

Who Settled the ‘Settlement Lands’?

David Pickles, born in 1840, was a surveyor at the Baynes Sound Coal Mining Company’s workings, a few miles up the Tsable River, when the mine closed in 1878. David chose to take up land on Denman Island.ⁱ He selected a site well inland where there was some good dry, timbered land adjacent to the large, seasonally flooded and treeless swale that formed the headwaters of what is now known as Beadnell Creek. The land he claimed included an 80 acre block, which is now the east half of Denman Conservancy Association’s Settlement Lands.ⁱⁱ As well he claimed a 160 acre quarter section immediately to the east where he built his cabin and an additional 80 acres to the northeast of his homestead. David’s initial claim was a pre-emption, obtained by staking and registering the claim and continuing to occupy it. To obtain a Crown Grant cost \$1 per acre at that time.ⁱⁱⁱ David was later joined by his younger brother Abraham who claimed the 160 acres to the North of the Settlement Lands, property which today is known as the Lake Farm.^{iv}

George Ford was one of the first colonial settlers on Hornby Island in the mid 1860’s.^v He was successful there raising sheep and in the late 1880s went ‘home’ for a visit to London, England. On his return he had with him his widowed sister, Mrs. L Green and her daughter Annie Green.^{vi} Due to bad weather the steamer they were on did not stop at Hornby Island and they disembarked at the new Denman wharf. David Pickles was there meeting the steamer with his horse and buggy and he offered to give the Ford party a ride across the island. After waiting out the storm they were able to row across to Hornby. Annie became a frequent visitor to Denman Island and in 1890 she was the first full-time teacher at a new school at Beaver Creek near Port Alberni.^{vii} David and Annie were married in 1891.

David and Annie Pickles had six children over the next dozen years. Four years into their marriage, after the birth of their third child, Cuthbert, David borrowed \$500 with a mortgage against his Quarter Section located in the area of the present Swale Farm.^{viii} My presumption is that he used the funds to obtain a Crown Grant of the 160 acres and to build a frame house to replace his pioneer log cabin. In 1909 David died, aged 69, (he was 24 years older than Annie). There was no will. Annie became the executor of the estate, selling some livestock and equipment to pay off the debts. She also had to pay the taxes on the land and interest (at 10% per year) on the \$500 mortgage. The farm fed them well but little money could be made. By 1914 the estate was still not settled and Annie applied to the court to sell timber rights on all the estate land. The timber was valued by both Thomas Graham and William Baikie at \$700, enough to pay off the mortgage, repair the house and meet some other expenses. In March 1914 the Court approved terms for the sale of timber rights to the Squamish Timber Company.^{ix}

A month later in April 1914 the oldest Pickles child, Beatrice, was married to Patrick Doheny, owner of Denman Island’s General Store.^x

But Annie’s troubles were not over. Half of their land had only been pre-empted and had not yet been granted by the Crown. On 22 February 1915 the Crown Grant of 160 acres that included the east half of DCA’s Settlement Lands, was made to the family estate. Annie received a one-third interest in the land for life and the six children became tenants in common of the property.^{xi} In 1924 Annie and David’s second son, Arthur Pickles, bought out the rest of the family to become the sole owner of the family’s 160 acres that included the east half of the Settlement Lands.^{xii} He didn’t pay cash. His title was encumbered by agreements to pay out his sisters by installments and provide his mother with an annuity. His younger brother Ernest farmed the other half of the family’s land, which is now called the Swale Farm.^{xiii} Cuthbert (Bert) retained a

Right of Way along the East side of the Settlement lands suggesting that he was then living in the northeast corner of that parcel where there is evidence of the house pit and the remains of an apple orchard. The whole family retained the coal rights under the family lands, but that part of the story belongs more to the other (west half) of the Settlement Lands.

Arthur kept the Settlement Lands' east 80 acres until 1963 when he sold it to Canadian Collieries. Subsequently it went through the hands of companies interested in harvesting its timber: Weldwood; John Hancock Insurance Company's nominee Comox Timber Ltd.; Mike Jenks' 4064 Investments Ltd.; and finally it was transferred to Denman Conservancy in 2006.

ⁱ Isbister, Winnifred *My Ain Folk* 1976 p. 33

ⁱⁱ The house pit and apple trees located on the Settlement Lands appear to be of later origin. An old road with a gentle grade leads down from the plateau, where Central Road runs, to that house site, and also gives access to the lowland area of the Lake Farm where it appears Abraham Pickles built his home.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mackie, R S *The Wilderness Profound* 1995 p59

^{iv} Probate BC Archives GR 2213, 1506 1923

^v *Land of Plenty, A History of the Comox District* 1987 p 82

^{vi} Isbister, Winnifred *My Ain Folk* 1976 p 33

^{vii} Peterson, Jan *The Albernis 1860 – 1922* p 70

^{viii} Probate BC Archives GR 2213, 626A 1914

^{ix} *ibid*

^x BC Marriage Registration Number:1914-09-074023

^{xi} 28876-I Crown Grant

^{xii} Title 55525-I

^{xiii} Isbister, Winnifred *My Ain Folk* 1976 p 34