

Newsletter

"A life not documented is a life that within a generation or two will largely be lost to memory."



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Welcome to another wonderful issue of *the Sea Island Heritage Society's* newsletter. The diversity of stories you'll find within is testament to the wide interests and dedicated efforts of our volunteers and you.

Your support matters. Through membership, donations and collaborations, we are building a collection of donated artifacts, documents, and photos rarely viewed by others than family. The stories you share with us enrich the heritage of our island's history.

In this issue, we are excited to tell you about some heritage markers coming to Burkeville Neighbourhood Park. And knowing May is Canadian Asian Heritage Month, we are celebrating the Chinese families on Sea Island with a story about MAH Fong. Do you remember him?

Do you have a favourite curiosity of Sea Island heritage that piques your interest? I had always wondered how my childhood neighbourhood got its name, Cora Brown. We learn the details in this issue.

Terry Slack writes of his family's river history on the North Arm Jetty. It is a story of adventure, determination, and living with nature. The second part of his story will be shared in September's newsletter.

We also share a story of three generations of the Bicknell family (Percy George, Harold Percy and Gordon) living on Sea Island. Photos new to us and clarification of information from Mary-Anne Connolly (née Bicknell) confirmed the story's accuracy.

Remember Harold Percy Bicknell and his renowned waterfowl decoy carvings? Mary-Anne brought two of the decoys and a few corks with her when we met and I took the following photo.



The next few months are going to be busy for our volunteers. In May we are celebrating the people and places of Sea Island at our invitational gathering for all who lived and live on Sea Island. It will be held at the Sea Island School many of us attended in our youth. See the details on page 5 of this newsletter.

On June 7, we will participate in Doors Open, hosted by the City of Richmond. The doors at our office at Sea Island School will be open to welcome all interested in the history and heritage of Sea Island. Topics range from the beginnings of island life to farming and fishing to the airport, military presence and veterans, with aerial views and maps that help young

people orient themselves to an island full of life long before many of them were born.

Also, later in June we are excited to participate in Burkeville Daze where we reconnect with Burkeville residents and share the history of the place where they live. We've had lots of interest at these events and lots of laughter, too, sharing our memories with others who when leaving often say, "I never knew that about Sea Island!" Come join us and share your memories.

Lastly, I ask that we take time to remember those Sea Islanders that have passed. May their memory always be with us.

I look forward to seeing you at any of the events above (and hopefully all of them!). Thank you for sharing your stories, photos and artifacts with us. We couldn't do what we do without your support.

Best wishes,

Eunice Robinson



President
Sea Island Heritage Society

The ongoing work we do!

As usual, we have been quite busy since our newsletter in November 2024. Here's some highlights:

- We indexed and added over 400 items of interest to the Society's Collection.
- We helped locate family members, photos and information for the stories you read in the February and April newsletters.
- Most recently, we connected with family members of Chinese pioneer families beyond Canada.

- We worked with the Bicknell and Slack families to bring you their family stories. The families have allowed us to scan family documents and have donated artifacts.
- We continued to assist Richmond Councillor Bill McNulty, providing him with photos and information for his book, *Sea Island The Beginning of Richmond*.
- We also attended meetings with the City of Richmond - Parks Department, Richmond Archives and Richmond Museum.
- We collaborated with the Parks Department on two new signs for Burkeville Park.
- We held monthly management meetings and as-needed project meetings.
- We have been planning for the Sea Island Celebration and 4th Invitational Reunion, May 24, 2025, at the Sea Island School.

Thank you for supporting the work we do. Not a member? To join, renew your membership, or donate to the Society, contact us at treasurersihs@seaislandhome.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Burkeville Neighborhood Park Heritage News

We have some exciting news!

On February 25th volunteers from the Sea Island Heritage Society (SIHS) attended the City of Richmond's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee Meeting. One of the items introduced improvements that are proposed for Burkeville's Neighbourhood Park.

Part of this proposal would include the relocation of the Public Art Piece "Shaping Hands" that was initially installed in 2008 at the Sea Island Firehall to a more prominent and accessible location within Burkeville Neighbourhood Park. This artwork is a large bronze globe that has 90 or so individual hand impressions from members of the Burkeville Community. Relocating this exciting piece of art would allow the community to have access to it, reinforcing its community unity message originally intended by the artist, Bart Habermiller.

Further to that, SIHS had introduced the idea to integrate heritage interpretive signs into the neighbourhood. The signage we created was accepted in support of the City of Richmond's Strategic



Figure 1. [Shaping Hands at the Sea Island Firehall]. (2025). (Source: David England).

Plans as part of their priority to enhance and preserve heritage assets within the community. The signage will be located prominently within accessible areas of Burkeville Neighbourhood Park.

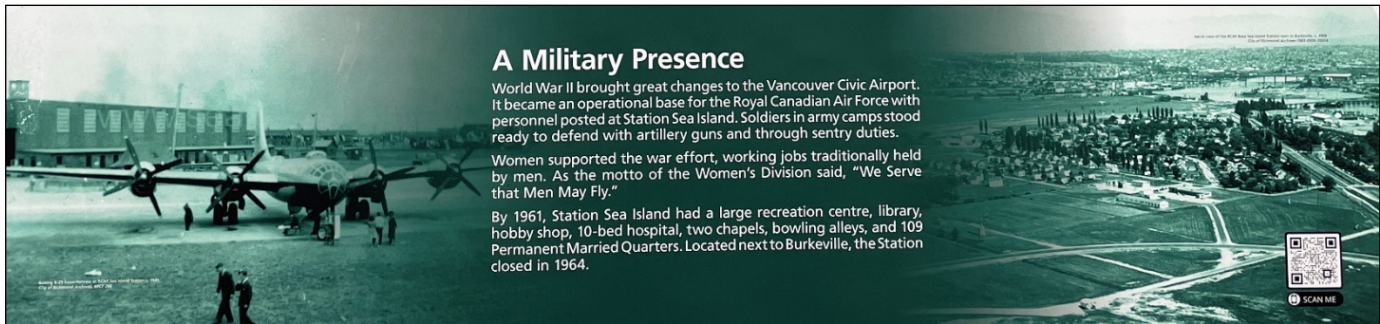


Figure 2. [The proposed and accepted military presence sign]. (2025). (Source: Richmond Parks Department).

At the February 25th meeting, our heritage proposals were accepted by the City of Richmond. The next step is City Staff have been approved to develop a detailed design of the project and to follow the standard procedure for the construction services procurement. It is anticipated that the Burkeville Neighbourhood Park Renewal will start in the fall of 2025!

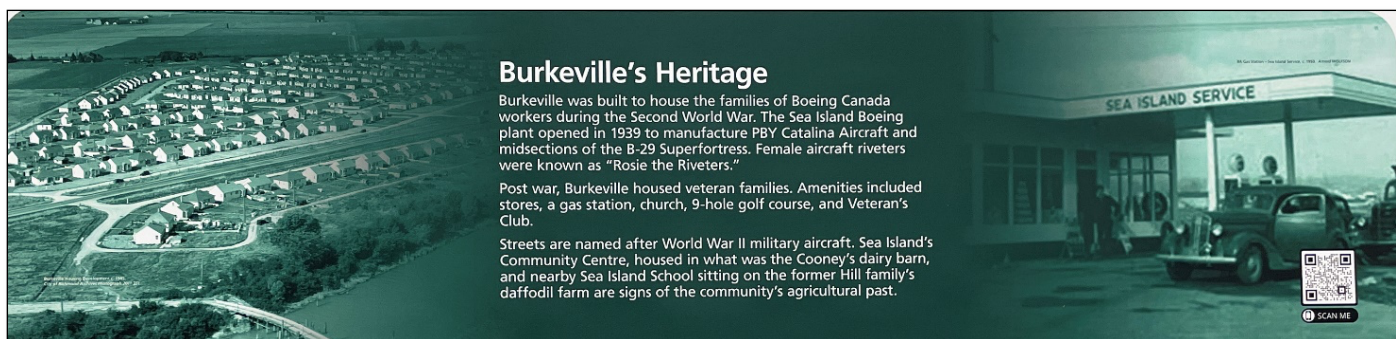


Figure 3. [The proposed and accepted Burkeville's Heritage sign]. (2025). (Source: Richmond Parks Department).

These efforts support SIHS's Sea Island Pathways Initiative which is in its early stages of planning and development. We are currently working on the initiative with the City of Richmond, YVR and other stakeholders.

Stay tuned for more information and updates about Sea Island heritage markers as we move forward! Want to be part of the Sea Island Pathways Initiative? Contact David England, Vice President, Sea Island Heritage Society at info@seaislandhome.org.

SEA ISLAND CELEBRATION AND 4TH INVITATIONAL REUNION



The Sea Island Heritage Society invites you to our 4th Sea Island gathering / reunion / get-together to be held on:

Saturday, May 24, 2025

11:00 am to 5:00 pm.

This event is for anyone who lived or lives on Sea Island. The big change this year is that we will hold it in Burkeville, at the:

Sea Island School, in the gym.

There will be some light refreshments, as well as coffee, tea and water.

Come join us, renew old acquaintances, share memories and learn more about Sea Island's history. And pass on this invitation to your family and friends who lived or live on Sea Island.

Admission is \$20.00 (cash or cheque) to be collected at the door.

Please **RSVP your attendance before May 15**, providing your name, address, email and phone number to Doreen at treasurersihs@seaislandhome.org. We need to know numbers for catering services.

QUESTIONS? CONTACT ANY OF US:

Eunice Robinson	604-596-2811	eunice@genbug.ca
David England		davidwengland911@gmail.com
Doreen King		treasurersihs@seaislandhome.org

MAH FONG - CHINESE PIONEER FARMER

May is Asian Heritage Month in Canada. It is an occasion to acknowledge the many achievements and contributions of people of Asian origin, who throughout our history, have done so much to make Canada the country we know and love.

In honour of Canadian Asian Heritage Month, the Sea Island Heritage Society brings you its first Chinese pioneer family story. The story has been condensed for the newsletter. Contact the Society for the longer version.

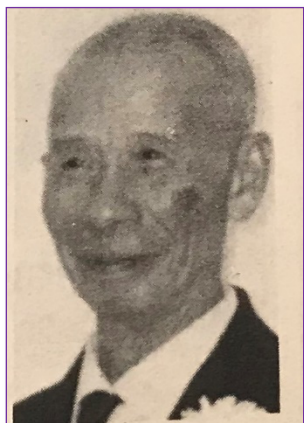


Figure 4. [MAH Fong, Richmond Review obituary]. (1975). (Source: Richmond Review).

MAH Fong was a Chinese market gardener, a venerable member of the MAH clan from the county of Toi-Shan, in the Guangdong province in China, and a Chinese pioneer farmer on Sea Island.

MAH Fong was born on September 15, 1885, in China to MAH Sum Ling and FONG (given names not known)

MAH Fong came to Sea Island in 1907, at the age of 21, leaving his first wife behind. He survived the head tax, the racism and the *Chinese Exclusion Act* hardships imposed on the early Chinese immigrants to carve a niche in the Lower Mainland's agriculture economy by sheer determination, hard work and no sleep.

MAH Fong's father and his brothers had come to Canada before him and established a farm in the bush and treed land of Sea Island. [*The Society is still trying to identify the brothers and father of MAH Fong, who came to Sea Island before him*].

Before the *Chinese Exclusion Act* was repealed in 1947, Chinese people were not allowed to own land and were limited to a few types of work. MAH Fong and his family held 110 leased acres in various locations on Sea Island. MAH Fong had 15 men working with him. They worked year-round.

In a City of Richmond interview of Hewitt HAYWARD dated March 9, 1973, Hewitt said:

"W.A. HAYWARD moved to Sea Island in 1921 and started a 45-acre dairy farm at the northwest corner of Miller Road and McDonald Road. MAH Fong lived behind the HAYWARDS on Sea Island, and farmed corn, cabbage, cauliflower, squash. Vegetables went to town with three Chinese men: MAH Luke (Look) who lived by the Acme Cannery, MAH Fong who lived behind the HAYWARDS and MAH Wing Toy."

In those days, pork was three cents a pound, and to make the dollar a day his vegetables fetched at the wholesaler, MAH Fong had to leave his farm on Sea Island at one a.m., walk and ride his horse and cart laden with vegetables to downtown Vancouver, arriving at four a.m. A 100-pound bag of potatoes brought 25 cents. He and his horse would turn right around and make the long trek back to Sea Island just as the day started and MAH Fong went straight to work in the garden again.

Many Sea Island children worked on MAH Fong and other Chinese farms on Sea Island,

especially during WWII when there was a shortage of farm labour. Barb Kinahan, a descendant of the Laing family, worked on MAH Fong's farm during WWII. Barbara said:

"MAH Fong and his wife's land was across from the LAING farm. MAH Fong had a shiny gold tooth which glistened when he smiled. They grew vegetables which they would deliver to sell in Vancouver's Chinatown. They lived in a big unpainted house. MAH Fong and his wife managed the land. MAH Fong had an old black truck to deliver his vegetables to Chinatown grocers."

MAH Fong said the delta land was good to him and rewarded his hard work. For the last 10 years of his farming career, MAH Fong farmed 54 acres which he leased from the Musqueam



Figure 5. [The end of Ferguson Road. Shannon Road intersects where the white railing is. On the right - the farm buildings of MAH Fong's farm at 99 Shannon Road, located on the First Nations Reserve]. (September 1, 1969). (Source: Robert Matthewson).

First Nations on Sea Island, at the curve of Ferguson Road where it turned into Iona Island.

Other than difficult working conditions, just like many early day Chinese, MAH Fong was never able to bring his first wife to Canada. A head tax was imposed by the Canadian government. Three times he went back to Hong Kong to try.

MAH Fong had three daughters and an adopted son with his first wife. Two of the daughters continued to live in China and one was living in Portland, Oregon in 1970. MAH Fong's adopted son was living in Boston with his family.

In 1950, MAH Suey Tin (17 years old) immigrated to Canada to join his father. MAH Fong had applied for Canadian citizenship for MAH Suey Tin in July 1949. MAH Suey Tin had been living in Hong Kong since November 1949. He is possibly MAH Fong's adopted son with his first wife. MAH Fong also became a Canadian citizen on December 29, 1950.

His second wife, ENG Ling, immigrated from China around 1955. ENG Ling was born on February 2, 1913, in China. In 1970, she was operating Ling's vegetable stand on No. 5 Road in Richmond.

Dave WAHL said that in the early 1950s he helped his Dad (Harry WAHL) service MAH Fong's farm equipment. Dave said:

"Harry WAHL, Dave's Dad, owned the Eburne Service gas station across from the Grauer store on Sea Island. When Dave was about 12-13 years old (around 1952 to 1954) he would go with his Dad to MAH Fong's farm, towards the end of Sea Island, kind of past the Cora Brown subdivision, to service the farm tractor or other farming equipment. At lunchtime, MAH Fong's wife (believed to be wife no. 2) would cook a delicious lunch on the wood stove in about 15 minutes. They would sit on

the apple boxes in the barn to eat their lunch. MAH Fong had two wives.

Every year, Harry and Dave were invited for Chinese New Year's with MAH Fong. Dave remembers being there with about six other people - some of MAH Fong's family and other Caucasian individuals. Everything was held in the barn. Dave does not remember going into the house, only the barn. MAH Fong's family would cook up a feast, and the drink of choice was Scotch. Dave was only 12 or 13 years old but was still served a bit of Scotch which he did not like. Dave said he still has not developed a taste for it. Dave did not remember seeing any children."



Figure 6. [George Bolton, Mrs. ENG Ling (MAH Fong's 2nd wife) and her grandson Henry]. (circa 1971). (Source: Marj Bolton).

By 1968, MAH Fong lived at 130 Abercrombie Drive in the Cora Brown subdivision with his wife ENG Ling and their son, believed to be TOM Yuk Yin.

In 1970, MAH Fong and ENG Ling retired from farming. MAH Fong was bored staying at home on Abercrombie, so, on occasion he would go into Vancouver's Chinatown to talk with friends.

In 1970, MAH Fong and ENG Ling moved to North Vancouver. MAH Fong helped his wife operate a grocery store until he became ill and passed away in 1975.

MAH Fong passed away on April 11, 1975, in Vancouver. He was 89 years old. MAH Fong is buried in the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Burnaby, in the Summit Section, Lot 313, Grave no. 4.

The characters on his tombstone, translated in Pinyin - the phonetic symbols for Chinese characters used to transcribe Mandarin Chinese sounds into a Latin alphabet - read:

MAH Gong (meaning Mr.) Yan Cun grave / Taishan, Bai Sha Town / MAH Shek Xin An Village.



Figure 7. [Tombstone marker of MAH Fong, Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Burnaby]. (November 29, 2024). (Source: Sea Island Heritage Society).

At the time of his death in 1975, MAH Fong had 12 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

ENG Ling passed away in Vancouver on January 23, 1999. She was 85 years old. She is also

buried in the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Burnaby, Section Garden of Love, Lot 21, Grave no. 8. There is no tombstone marker for ENG Ling.

CORA BROWNE AND THE CORA BROWN SUBDIVISION

written by the Sea Island Heritage Society

In 2001, and again recently, the Sea Island Heritage Society tried to determine why the Veterans Land Administration (VLA) named the fifty-one acre lots purchased by the government for returning war veterans the Cora Brown subdivision and dropped the "e" in Browne.

It was always a mystery ... who was the infamous Cora for whom this piece of land was named. After infinite hours of checking historical documents, land registers and interviewing individuals, the Society found no romantic or unusual story, but simply that the VLA named the subdivision after the last owner of the land, Mrs. Cora Browne.

The Cora Brown subdivision was named after Cora Adelaide Browne (née Williams), the daughter of Thomas Walter Williams (1865-1925) of Brantford, Ontario and Ada Amelia "Millie" Sage (1865-1939), also of Brantford, Ontario. Cora was born on April 22, 1895, in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In September 1924, Cora married Wallace Roy Browne in San Francisco, California. Wallace was born in Ingersoll, Ontario to Wallace Graham Browne and Sara Elizabeth Nixon on December 22, 1895. When Cora and Wallace's engagement was announced in the Vancouver Province newspaper in September 1924,

Wallace's parents were living in Everett, Washington.

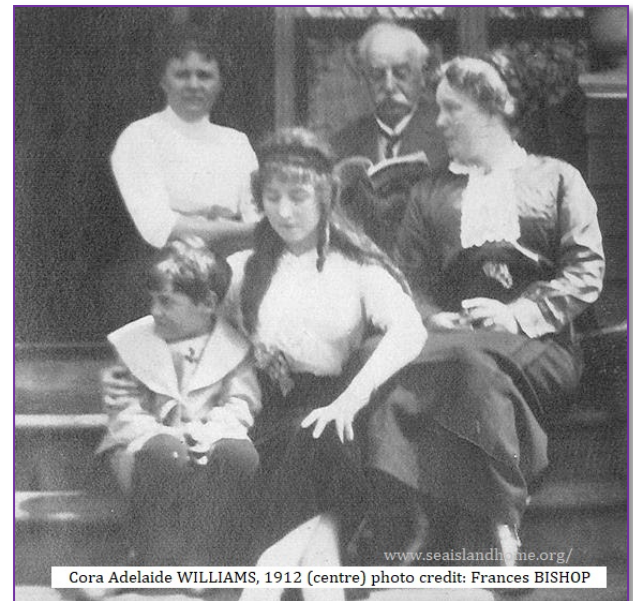


Figure 8. {L-R: Back - Alice Maud Griffiths and Joseph Charles Bishop (died on Mt. Baker in 1913). L-R: Front - Joseph William Bishop, Cora Williams and Ada Amelia "Millie" Sage (Cora's mother)}. (1912) (Source: Frances Bishop).

In 1925, Thomas Williams, Cora's father passed away in Vancouver. On November 26, 1925, the Land Title for Block 56 Lot 11 and Lot 12 Powell Street, Vancouver was transferred to Ada Amelia Williams and Cora Adelaide Browne, trustees of the Estate of Thomas Walter Williams. The land was sold on August 20, 1930. (Source: Landscapes of Injustice - UofVic - <https://landscapesofinjustice.uvic.ca/archive/brow154.html>).

Cora and Wallace lived in San Diego, California for six months after they got married. They moved back to Vancouver, British Columbia and they are listed as living with "Millie" (Cora's mother) and their 5-year-old daughter, Joan Adrienne Browne (later Lindsay) at 1131 Burnaby Street in Vancouver in the 1931 Census. Cora Browne, her husband and

daughter lived in the West End of Vancouver for most of their lives. Joan Adrienne Browne was born on July 9, 1925, in Vancouver. She married Howard G. Lindsay on May 25, 1965. They had no children.

In 1939, Millie passed away in Vancouver.

Neither the Williams nor the Browne family ever lived on Sea Island. Thomas Williams had purchased considerable land on Sea Island as an investment. Thomas Williams and his partner John Woodrow purchased the land and leased it to various farmers. The property was described as "Blk 5N, Range 7W, West ½ of Sections 12 and 13". Jack McGregor and his sons rented this land for many years and the area became known as "The McGregor Place."

The land on Sea Island became the property of Cora Browne after her father passed away. Cora inherited all her father's assets.

After World War II, the federal government purchased land on Sea Island, the site of the former Thomas Williams' farm, to build homes for returning veterans under the Veterans Land Act. Around 1946, the subdivision was named Cora Brown by the Veterans Land Administration (VLA).

The Society confirmed that the VLA named the subdivision Cora Brown after the last owner of the property, Cora Browne, but do not know why they dropped the "e" from Browne. Neither did Cora Browne's daughter Joan. Joan did not remember her family receiving any notification that the subdivision would be named after her mother, and vaguely remembered her mother saying she should sue them for using her name without permission.

The Cora Brown subdivision was located at the north end of Sea Island. The original fifty houses were built from Grauer Road to Ferguson Road on Myron and Abercrombie Drives. Each holding consisted of a small two-bedroom house (no more than 800 square feet) and an acre of land. The balance of the subdivision was also Veterans Land Act land but for the rest, people could build their own designs. The streets in the subdivision - Abercrombie, Myron, Edgington, and McCutcheon were named after young Richmond men who died in World War II.

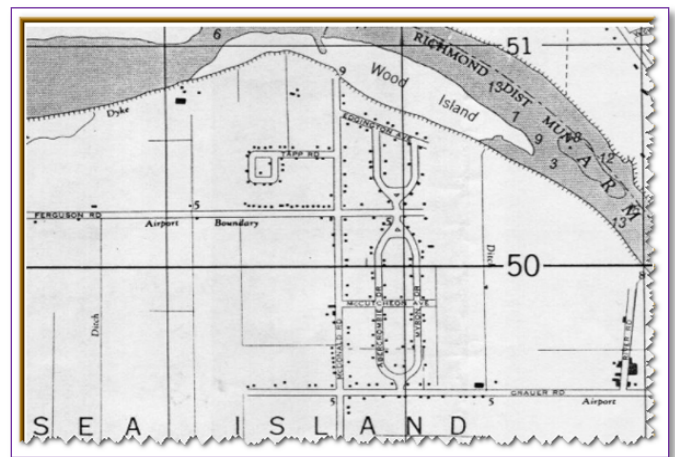


Figure 9. [Map of Cora Brown subdivision on Sea Island]. (1956). (Source: Friends of Richmond Archives Facebook Page).

Cora Browne passed away in Vancouver on September 14, 1981, at the age of 86 years old.

PART 1: SLACK FAMILY RIVER HISTORY - 1929 - 1950

written by Terry Slack



Over the years Terry Slack has shared many vivid memories of family life at the mouth of the North Arm of the Fraser River. These memories have been documented as

research notes by the Sea Island Heritage Society. The notes include email exchanges, a recorded interview with Terry by Don Gordon (1991) that was transcribed by Sharon Bordeleau, as well as information gathered from Ancestry.ca. This story was compiled February 2025 using Terry's words, guidance and approval.

The "Nottingham Two"

In 1929, my grandfather, Francis (Frank) Slack (1882-1963), and his son, my uncle, Harold Slack (1912-1977), both bricklayers, immigrated from Sutton in Ashfield Mansfield, Nottinghamshire England, via Liverpool, Lancashire to Canada on board the Dutchess of York. They were sponsored by the Endo family of the Japanese Celtic Cannery Community and given sea and train passage to come to Vancouver. They were provided with a home - a float house - that needed to be moved to a large Japanese boat building floating shed on the North Arm Jetty, west of today's Iona Island (★marks the spot they lived on the Jetty.) The float house was in New Westminster at the time and needed to be moved down the North Arm of the Fraser River. In the spring of 1930, my grandfather and uncle used a small skiff to

bring the float house to the North Arm Jetty. It was a difficult journey. They arrived exhausted and in poor health.

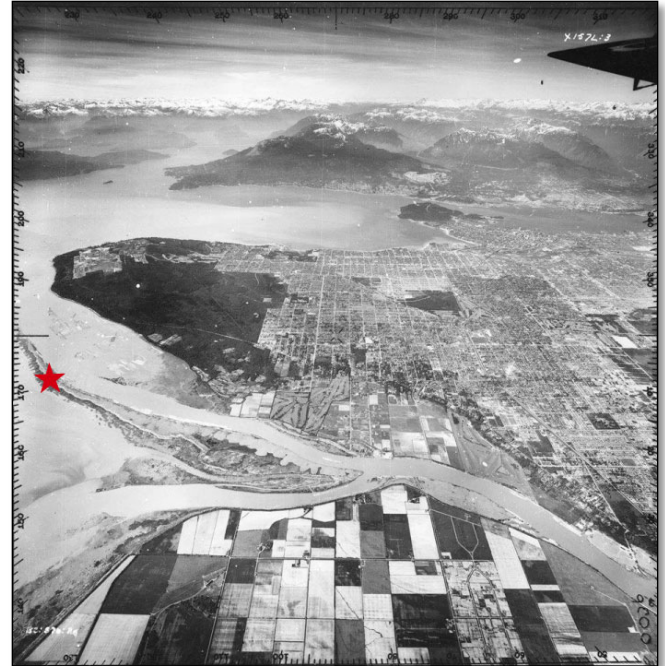


Figure 10. [View of Sea and Iona Islands and Vancouver looking north]. (1948). (Source: Vancouver Archives AM54-S4-: LP 153.1).

The "Nottingham Two" as many river people called them became the early hippies of the North Arm Jetty. They quickly learned ways to gillnet for salmon in a place many still call the "SLACKS' SHACKS SALMON DRIFT," just west of the Inner Navigation light on the North Arm Jetty. The two Englishmen had to put special blinds over the float house windows as the Blinking Jetty Navigation Light kept them up at night!

In the 1930s, there were about five or six float houses or "onshore boat building sheds" on the Jetty. Some of them, high on the beach, were built on logs. Some were built on old Eburne Sawmill barges.

My grandfather and uncle learned boat building skills from the Japanese boat builders in the North Arm area and did brick chimney construction near the Celtic Cannery Community. Their first fish boats were probably North Arm flat bottom skiffs loaned from the Japanese Celtic Cannery Salmon, Surf Smelt and Eulachon Fishers of Celtic Slough. They created small Putt Putt boats - flat bottom skiffs - by adding a little Briggs and Stratton gas engine in the stern that made the sound "putt, putt." The engines were often rebuilt from found discarded small motors initially built for other uses.

They used the Putt Putt boats to go to the store on Sea Island in Eburne. They both got mail so must have had a registered post box at the store in the early years. They always visited friends on the Sea Island side near the bridges and the Gamblin family living on Duck Island across the river from the Sea Island store.

An Eburne hardware store located at the south end of Hudson Street was one place for them to buy log dogs - steel pins or 'dogs' pounded into found logs by log salvors to prepare for towing.

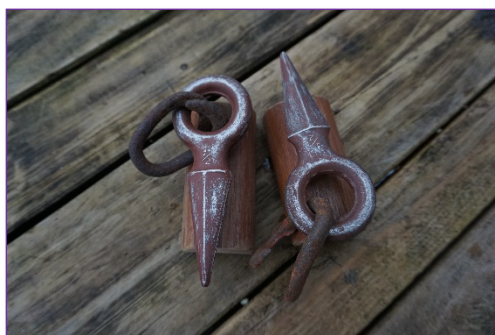


Figure 11. [Terry used these log dogs when salvaging logs]. (1960s). (Source: Terry Slack).

A special type of hammer made of oak with a long handle was needed to lock the log dogs in the log.

They also bought rope for log salvaging and gillnet fishing needs. They probably bought

gasoline and oil from the Shell Marine Gas Station on the east end of Middle or Deering Island.

The Lure of a New Life

By 1947, there were salmon on the middle arm of the Fraser River - it was a good salmon year. In 1948, my grandfather sent a letter to my family in Nottingham, inviting us to immigrate from England to Canada and homestead on the Iona Island jetty in the two-room float house. I was a young boy of age eight at the time.

My Uncle Jack, my dad's brother, who came with his family, were the first to come. John Charles (Jack) 1918 - 1980, wife Emily Louise (Lou) 1919 - 2006, and son Anthony John (Tony) 1942 - 1998 came from England to Canada in 1948. They joined family members living on the North Arm Jetty. Later, my uncle, Frederick (Fred) Slack (1910 - 1993), and his family of 11 came in the mid 1950s sponsored by Frank Slack. They lived in Cloverdale and then Abbotsford B.C.

We came in 1949. My dad, Alfred Slack (1914-1993), my mom, Mildred (née Harris, 1920-2019), me (b.1941) and my sister, Valerie, came across the Atlantic on a boat called the Ascania, Cunard Line, and docked at Halifax. The Ascania was a troop ship. It was the last voyage for this ship. We landed at Pier 22 in Halifax. During the trip, they segregated the men and women on the ship. It was the same route my grandfather took. We then came across Canada by rail. It was November 1949, one year after the Fraser River floods of 1948. It must have been a terrible fall because when we got here the river was freezing in New Westminster. I'll

never forget getting off the train and the docks in New Westminster.

We were picked up by an old packer from the North Arm. I remember that old 'Vivian' engine in it. The boat was an old packer called 'Miss Celtic,' built at Celtic Cannery. We put our big box on the packer and headed down to join the family on North Arm Jetty. I learned later that 'Miss Celtic' had been a Japanese owned boat and was left in the care of the Slack family when the Japanese were interned during WWII.

Life was very different as we were all coal miner and bricklayer families. My dad said that when we arrived, he jumped from the boat to the dock and fell in. He wasn't a marine man at all, but he had the lure. It was the start of a new life. They got hammers and chisels out and my Uncle Harold and my grandfather told us we needed a boat, and we needed to build it. They started to put 'found' things together for a boat so they could log salvage and fish.

I didn't know what it would be like to live in a float house. The adults said it was like breaking of the land, a kind of pioneer approach. We were squatters, we had nowhere to go. We just had the kerosene light and the wood stove. We paid our income tax because we were landed immigrants, but we did not have any of the amenities that anybody else had. We had an outhouse on the back of the float house, hanging over the water. The well we were drawing fresh water from started to get salt water in it and the water was no longer potable. There was good water before because I asked my Uncle Harold if he drank the water out of the well. He told me it was perfect water.



Figure 12. [Terry Slack, second from right, catching chub from their float house]. (circa 1949). (Source: Terry Slack).

There was a deep channel between Iona and Sea Island. You couldn't walk across it. Iona was an island paradise to us. It was sandy beaches for miles, all the dungeness crab you ever wanted, there were thousands of them out in the tidal pools. We didn't need any money. We had salmon fishing. My mom would bottle the salmon. We had our crabs in the wintertime. Then we knew some of the shrimp draggers. Harry used to come in and drop at Slack's dock. It was a dock in front where we were tied up, and they'd tie up there and gave us all kinds of things. The tugboat guys knew us too.

When we were there in the early years, there were people who had summer cottages, who were using old homestead homes on Iona Island. In the 1950s, there were two or three summer homes for Duck and Sea Island families. I remember Miss Sweeney's old home, empty. Then people we didn't know would use it in the summer. People came for a picnic because it was a beautiful, beautiful island. It had lovely sand beaches and was away from everything.

I remember four homes on the jetty where I lived. Some were summer homes. The one I

remember well was Mr. and Mrs. Gamblin's house. They used to own a house on Duck Island, the top end of the Middle Arm, and their summer home was down on the Iona spit. We would row our boat to Duck Island and visit them in the wintertime and then see them nearby at their summer home in the summertime.

When we first came, we used a rowboat to pick up groceries and supplies. The other person who lived adjacent to us on the spit was called Bill Robb. He was an old settler, a hermit of sorts, and used to have a rowboat. In fact, he made row boats in his shed there out of driftwood from the island. Then he added a motor. Bill made many of the Putt Putts used on the river.



Figure 13. [Valerie, Tony and Terry Slack at Iona Island beach]. (circa 1950). (Source: Terry Slack).

Bill would row up the river to Grauer's store and to Marpole. We used to go with him and help him row the boat. We would go up with the tide and return down river with the tide. We'd get our groceries for the week, but the real problem was water. We found a spring, directly across the river from us, which is now Pacific Spirit Park on the University of British Columbia Endowment Lands. We used to row across there to 'Booming Ground Creek' where people were sorting logs. There was also a splitter mill there. This is where we got our water for a while.

Watch for a continuation of the Slack Family's River History in the September 2025 newsletter.

THREE GENERATIONS OF THE BICKNELL FAMILY

written by the Sea Island Heritage Society

This story involves three generations of the Bicknell family:

1. Percival 'Percy' George Bicknell (1862-1953) who was living on Sea Island with his family by 1910,
2. Harold 'Percy' Bicknell (1897-1959), a son of Percy George Bicknell, and
3. Gordon Keith Bicknell (1923-1996), a son of Harold 'Percy' Bicknell.

Settling on Sea Island

PERCIVAL 'PERCY' GEORGE BICKNELL

Percy (1862-1953) travelled with his brother, Wallace, from Liverpool to Quebec, Canada in 1880, eventually arriving in Victoria in 1897 where he met and married Rose Harriet (née Mann; 1873-1954). They had four sons: Harold Percival 'Percy' (1897-1959), Raymond John (1899-1985), Kenneth George (1905-1988) and Clifford Mann (1913-1971). Their first two sons, Percy and Raymond, were born in Victoria, B.C.

In 1901, Percy, his wife, Rose, and sons, Percy and Raymond, moved to Vancouver to live in the home of their aunt and uncle, Edwin and Agnes Bridge and their daughters, May and Daisy. Percy and Rose's son, Kenneth, was born a few years later in Vancouver.

In 1910, Percy, Rose and their three sons were living at 373 Shannon Road on Sea Island in Richmond, B.C. Clifford, their fourth son was born on Sea Island in 1913, the same year Percy became a Richmond School Trustee.



Figure 14. [Percy Bicknell's home at 373 Shannon Road]. (1942). (Source: Bicknell Family Collection).

The Sport Hunter and Waterfowl Carver

HAROLD PERCIVAL 'PERCY' BICKNELL

As a teenager, Percy and a younger brother loved to spend time in the marshes around Richmond, especially the southwest shores of



Figure 15. [Harold 'Percy' Bicknell painting his decoys in the basement of his house on Shannon Road]. (circa 1940). (Source: Bicknell Family Collection).

Sea Island where their family lived. Young Percy loved sport hunting for ducks, geese and other waterfowl.

As Percy gained experience in this sport, he started carving decoys to use and sell, continuing to do so throughout his life. It is thought that he made five different species of birds, the bodies of which were made of red cedar, the heads of spruce, the body hollowed out with a bottom board. He became a skilled carver with Bicknell decoys, now a treasured collector's item. His trademark on his decoys was a V shape cut on the tail.



Figure 16. [Harold 'Percy' in his punt surrounded by some of his decoys on the Middle Arm of the Fraser River]. (circa 1940). (Source: Bicknell Family Collection).

By 1921, Percy was in Skeena, BC working as a Master Mariner. He met Florence Ethel (née Ackley; 1898 -1970) who lived in New Westminster, BC. During this time, he was a fish packer and she a stenographer. On June 15, 1922, they married in New Westminster and settled there for a few years. They then moved to Percy's childhood home at 373 Shannon Road, the south end of Shannon Road on the banks of the Middle Arm of the Fraser River, Sea Island. Percy managed the store, cannery, and marine gas station for the Vancouver Cannery

from approximately 1938 to 1948. They had four children: Gordon, Ronald, Margaret Rose and Percy Gerald 'Gerry.'

By 1954 the Bicknell family was living in a house at 198 McDonald Road.

A Fisherman and Marsh Hunter

GORDON KEITH BICKNELL

Gordon was born May 12, 1923, in New Westminster, and grew up on Sea Island. He was working at the Boeing Aircraft Canada Ltd. plant on Sea Island during the years, 1943-1945, as did Mary Elizabeth Sager (1924-2000). Gordon and Mary married on December 1, 1948. They settled on Sea Island, first at 503 Grauer Road then at 532 Edgington Drive until 1974. They had four children: Peter (1950-2020), Donald (1953-2011), Joy (1956-2024) and Mary-Anne. They attended Sea Island and Duncan McDonald schools.

Gordon was a fisherman for over 50 years and used to sell salmon off his boat, the *Gee Bee*, that he moored at the old Terra Nova Cannery



Figure 17. [Gordon Bicknell and his boat, *Gee Bee*, at Terra Nova]. (1955). (Source: Bicknell Family Collection).

site on Lulu Island, across the Middle Arm of the Fraser River from his Shannon Road home.

He was also a big-time trapper. One year he caught 1,000 muskrats. His daughter, Joy, wrote the following story about her dad's trapping days.

Muskrat trapping Days Sea Island Richmond B.C. 1940-1960's

written by Joy (née Bicknell) Hemsworth

Every Saturday was a rat skinning experience at 532 Edgington Avenue on Sea Island.

My sister Mary-Anne, who is three years younger, remembers eating toast and jam, TV loud, sitting on the couch in a well warmed basement by a massive fire burning in the half-finished fireplace. As it is winter, which means trapping, hunting, with no time to finish off the addition dad had built in that Spring of 1965.

Trapping was a job. Everyday September through March, dad's trap lines - a minimum of one hundred traps - were in place, filling every marsh that was rich in vegetation. I learned early on there had to be a food source for a muskrat to take up residence. The foreshores of Sea Island would fulfill that requirement. Dad loved trapping muskrats, he found pleasure walking in his black gum boots, his sweater and toque, with the wind in his face. He was making money and staying fit, taking his daily walk all around Sea Island from Shannon to Grauer, Ferguson, McDonald, and Airport Roads. He was always carrying a brown sack with his dog at his side.

Making money meant \$1-2 dollars per rat pelt in the early Spring; for that they would be graded and sold to a fur company on Granville Street in Vancouver, BC. My sister and I would love to go with dad. It was an experience I will

never forget, two young girls upstairs in the showroom filled with every dead wild animal skinned in the wild. They were displayed on racks of design, wealth, grandeur. I loved it and to this day I have two beautiful fur coats that give me a warm cozy feeling when I wear them.

There is a memorial bench for Gordon and Mary on the Lulu Island North Dike Trail on the Middle Arm of the Fraser River near Terra Nova, likely right across the river from the spot where Gordon first lived on Sea Island.



Figure 18. [Gordon and Mary Bicknell memorial bench on the dike near Terra Nova Park]. (2024). (Source: Sea Island Heritage Society).

IN LOVING MEMORY

Sadly, we have heard of four Sea Islanders who passed away since our last newsletter.

JOYCE BUTLER, NÉE HUBENIG (1943-2024)



Joyce Butler (née Hubenig) passed away peacefully on October 15, 2024, surrounded by the love of her family. Many of us recall Joyce as a school mate at Sea Island School and as a neighbour in Burkeville. She is remembered for her kindness and sense of adventure.

LINDA DOUGLAS (1946-2025)

It is with great sadness we announce Linda's passing at Mountain View Manor in Ladner February 27th, 2025. She will be sadly missed by her sister Sherry Mansley, brother-in-law Kirk, nephew Ryan and his family, and many close friends. Linda lived a very adventurous and interesting life. She loved sharing her stories, her memories and her laugh.

LENORE INSEL, NÉE ROBERTSON (1938-2024)

Lenore Insel (née Robertson) passed away peacefully October 2024. She grew up in Cora Brown with her sisters, Linda and Sheila, at 109 Abercrombie Drive. She is missed by all who knew her.

RAY GORDON LEFLER (1942-2025)



Ray Gordon Lefler, the husband of Carole Lefler (née Alexander), one of the directors of the Sea Island Heritage Society, passed away on February 9, 2025. He was 82-years old. Ray was the foundation of his family, always there to lend an ear or share a laugh. He was a father, a loving husband, an incredible grandfather, a brother who always had your back, an uncle with a kind word, and a friend who made everyone feel special.

SEA ISLAND ARTIFACTS AND MEMORABILIA

Over the past few months, we have had some lovely donations. Donations are welcomed and appreciated. If you are downsizing or just cleaning out those boxes from the basement or attic, anything "Sea Island" would be most appreciated. Contact Eunice at eunice@genbug.ca.

CONTACT US

If you have questions, comments, or want to share your memories and photos, we would love to hear from you.

To submit a letter, documents, photos, or a cheque for your membership or donation via snail mail:

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To be added to our e-Newsletter, or send us an email: info@seaislandhome.org

To join, renew your membership or donate by e-Transfer: treasurersihs@seaislandhome.org

Website: <https://seaislandhome.org>

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"Sea Island is located within the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-waututh Peoples."