the Crown Reserve over the adjacent area with Park status. The rectangular Crown Reserve encompassing the beach and well into the interior of the Point was a long standing Federal Crown Reserve, likely established when the Chrome light was being built in 1890. It appears on a 1919 map of the area and prevented pre-emption or purchase by prospective settlers.

In the early years of the Twentieth Century single men could make a (bare) living by fishing for salmon from row boats, if they could live close to the fishing grounds. The south end of Denman Island with good fishing near Chrome Island or Eagle Rock was such a fishing area and 'Betty's Beach' was a convenient place to build a shack for shelter. They could sell their catch to the buyer at nearby Deep Bay. There was a similar row of shacks at Flora Island off St. John Point at the east end of Hornby Island. A notable collection still exist at Shack Island adjacent to Piper's Lagoon Park a little north of Nanaimo. Though these are now treasured holiday pads, not fisher's shacks!

Albert Prince was one of the earliest to have a shack and fish from Betty's beach. Known as Bert, he was a 'life-of-the-party' kind of guy so, once other fishermen had joined him living there, the Denman community called the place 'Prinetown'.

Bert Prince had maintained correspondence with a woman friend from his youth in England, posting letters from Deep Bay when he lived on Denman Island. Eventually this woman, widowed and well off from her earlier marriage, came to Deep Bay seeking Bert. A friend of his in Deep Bay, realizing that Bert needed to be well dressed for the occasion, took his best suit with him when he went to pick up Bert from Prinetown. The happy couple were married in Vancouver on 29 June 1932.

They were still living in Vancouver when Bert died there in 1948 just a year after he retired from working at Vancouver Shipyard.

Donald Hastings moved to Denman Island in 1919 and he loved to fish so he had a cabin at Prinetown though he also owned land where he lived elsewhere on the Island. In his seventies Donald married, sold his land and moved off the Island. However, when his wife died he moved back and lived in his cabin at Princeton in the 1950's, for a few more years of the good life. Prinetown continued through the 1970's as a place for fishermen to 'squat' and for Denman Islanders to have a place at the beach.

The last of the Prinetown residents was John Carlson. Carlson was Norwegian, a fisherman of the old school who had, earlier in his life, rowed his boat from Vancouver to the Queen Charlotte Islands, now Haida Gwaii. He fished from Princeton in his 16 foot double ended skiff which he would sail (and row) to Vancouver for supplies.

In 'High Tides' (April 1981) Hillel Wright wrote that he was helping to move a fisherman and his gear to squat at Princeton in 1973 when he first met John Carlson. Wright described John's yard just above the high tide mark 'cluttered with cats and chickens' and his shack as one room with a sleeping loft and a lean-to for firewood.

John Carlson is remembered by some present Denman residents including Catherine Platz who described, in the 'History of Horses on Denman', riding with her young friends down the trail to Boyle Point and, leaving their horses, descending the steep trail to the beach. The tea made for them by old John, was so strong they couldn't drink it! Carlson lived there until he died in 1980 aged 92.

In the early 1980's there were changes coming. A roadway had been cleared to Boyle Point to provide power for the Chrome Island Light. By 1984 unauthorized road use led to the closing of this road with a locked gate. Discussions were held with various government agencies about making Boyle Point a Park. The free and easy days, when you could build a driftwood shack on the beach and live there, were over.

Ref. *A History of Horses on Denman* by Jacqueline Ward (2010)