More on Denman Island's Stone Quarry

By Graham Brazier

"What is the fascination with Denman Island's stone quarry?" One might ask. After all, it has been the subject of at least two other contributions to 'This Place'. The answer is actually quite simple - it was the discovery of a book titled - take a deep breath - "Report of the Building and Ornamental Stones of Canada, volume v. Province of British Columbia by Wm. A. Parks, B.A., PhD, Ottawa, Government Printing Bureau, 1917." Dr. Parks makes reference to Denman Island 27 times in his 236 page tome.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, the reports on individual mine sites throughout the province have a distinctive scientific tone which makes them virtually unreadable, if occasionally comic, for the general public. "The ten sandstones tested vary but little in gravity", wrote Dr. Parks, "ranging from 2.656 for the Newcastle Island stone to 2.713 for the dark Denman Island type: the average is 2.67. The average gravity of ten marbles is 2.75, but if the two dolomitic stones from Grant Brook be omitted the average is 2.72."

It seems as though the author may have anticipated this and attempted to address it when he wrote in the introduction: "While the report is thought to be fairly complete with respect to known occurrences of valuable stone, it is to be remembered that British Columbia contains vast tracts of rocky country, of which, practically, nothing is known. It is manifest, therefore, that the general conclusion drawn from this report as to the resources of the province in building stone is not to be construed as expressing in any way the possible, or even probable, limits of production. This observation is made necessary by the fact that the earlier volumes are more or less expressive of the total probabilities of production; in the fourth volume particularly, an attempt is made to point out the possibilities of all the rock formations of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. An effort to apply this method to British Columbia, in one season's operations, would be ludicrous."

Nevertheless, the interest in 'building and ornamental stones' in the early days of the last century was widespread and quarries were developed and exploited on many, if not, most of the gulf islands,largely in response to pre-war building booms in Vancouver and Victoria. However, as the stone was primarily ornamental in its use it was subject to great fluctuations in demand which crashed with the outbreak of World War 1 sending Denman Island's quarry into receivership. Three years later the report examining Denman's quarry product was written and included the following photograph:

https://www.facebook.com/100063445636263/photos/1292596686198507/?_rdr

This compelling photograph is followed by extensive analysis of the product of the mine, of which the following paragraph is a small sample: "Smoothed surfaces show very fine white and black specks in a greyish groundmass, but fractured surfaces have a "muddy" appearance. The constituent grains are quartz, orthoclase, plagioclase, and indeterminable volcanic rock: the whole cemented in a rather abundant argillaceous cement."

Also included is a statement about where the products of the quarry were used: “Denman Island stone has been used in small quantities for trimmings in many buildings. The most important structures in which it may be seen are —

Normal school, Victoria.

Drill hall. Victoria.

Metropolitan building, Vancouver.

Dawson school, Burrard Street, Vancouver.”

The report, however, concludes with the distinctively non-scientific remark that “These buildings all show a rather dead, dark, bluish-grey colour which is not attractive.”