

Forgotten Cusheon Cove

BY GAIL NEUMANN

In the early 1900s, Cusheon Cove, on the southeast shore of Saltspring Island, was one of the busiest communities on the island. A company village, Cusheon Cove was driven by the Bulman-Alison Lumber Company, established in 1905 and at one time not only employing some 150 men, but providing houses for their families.

More than half the seats at Beaver Point School were filled with children from the mill village, and ocean-going ships loaded lumber at the wharf for international markets.

Surrounding farms prospered through selling supplies to the village, and while families lived in houses, there was a large bunk house for single men and cabins for Asian workers also dotted the acreage. The whole community prospered until 1926, when the wharf collapsed and, shortly afterwards, the mill closed.

Chris Hatfield, the current owner of the property, is working to uncover the history of Cusheon Cove. But he's discovering that it's a hidden history. Area newspaper accounts of life at Cusheon Cove are rare and extremely terse.



One of the few photos known to exist of inhabitants of Cusheon Cove: a wedding party stands outside the cookhouse in 1912. *Salt Spring Archives*

Minute details of social life in Ganges and Fulford Harbour fill the pages of the local paper, *The Sidney and Gulf Islands Review*, during the period of the mill's operation, but little or no mention is made of Cusheon Cove.

Existing photographs of the mill are few. Although Hatfield's investigations have been extensive, few photographs seem to have been taken and many of the known photographs appear to have

been lost. The Saltspring Archives has worked with Hatfield to try to document the history of Cusheon Cove and find photographs of the years the mill was in operation, but with little success.

In the meantime, Hatfield has started digging, literally. He has uncovered artifacts of Chinese and Japanese labourers at the mill. Tools, bottles, rice bowls, pottery, even footwear has survived in pits. Hatfield has begun the huge project of

gluing together the pieces and he's started a museum dedicated to the history of Cusheon Cove. It's now open Friday to Monday for the summer.

One of Hatfield's projects is to make a map of the Cove and to pinpoint the location of all the buildings. Using GPS technology and an aerial photograph from 1932, he's taken readings of known points and now is pinning down other building locations and beginning further excavations.

Hatfield has requested that anyone with artifacts, photographs, or documentation from the Bulman Lumber Company contact him or the Saltspring Archives. Hatfield's museum will be open this summer and he would be grateful for any help to document the history of the area more fully.

Hatfield may be contacted at 250-653-9654 or write to him at 107 D. Meyer Road, Saltspring Island, V8K 1X4. The Saltspring Archives can be reached at www.saltspringarchives.com. The archives and Hatfield will share any information or documents that are offered.

Gail Neumann lives on Saltspring Island