

# Denman Island Community Heritage Register

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# Introduction

The Denman Island Community Heritage Register is an official list of historic places specific to a community which have been identified by the local government (Islands Trust) as having heritage value or heritage character. Its main function is to **recognize** and **celebrate** historic places within the community.

A heritage register can be an important tool for the community; places listed on the register receive recognition for their heritage values and character and are better positioned to access heritage conservation tools and incentives and be eligible for various funding sources such as the Heritage Legacy Fund of BC.

The Denman Island Community Heritage Register is intended to:

- enhance public appreciation of the identity and character of the community;
- provide public access to heritage information;
- give notice to property owners, and potential buyers, of recognized heritage features on their property;
- facilitate the integration of heritage conservation into community planning and community sustainability; and
- provide a tool for determining eligibility for heritage programs and incentives.

The act of being listed on the Community Heritage Register does not constitute formal protection. Omission from the Community Heritage Register does not affect heritage protection, as inclusion on a heritage register is not equivalent to heritage designation or any other form of permanent heritage protection.

# Eligibility

Historic places are not limited to buildings and can include structures (such as fences or walls) or entire properties, neighbourhoods or areas, cultural landscapes (such as historic farms) or spiritual places, industrial heritage sites, cultural sites, etc. Such places can be nominated for inclusion on the Community Heritage Register at any time and, if they meet the eligibility criteria, can be added by Denman Island Local Trust Committee resolution on an ongoing basis. Nominations must include a Statement of Significance which is a three-part statement including the description, the heritage value, and the character-defining elements of the historic place. Please contact the Islands Trust Office for more information on the nomination process and Statements of Significance.

**Eligibility Criteria:** Historic places may be entered in the Community Heritage Register if they are of cultural or natural heritage significance and satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

- importance in the evolution, cultural traditions, community identity and history of Denman Island;
- possession of unique, uncommon or endangered aspects of cultural or natural heritage of Denman Island;
- special association with a historical event or with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- demonstrates importance because of its aesthetic significance or importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technological achievement at a particular period;
- special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Denman Island's history; and
- potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the region's history.

# List of Places on the Denman Island Community Heritage Register



- 1.** Denman Island Community Hall



- 2.** Marcus Isbister Old School Centre

# 1. Denman Island Community Hall

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## Description:

The Community Hall, located at 1196 Northwest Road in the "downtown" area of the island, is highly visible. It's a typical single story frame construction, about 5600 square feet. It sits on its lot with a front entrance, adorned with large sculpted human figures, facing west. The exterior is sided with cedar boards and shingles and the interior panelled with drywall and tongue and groove cedar. Individuals and groups book the hall for meetings, workshops, cultural events and family functions. It's available for public bookings 365 days per year, all day until 3:00 am.



Present-day Denman Island Community Centre (2011)

## Heritage Value:



Denman Island Athletic Hall (early 1900s),  
now known as the Community Hall

The Denman Island Community Hall has been a social, political, and cultural heart of the community for 100 years; many weddings, memorials, births and public holidays have been celebrated there. In its early days, it was used for meetings of the Boy Scouts, for the school's Christmas pageants, for political gatherings, and for the annual Fall Fair. When electricity came to the island in 1957, Denman was added to the National Film Board's list of a monthly program of supplying films to rural communities. The novelty of having picture shows on Denman drew large crowds. The isolating nature of the homesteads in this rural

agricultural community meant that these social gatherings were particularly important to the solidarity of the community. Since a major renovation in 1940, regular upgrades to the Hall have taken place about every 5 years, much of the work done by community volunteers.

Today the Community Hall more than ever serves as the heart of the Island's political and cultural life. It is here that the island has most of its committee and general meetings, where issues important to it are debated, and in which a great many islanders are deeply involved. Local and visiting musicians perform there, local and off-island theater and dance groups as well. The Hall hosts a Readers' and Writers' Festival, a Christmas Craft Faire, a concert series, a children's circus, fashion shows, musical open stage events, a fall Harvest Festival, New Year's and Hallowe'en dances, a day care center and a library. Public

meetings, planning sessions, and workshops of many kinds take place there. Descendants of some of the original pioneers are still using the hall.

In the mid-1980s, Mike Comeau played a central part in forming the Denman Island Arts and Crafts Society (DIACS) as a registered charitable society with the aim of nurturing Denman's rich artistic community. The Concerts Denman series is one example; Robyn Huw Bowen of Wales gave the first concert. He said that our Hall was "on the level of the top two or three" of the many he's played worldwide.

### **Character-Defining Elements:**

Significant island events have shaped the Hall and form a core island culture and tradition. The extensions added to the building represent different stages in the island's history. Over the many years of this hall's history, many islanders have been involved in building, maintaining, decorating and organizing events there. Additions to the Hall, including sculptures, woodwork, glasswork, painting, and architecture reflect their creativity, standing as a tribute to these contributors. The following are among the many artistic features of the Hall:

- situation of the Hall on its original site, central to the island's "downtown" area
- the arch holding up the roof over the front door: two abstract people sculpted from huge sections of driftwood and painted in red and green, sculpted by local artist, Mike Dennis
- similar sculptured arch inside the hall, at the entrance from the main hall to the kitchen and back hall, which appears to be supporting the header of a doorway
- the post and beam construction of the back hall, using large beams and some peeled logs from local sources
- mosaic tile work in the newly renovated handicapped accessible washroom
- a locally made floral stained glass window in kitchen wall
- the gazebo on deck outside back hall
- sculptural knee braces on the columns inside the main hall
- wooden exterior doors made by local cabinet makers.

*Photos and text submitted by Margie Gang*

## 2. Marcus Isbister Old School Centre

### Description:

Located approximately mid-island at 5901 Denman Road, the Marcus Isbister Old School Centre began life in 1912 as the one-room Denman Island School. The building today consists of two large classrooms, washrooms and two small meetings rooms, one the earlier cloakroom and the other part of the west classroom. The one-acre property has always been an important community fixture, serving as the site of the Island school for almost 80 years, where Christmas concerts and other special celebrations took place as well as regular school activities, and more recently becoming an important community centre that provides meeting space for a variety of island organizations, a separate building dedicated to collecting and sorting recyclables, and a gathering space for islanders.



Present-day Marcus Isbister Old School Centre (2011)

### Heritage Value:

The original building on this site was the third school on the Island, built to accommodate many more students as a result of the sandstone quarry, which only operated for about seven years but which swelled the number of young families so that 54 children were enrolled in the school by 1912. Although enrolment varied in the ensuing years, dropping to 20 in 1949 and increasing to over 100 in the following half century, this building housed the Denman Island School until 1990.



Old School (1912) before a second room was added in 1919

Unlike its predecessors, the “new” school had a full, ground-level basement and a furnace, with the classrooms one level up from the ground. Despite the furnace, the building was heated for many years by a wood stove. The well was across the road, and a bucket on a long rope supplied the school with water, filling an earthenware cistern that was located in the cloakroom. The building exterior consisted of stucco and bevelled wood siding, with a wood shingle roof. A second classroom was added on the west side in 1936, resulting in the structure as we know it today. The gas lamps were replaced in 1952 when a power

plant was purchased for the school, soon to be replaced when electricity arrived to the Island in 1957. Many current residents of Denman Island attended the Denman Road School, and at least four of the teachers still live on Denman.

A new elementary school was constructed in Denman Village in 1990, and in 1993 the Denman Road property was acquired by the community to be held by the Island Trust Council but managed by the Residents' Association. Soon after that the outdoor covered play area was converted into the Recycling Centre and the classrooms are now rented to various community groups including the Local Trust Committee, the Denman Conservancy Association, the Denman Island Spinners and Weavers, the Denman Island Women's Outreach Society, and for other community meetings. In 1994 the Free Store opened in the south portion of the basement and in 2004 an outdoor, Saturday farmers/craft market was initiated on the grounds from May through October. Today, on a typical Saturday morning in the summer, a handful of weavers work in the east classroom, children play on the grass while parents shop at the market, islanders browse through the Free Store, and the Recycling Centre sees plenty of use. All of these activities are deftly managed by a committee of the Denman Island Residents' Association.

### Character-Defining Elements:

The heritage value of the Old School building rests in a number of features, some of which retain the classroom atmosphere and some of which reflect its many uses today. The classroom features are as follows:

- retention of the two large classrooms in much the same state as they would have been 50 or more years ago
- slate blackboards on the walls of both classrooms
- original chalk railings below the blackboards
- four very large windows lining the outside wall of each classroom
- the original high ceiling in the east classroom
- the original tongue-in-groove wooden paneling on some classroom walls
- a large, old wooden cupboard in the east classroom with drawers in the bottom and open shelves, most likely used originally for storage of classroom materials
- sturdy linoleum on the floors, which is probably over 60 years old.

Features reflecting the current use of the building are as follows:

- a sign listing the island groups currently renting space in the building
- flagpoles in front of the building flying the Canadian Flag and the Islands Trust flag, the latter acknowledging that the building is presently owned by the Islands Trust Council
- a large, funky wooden sculpture by local artist Michael Dennis, depicting a RCMP officer
- a wooden bench in front memorializing past local trustee who died a month after resigning from office
- painted wooden panels affixed to the washroom window frames depicting islanders.

*Photos and text submitted by Gloria Michin and Louise Bell*