

This Place

The Settlement Lands Part 2

By John Millen

The story of the western half of the Settlement Lands is very different from that of the East half, relating as it does more to the history of the whole region. In 1888 the Comox Valley region was humming with activity. The Dunsmuir family had acquired a huge area of land and coal rights and had started operating their first coal mine at Cumberland as well as their coal export wharf at Union Bay. The family's Union Coal Company owned all the coal rights in the adjacent parts of Vancouver Island.

On 30th April 1888 a Crown Grant of 464 acres on Denman Island was made to Thomas Watson Glaholm.¹ The land comprised a half-mile-wide strip fronting on Lambert Channel, in recent times owned by Dean Ellis, then running inland just over a mile to the Pickles Homestead and jumping over to the west of the Pickles land to include the west half of the present-day Settlement Lands. Thomas Glaholm and his family lived in Nanaimo and he worked as a teamster (in 1881) and grocer (1891)² He flipped the Denman Island land in 1888 to Angus Rutherford Johnston of Nanaimo.³ Johnston had also been granted 976 acres that year in the southern half of Denman Island and had acquired additional land in the north part of the Island.⁴

Angus Rutherford Johnston had, to say the least, a colourful career. Trained as a civil engineer in Scotland, he went to Chile in the early 1850's to work on the construction of a railway. Later he joined expeditions exploring Peru, Ecuador and Nicaragua. In Nicaragua an adventurer, William Walker, from the United States had set himself up as President of Nicaragua in 1855 inspired by the Manifest Destiny movement to annex additional territory for the USA. Johnston was so outraged he volunteered with the local military forces which succeeded in ousting Walker. Later Johnston took passage from Chile to California on a ship which was wrecked on the South American coast. He was one of only three survivors. Arriving eventually in California he joined further survey expeditions to Arizona and Utah. He came to Victoria in 1858 in time for the Fraser River and Caribou gold rush. He appears to have been quite successful in those gold fields. In 1877 he moved to Nanaimo and set up a grocery and building supply business.⁵

All of Johnston's Denman Island land was transferred 3 June 1890 to the estate of the late Alexander Alfred Green,⁶ formerly a banker in Victoria.⁷ At this time another prominent citizen Judge Crease also bought land on Denman Island.⁸ To this point it seems that all the owners of the acreage that included the Settlement Lands were speculating that the land would increase in value, perhaps due to the expected extension of the railway to Courtenay. Or possibly they hoped that coal might be found there. Much of the land they acquired had little value for agriculture. Enthusiasm for speculation in British Columbia land started early in Colonial times and continues unabated.

On 2 April 1895 the Green estate transferred all the land assembled by Johnston to James Dunsmuir.⁹ James had inherited his father Robert's estate of coal mines and railways and was at this time on his way to a political career which culminated with his 3 years as Lieutenant Governor of the Province. Heavily involved in Provincial politics James sold his Esquimalt and

Nanaimo Railway (together with the railway land grant) in 1905 to Canadian Pacific Railway, but he retained the coal mines and extensive coal rights.¹⁰ In 1910 James sold his coal mines and related properties to William Mackenzie, promoter of the Canadian Northern Railway, who vested the land in Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd.¹¹ The transfer deed was vague, stating lands included in this deal were those of Dunsmuir's lands: 'in anywise relating to coal mines and fire clay'.¹² We note that James' Denman Island land holding were transferred to Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd in 1915.¹³

Subsequent owners of this half of the Settlement Lands were:

- Forestry companies Weldwood of Canada Ltd. (1966)¹⁴; Comox Timber Inc. (a subsidiary of the John Hancock Corp. of Massachusetts USA¹⁵; and 4064 Investments Ltd.¹⁶;
- Developer 0736800 B.C. Ltd.¹⁷ and
- Denman Conservancy Association in 2006.

¹ Crown Grant DD27927

² BC census 1881,1891

³ Land Register 10.146.7980a

⁴ Crown Grant 22187

⁵ Howay F.W. & Scholefield E.O.S. British Columbia, The SJ Clarke Publishing Company 1914 Vol. 3 p.1154.

⁶ Land Register 11.525.9992a

⁷ Mackie, Richard Somerset The Wilderness Profound Sono Nis, 1995 Page 193

⁸ Mackie ibid

⁹ Land Register 17.85.340C

¹⁰ Rekston, Terry The Dunsmuir Saga 1991

¹¹ Rekston.Terry ibid

¹² Rekston, Terry ibid p. 224

¹³ Cert. of Indefeasible Title No. 22249

¹⁴ Cert. of Indefeasible Titles No. 379861I (1966) & S21289 (1987)

¹⁵ Cert. of Indefeasible Title EJ49132 (1995)

¹⁶ Cert. of Indefeasible Titles No. EL77132 (1997) & EX3434 (2005)

¹⁷ Cert. of Indefeasible Title No. EX135215 (2005)