

Context:

Gabriola, history

Citations:

Barman, Jean, Island sanctuaries—Early mixed race settlement on Gabriola and nearby coastal islands, *SHALE* 2, pp.5–14, March 2001.

Copyright restrictions:

Copyright © 2001: Gabriola Historical & Museum Society.

For reproduction permission e-mail: nickdoe@island.net

Errors and omissions:

Reference:

Date posted:

November 21, 2012.

Island sanctuaries—Early mixed race settlement on Gabriola and nearby coastal islands

Dr. Jean Barman

Adapted from a talk given to the Gulf Islands Historical Society, September 20, 2000

The past can be approached from a variety of perspectives. Some of us are insiders who share in the experiences that interest us. Others of us are outsiders who may be equally interested, but lack the insights that come from participation in the experiences themselves. The best history grows out of a combination of perspectives, as I have discovered over the past number of years while attempting to give meaning to early Aboriginal mixed race settlement across British Columbia. By this I mean the personal relationships that developed during the nineteenth century between Aboriginal women and newcomer men. I am well aware that my sense of what happened on Gabriola and nearby coastal islands is partial. It is my hope that by sharing what I have learned with local communities our common understanding will be enriched and given deeper meaning. I look forward to readers' comments.

Beginnings

The impetus to personal relationships between Aboriginal men and newcomer men on Gabriola and nearby coastal islands, as well as across British Columbia, lay in two principal events of the nineteenth century—the fur trade and the gold rush.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, two thousand or so men came on contract to the Pacific Northwest to work for the Hudson's Bay Company, first in the fur trade, and later in other enterprises including fish-packing, agriculture, and coal mining. Many soon returned home, but several hundred stayed on, often settling near their last place of employment. One of the principal reasons they did so was that they had established personal relationships with Aboriginal women. As I have explained in two previous articles—one about Fort

Langley,¹ and a second, written with Bruce Watson, about Fort Colville²—such relationships benefited everyone. The Hudson's Bay Company got better access to furs and other natural resources; men were comforted during long winter nights; and Aboriginal families gained privileged access to the traders.

The second phase of mixed race relationships had its impetus in the gold rush, beginning on the Fraser River in 1858 and extending by the early 1860s north into the Cariboo. As many as 50 000 men—and they were almost all men—came to get rich quick, or so they thought. Politically, the effect of the gold rush was to transform what

¹ Jean Barman, *Family Life at Fort Langley*, *British Columbia Historical News* 32, 4 (Fall 1999), 16–23.

² Jean Barman and Bruce Watson, *Fort Colville's Fur Trade Families and the Dynamics of Aboriginal Racial Intermixture in the Pacific Northwest*, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 90, 3 (Summer 1999), 140–53.

was still an Aboriginal place into a politically-defined entity increasingly under the control of newcomers. Vancouver Island had been loosely a British colony run by the Hudson's Bay Company; now, it became a wholly British possession, as did the mainland. Socially, the gold rush began that process by which Aboriginal people were usurped of their place on the land. Most newcomers left almost as soon as they came, for the difficulties of getting to the gold fields were horrendous, and the chances of actually striking it rich very small, but a number decided to stick around. The most important factor that encouraged them to do so was the opportunity to pre-empt 160 acres before the land was surveyed. Once improvements were made, they only had to pay a nominal fee in order to acquire outright ownership of the land.

These men who stayed did not have the same encouragement from their employers as had fur traders to cohabit with local women, but two reasons encouraged some of them to do so. The first was the desire for a home of their own. Many of the men already had had their share of adventure. There probably wasn't much going for them whence they came, or they wouldn't have left in the first place. Here was an opportunity to make their own destiny, and they wanted a woman at their side. The second reason was the gender imbalance in British Columbia. Newcomer women were in very short supply. Throughout the nineteenth century, there were two or three newcomer men for every newcomer woman.³ As a consequence, many men, just as had their fur trade predecessors, turned to local women, who in turn had their own

³ See Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, rev. ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, for details on this and other general points.

reasons for deciding to cohabit with them. The social upheaval created by the gold rush and the pre-emption policy forced many Aboriginal women to go out into the world and fend for themselves. In other cases, families, just as in the fur trade, saw strategic advantages to allying their daughters with the newcomers in their midst.

These relationships formed during the fur trade and gold rush eras took many forms. The ones that interest me are the fifteen hundred or so that I've been able to trace between 1840 and 1900 where children were sufficiently acknowledged by their fathers to be given his surname.⁴ Such ties, even when they became lifelong, are difficult to disentangle. Most of their participants were fairly ordinary people, who were far less likely to have their lives officially documented than were the handful of men at the top. Just as importantly, these relationships were, from their impetus, tainted by racism. Almost all newcomers accepted the notion of a hierarchy of the races that conveniently put themselves on top. Aboriginal people were doubly disparaged, being darker in complexion and non-Christian, and so "uncivilized". Newcomers' quest for the land on which Aboriginal peoples made their lives heightened racist rhetoric, which then became a very convenient basis for dispossession.

⁴ Among my sources, not separately footnoted here, are the manuscript censuses available for 1881, 1891, and 1901; vital statistics of births, marriages, and deaths, available through the British Columbia Archives (BCA); records of St. Paul's Anglican Church and Ebenezer Methodist Church, Nanaimo, and of St. Andrew's Catholic Church, Victoria, in BCA; and pre-emption records in BCA, GR766. I have also used newspaper accounts, family recollections, and various other information located or made available to me, often through the generosity of descendants.

On the islands off the British Columbia coast, including Gabriola, I have located some 70 relationships, just under 1 in 20 of the total number. This may sound small, but it takes on greater meaning when we realize that, in general, I know more about these families than is usual among my fifteen hundred. In other words, many of the island families left a trace, and did so because, I want to suggest, they occurred in circumstances conducive to their longevity. My sense is that two aspects of coastal islands—accessibility and autonomy—were critical to their becoming sanctuaries for mixed race families.

Accessibility

I see accessibility as having three aspects. The first is the islands' geographical accessibility to the men themselves. The second is access to their wives' families—their in-laws. The third aspect is accessibility to other clusters of population and thereby to the cash economy. Each of these three, I think, encouraged family stability.

1—Accessibility to outsiders

As to geographical accessibility, the coastal islands are hard to avoid. Most Hudson's Bay Company employees and miners came up the coast to Victoria. If heading to trading posts, such as Fort Langley or Fort Kamloops, or to the gold fields, they then made their way across the Strait of Georgia to the mainland. Not only were the islands themselves visible along the way, so were their small patches of arable grassland amid the forests. Almost every one of the 70 or so persons I have traced described themselves in the census, or in their marriage papers, as a farmer. These men may have done numerous things to make a living, including logging, fishing, and

lighthouse keeping, but a farmer was what, in their heart of hearts, they wanted to be. The islands gave them an opportunity to own a piece of land of their own.

Some of the earliest reports of coastal island inhabitation by newcomers living with Aboriginal women come, not unexpectedly given its size and apparent lack of an Aboriginal population, from Saltspring Island. Anglican Bishop George Hills, on his way by boat to Nanaimo in September 1860, wrote about a stop on Saltspring:

“Several settlers met us. I visited most of the log houses which are built on each lot... There are 16 settlers mostly young men. Nearly all are living with Indian women.”⁵

Hills approved of the men's initiative, but when he held a service in one of the houses, his sermon topic was the prodigal son. A Methodist minister who visited the north end of Saltspring the next March was less sanguine:

“Nine men now in the settlement.... five are living with Indian women in a state of adultery, some have families from such connections. One man has committed this degrading course since I was here last.”⁶

Some men squatted for a time before pre-empting or purchasing land. Others with more political acumen took advantage of the legislation so that land on Saltspring began to be taken up in 1861, just a year after it became possible to do so. Clusters of newcomers soon grew up on the west side at Burgoyne Bay, around Fulford Harbour on the south end, and also on the north end, each with its own distinctive character.

⁵ September 7, 1860 entry, Bishop George Hills, Diary, in Anglican Church, Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia, Archives, University of British Columbia.

⁶ March 26, 1861 entry, Ebenezer Robson, Diary, in BCA.

Altogether, I've traced about two dozen mixed race families living on Saltspring during the nineteenth century.

The second largest island cluster after Saltspring, numbering seventeen by my count, grew up on Gabriola near Nanaimo. Here, June Lewis-Harrison's wonderful local history, *The People of Gabriola*, gives a guide to what happened.⁷ A somewhat different phenomenon was at work than on Saltspring. The Hudson's Bay Company began to diversify away from furs in the middle of the nineteenth century. One of the most promising directions lay in coal. A failed attempt to mine at Fort Rupert was followed by a successful one at Nanaimo. A general assumption exists that all the miners were brought out from England with families. Many were, but others came on their own. As these men of a more independent disposition began to settle down, some of them sought more than simply a job underground. Again, the key lay in island accessibility.

Several newcomer men, singly or in pairs, made their way to Gabriola in the early 1860s. Two such men were Irish miners Robert Gray and Thomas Degnen. Gray is said to have jumped ship at Nanaimo; Degnen to have got there after a stint in the US army that took him west to Oregon to fight Indians. The story goes that Gray and Degnen, on a day off from work in the mines, paddled in their canoes the four or five hours it took to get to the "big island" they could see across the harbour. One version of the story has them being invited to do so by a young Aboriginal woman whose family lived on Gabriola, or

⁷ June Lewis-Harrison, *The People of Gabriola: A History of Our Pioneers*, Cloverdale: D.W. Friesen, 1982.

Descanso as it was then sometimes called.⁸ In 1862 or 1863 the two settled there.

Like Saltspring, Gabriola was big enough that clusters of settlers could live essentially independently of each other. Four other ambitious Nanaimo men, Thomas Jones, John Caufield, Alexander McFarlane, and Richard Chapple, pre-empted land at about the same time that Gray and Degnen arrived. Magnus Edgar and Thomas McGuffie got there even earlier, pre-empting land on the southern shore of Gabriola on the same day in October 1862. Edgar arrived from the Shetland Islands in 1851 in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company and then, like so many others, worked for a time in the coal mines at Nanaimo, as did McGuffie, who hailed from Ireland.⁹

Others, who had, or who would soon have, a mixed race relationship, joined these early settlers. Englishmen John Kemp and Henry Heath were on Gabriola from at least 1866 and 1868 respectively. Two other Nanaimo labourers, Josiah Foster and Robert Dombain, soon arrived, as did Englishmen William Jeffries and Fletcher Ambrose. Theodore LeBoeuf from Quebec followed in 1874, as did Englishman Jonathan Martin who had earlier pre-empted land in the Cowichan Valley and on Saltspring. That spring, an article in the Nanaimo Free Press claimed that "...though not above seven miles on its longest line, and two or two and a half on its broadest," Gabriola contained seventeen settlers "...in constant occupation of their claims and hard at work".¹⁰ Almost two thirds of that number had Aboriginal

⁸ Most information on the Degnen family comes from *Degnen Bay-Gabriola Island*, typescript in BCA/Vertical Files (BCA/VF).

⁹ *Magnus Edgar*, typescript in BCA/VF.

¹⁰ *Gabriola Island*, Nanaimo Free Press, May 17, 1874.

wives and young families. Following at a later date would be Portuguese John Silva who had been living on Mayne.

The reasons Silva, and perhaps others of the ten men with mixed race families I have located on Mayne, abandoned the island had to do with its location. As historian Marie Elliott explains, the island's accessibility was for a time its undoing.¹¹ The route that Aboriginal people long used in travelling to Point Roberts and the Fraser River ran through Active Pass, which divides Mayne from Galiano, and the high volume of traffic through the pass put settlers there in particular danger. Following the murders of settlers from Mayne in 1863, the Royal Navy was called upon to enact justice. The result was the bombardment of the Lamalcha people living on the south end of Kuper Island, a sad event that Chris Arnett has skilfully chronicled in his book *The Terror of the Coast*.¹² Only the most determined newcomers persisted on islands around Active Pass and Plumper Sound.

The other twenty or so mixed race relationships were scattered across the other coastal islands. Whatever the location, the pattern was much the same. Newcomers largely of a single generation, being born in the first half of the 1830s, with comparable life experiences, usually of youthful adventure culminating in the gold rush, found the idea of having a place of their own enormously attractive.

¹¹ Marie Elliott, *Mayne Island & the Outer Gulf Islands: A History*, Mayne Island: Gulf Islands Press, 1984.

¹² Chris Arnett, *The Terror of the Coast: Land Alienation and Colonial War on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, 1849–63*, Vancouver: Talon, 1999. The Lamalcha (Lamalchi) have since joined the Penelakut, a Hul'qumi'num First Nation.

2—*Accessibility to wives' families*

Accessibility had another aspect in attracting men to coastal islands, and that was accessibility to in-laws. Some men settled down first, then found a wife. Most found a wife, then settled nearby. In either case, proximity to women's families counted, not surprisingly perhaps, given the character of everyday life and also the sometimes great age differentials. Women were usually just past puberty at the time they began to cohabit with men sometimes twice their age. Accessibility to wives' families meant that women were more satisfied, their menfolk tutored in necessary skills, and families given a stronger sense of place than they would otherwise have.

Proximity to wives' families may have spurred on several of the early Gabriola settlers. Degnen, Gray, Kemp, Martin, and later Silva were already living with Cowichan women named, respectively, Jane, Margaret, Lucille, Helen, and Louisa; Dombain, Jeffries, and Fletcher with Sechelt women called Lucy, Ellen, and Mary; Foster with a Squamish woman named Jenny. At the time Degnen and Gray headed off to Gabriola in 1863, they were each cohabiting with local women, Degnen with a Cowichan chief's daughter Jane Janimetga, who may have been the woman leading them to the island in the first place, and beginning families by them. Their marriages did not, however, go equally well. Degnen had a lifelong union with Jane and their nine children. As well as farming on Gabriola, Gray manned the lighthouse on Entrance Island, which brought in some needed cash —\$600 a year. According to Lewis-Harrison, eventually his wife tired of doing all the work on the Gabriola homestead and left, taking their youngest son with her. In other words, accessibility to wives' families gave a freedom of action

that mostly brought families together, but could also drive them apart.

Numerous of the early settlers on Gabriola not only lived with local women, they were legally married to them or would soon be so, a measure of commitment shunned by many of their contemporaries across British Columbia also cohabiting with Aboriginal women. Robert Dombain, who pre-empted land on Gabriola in 1870, had wed a Sechelt woman named Lucy in an Anglican ceremony in Nanaimo in 1865, two years after the birth of their son James. Henry Heath proudly described himself as “farmer of Gabriola Island” when he married Mary Whiam in 1868 in the Methodist church in Nanaimo, where two years later Josiah Foster wed Jane “of the Squamish tribe”. John Kemp had his first child in 1866 by a Cowichan woman named Lucy, whom he married in an Anglican ceremony in Nanaimo in 1872 and by whom two more daughters and two sons would be born before her death in 1882.

In several cases, wives’ origins were more distant. Theodore LeBoeuf, Thomas McGuffie, and Richard Chapple all had Tongass wives, that is, women from the Alaska panhandle, respectively Maria, Adeliza Jane, and Mary. Chapple had already fathered one or two daughters by Kanshek or Mary whom he married in an Anglican ceremony shortly after pre-empting land on Gabriola in 1863. There would be another daughter and three sons before Mary’s death a decade later in a boating accident.¹³ McGuffie became the father of Annie Jane in 1861. At least five more children had been born to him and Adeliza Jane by the time they wed in an Anglican ceremony in 1873. LeBoeuf wed Maria in a Catholic ceremony in 1867.

¹³ *Mary Chapple*, Nanaimo Free Press, November 28, 1874.

As the departure of Robert Gray’s wife indicates, such women were in no way passive partners. Indeed, they often paved the way by teaching their husbands essential skills. The grandson of an early Saltspring settler recalled how his grandmother gave her husband a canoe, taught him to paddle, to catch fish, took him to visit her people, and “always spoke the Cowichan dialect” with him so that he learned to understand and speak it fluently.¹⁴ This grandson explained how his grandmother’s brother, sister, and the rest of her family would come to Saltspring each summer to dig clams, which they dried in racks on the beach, and then threaded on strings made of cedar bark.¹⁵

Women too sometimes exchanged services, one newcomer daughter recalling how “...there was Mrs. Degnen (the older Mrs. Degnen), a lovely woman who could speak very little English and my mother used to make out her grocery list for her”.¹⁶ It was almost certainly the same Jane Degnen who served as midwife on the south end of Gabriola. A newcomer son recalls his mother working with Maria LeBoeuf, the Tongass wife of Theodore:

“...[my mother, Elizabeth Eastham] knew the LeBoeufs. She knew them when she was young. [She] went with Mrs. LeBoeuf and went around as a washerwoman, washing clothes in other people’s houses. She used to arrive at seven in the morning in the other people’s houses, and the water would be ready and she would wash the clothes for the

¹⁴ Phyllis James, *Incredible grandparents*, Colonist, September 5, 1976.

¹⁵ Pat Turkki, *Family’s pioneering spirit lives on today*, Sun, May 30, 1987.

¹⁶ Alison Law in Lewis-Harrison, *People of Gabriola*, 68–9.

family. Ten hours a day... non-stop...that's how she made a living."¹⁷

3—*Accessibility to markets*

The coastal islands were accessible not just to men and their wives, but also to markets for agricultural and other products. The same ease of access that encouraged settlement made it possible to get to markets and thereby gain access to the cash economy. Some of the early Gabriola settlers, like Degnen, planted orchards, discovering that while some varieties of apples produced in abundance peaches were not feasible. The Degnen farm also became known for its spring lamb, sold door to door in Nanaimo. At first, Thomas Degnen used a dugout canoe to get to Nanaimo, but in 1871 acquired the first of several steam launches given the name of *Patsy*.¹⁸ Richard Chapple constructed his own wharf in the fall of 1883 and that Christmas offered suckling pigs for sale in Nanaimo.¹⁹ Ten years later he took there what the local newspaper described as "...a quantity of Rose potatoes, the largest and finest brought to the city this season".²⁰ As well as growing foodstuffs for the Nanaimo market, Theodore LeBoeuf, who also worked as a carpenter, built barns in the Nanaimo area almost as easily as on Gabriola.²¹ So it went for other families as well, in each case

¹⁷ John Eastham ["Frisco Jack"] in Lewis-Harrison, *People of Gabriola*, 86. Some in the family prefer "Easthom", with an "o", but Jack preferred the "a". Jack went to live with his grandmother after his father drowned in about 1897.

¹⁸ Lewis-Harrison, *People of Gabriola*, 197.

¹⁹ Nanaimo Free Press, September 19, and December 25, 1883.

²⁰ Nanaimo Free Press, July 1893.

²¹ Lewis-Harrison, *People of Gabriola*, 152–53.

facilitating economic survival and thereby family stability.

Autonomy

Just as there are three aspects of accessibility—to the islands, to wives' families, and to markets—the concept of autonomy has parts. The first aspect has to do with the freedom that islands gave men and their families to live as they would. The second aspect of autonomy relates to the choices available to the second generation as it came of age.

1—*Autonomy for families*

The great charm of the coastal islands for many families was the independence they gave from outside interference. The quest for autonomy was responsible for Gabriola's early settler families arriving there in the first place. Not just Degnen and Gray, numerous others were Nanaimo miners or other labourers willing to forego a certain wage for the opportunity to be their own persons, dependent on their own resources.

This desire for autonomy was expressed in different forms. On Salt Spring opposition to the island becoming legally "organized" in 1872 was most vehement at Burgoyne Bay among men with Aboriginal wives and families. As put in a local history published some eighty years later, these men:

"...have long since passed on, but their uncompromising fight to preserve their individual way of life, developed when the times were not so good, has influenced the community ever since. The island is one of a rapidly decreasing number of places where in these days, a man may still live as a man, as he wishes, 'in peace, in dignity and without interference'."²²

²² Eric Roberts, *Salt Spring Saga*, Ganges: Driftwood, 1962, 63, also 60–1.

A sense of autonomy also grew out of shared experiences typical of island life, as with the fears of the families settled around Active Pass. In similar fashion, Joseph Chapple, born on Gabriola in about 1870, "...could recall childhood days when barricading of his home for protection from the wolves and cougars that ravaged the Island was a nightly task".²³

Two very determined Portuguese men point up the relationship between coastal islands and the desire for autonomy. Joe Silvey and John Silva were, according to one account, sailors together on a Portuguese whaler, and when it reached Victoria sometime between 1852 and 1854 they jumped ship. After various adventures, likely including a time in the gold fields, they both turned to business. John Silva ran a fruit and vegetable store in gold-rush Victoria, Joe Silvey, who by this time was becoming known as "Portuguese Joe", a saloon in early Gastown on Burrard Inlet. They each found an Aboriginal wife, John Silva, a Cowichan chief's daughter who took the name of Louisa, Portuguese Joe Silvey, Squamish chief Kiapalano's granddaughter Khaltinaht.²⁴ As to how the men found their wives, Silva's granddaughter Margaret told the story of how "...my mother always said he gave them two horses hitched and ready for working—two horses and about three sacks of spuds".²⁵ The two men wanted more for their families. In 1873, John Silva purchased 237 acres at \$1/acre around Village Bay at the western entrance of

²³ *Jos. Chappel, 75 Years on Gabriola, Dies* Vancouver Sun, October 10, 1945.

²⁴ Leo and Gaylia Nelson, *John Silva, William Blank, and Robert Shaw*, March 7, 1975, typescript in BCA, Ms. 242; *Josephine Silvey*, typescript in City of Vancouver Archives (CVA).

²⁵ Conversation with Margaret Hall Corbett, Quadra Island, July 29, 1982.

Active Pass on Mayne Island.²⁶ Settling there, the couple had ten children. In the interim, Portuguese Joe settled down on the shores of Stanley Park, near where the totem poles and Brockton oval now are, but became increasingly aware that he could not give his family the autonomy he wanted for them. So in 1881, Portuguese Joe Silvey pre-empted 160 acres of Reid Island and moved his family there.²⁷

Portuguese Joe and his family stayed put on Reid Island into the second generation but, in the search for autonomy, the Silva family made yet another move. The reason said to have caused the Silvas to leave Mayne Island for Gabriola was the persistence of Indian raiding parties. According to their granddaughter:

"...The Haida Indians kept coming through the passageway and they'd hoot and they'd holler and away they would come and they were a pretty fearful bunch and my grandfather kept sheep and he had goats and he had geese and stuff and these Indians would come through and they'd take about half of his stuff to feed their—I guess they didn't like to live on fish all the time!—and anyway my grandmother decided, 'I am not living here,' so she said to my grandfather, 'I want to get out of here,' and so she talked him into moving to Gabriola Island."²⁸

In 1883, John Silva bought 133 acres of abandoned homestead land on Gabriola Island in an area that would become known as Silva Bay. Their granddaughter recalled the Silva house:

²⁶ Land records, cited in Leo and Gaylia Nelson, *John Silva, William Blank, and Robert Shaw*, March 7, 1975, typescript in BCA, Ms. 242.

²⁷ Elizabeth (Mrs. James) Walker and Alice Crakanthorp, conversation with Major J.S. Matthews, Vancouver, November 28, 1938, CVA.

²⁸ Conversation with Margaret Hall Corbett, Quadra Island, July 29, 1982.

“...He built my grandmother a beautiful house there...I saw their house...you know how they used to put the plaster on the chicken wire, they put the plaster on, and it was beautifully plastered, all painted, and they had a fireplace downstairs and a fireplace upstairs and lovely [wooden] staircase...he was a good carpenter and he had siding over the tops of the logs...and he painted it, it was a beautiful house. He had lots of apple trees and pear trees and everything.”

For the Silva family, as for many of their island contemporaries, the search for autonomy had its desired outcome.

The autonomy that Gabriola and the other coastal islands gave was fundamental to their settlement. Through the end of the nineteenth century and even beyond, mixed race families were at Gabriola's core, particularly on the south end. Four of the early arrivals died before they ever really made a difference, Andrew McFarlane in 1863, Fletcher Ambrose in 1878, and Henry Heath and John Caufield the next year. Three others—William Jeffries, Thomas Jones, and Robert Dombrain—soon moved on. The remaining ten made Gabriola their home, not just for themselves, but for their wives and families, in many cases into the second generation and even up to the present day.

2—Autonomy for children as they came of age

The second aspect of autonomy has to do with the options available to the second generation as it came of age. Across British Columbia hybrid, or mixed race, children became by virtue of their birth trapped in racial rhetoric. Newcomers denigrated them as half-breeds or “mongrels” who inherited

the worst characteristics of each of their parents.²⁹

Some island couples had large families, others just one or two children. Such long established Gabriola families as the Degdens, Edgars, McGuffies, Chapples, Martins, and Silvas each had six to twelve children. Their offspring were, at least to some extent, protected by their way of life. Where clusters of families grew up together, as on Saltspring and Gabriola, children might well make their lives so far as possible in their parents' shadow, continue to live on the island, and possibly intermarry. Jonathan and Helen Martin's son John married Charlotte Sampson, the mixed race daughter of one of his father's shipmates on the 1849–50 voyage of the *Norman Morison* to Victoria who had settled on the north end of Saltspring.³⁰ Thomas and Catherina Jones' son Azariah married Josiah and Jane Foster's daughter Emily. Even where sons headed off, as did Joe Chapple at a young age to work in the Nanaimo coal mines for the very good wage of \$700 a year, they still identified with their Gabriola origins. As his obituary put it, “...he still called Gabriola ‘home’”.

For offspring who did not intermarry, the sense of autonomy and self-confidence that coastal islands gave was fundamental to their choices of partners. Across British Columbia during these years, mixed race daughters had far more options than sons. A continuing shortage of newcomer females, combined with women's generally lesser

²⁹ This topic is discussed in Jean Barman, *Invisible Women: Aboriginal Mothers and Mixed-Race Daughters in Rural British Columbia*, 159–79 in R.W. Sandwell, ed., *Beyond the City Limits—Rural History in British Columbia*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999.

³⁰ Information from Donald Martin, Santa Ana, CA, March 3 and 5, 2001.

status in society, made permissible unions with newcomer men. John and Louisa Silva's daughter Mary married an American; Portuguese Joe Silvey's daughters Josephine and Mary, Ontarians. Two LeBoeuf daughters "married white", to use the language of some newcomer descendants.

In general across British Columbia, mixed race sons were perceived as sexual threats to newcomer daughters' virtue, and almost always, where they did not find hybrid partners, turned to Aboriginal women. However, among island offspring, not just numerous daughters but also sons partnered with newcomers. Four of Jonathan and Helen Martin's eight sons married newcomer women. So did two Degnen daughters, but also three Degnen sons. Mark Edgar made his life on his parents' Gabriola homesite with the daughter of a Welsh coal mining family from Nanaimo. James, Louis, and John Silva all married English women. These sons speak to the self-confidence that the autonomy of coastal island life gave to sons as well as to daughters.

In general, there was an important advantage in children selecting newcomer spouses having the same origins as their island fathers. That was to diminish their aboriginality at a time when visible mixed race was a stigma that was virtually impossible to overcome, no matter how hard individuals worked, or how well they behaved. At the same time, the autonomy to choose took a son or daughter only so far. At age sixteen, Robert and Margaret Gray's daughter Jane married a twenty-eight-year-old Danish labourer, Henry Peterson, who after a few years in Nanaimo settled down to farm on Gabriola. Jane's brother James, who was so enterprising that he passed the provincial examination necessary to teach, even though hoping to farm, wed the

daughter of a Scottish couple living in Nanaimo before settling down on the family homesite. Whereas James Gray continued to be the model of respectability, even running the local post office, the rowdy Peterson brood was long perceived as the bane of the island's existence.³¹ Whether it was cause or effect, at Jane Gray Peterson's death, her daughter described her on the official form, not as was usual for island families by her father's origins and thereby as Irish, but as an "Indian".

Conclusion

What then do we make of this?

Accessibility and autonomy, I've tried to show, were talismans for Gabriola and other coastal island families. Access to the islands themselves, to women's families, and to markets encouraged the longevity of relationships, as did the sense of autonomy that islands gave both to the first and second generations. The various islands functioned, to a lesser or greater extent, as sanctuaries.

Even so, Gabriola and the other coastal islands could not wholly protect families from the endemic racism of the day. Just as happened to Aboriginal wives when their husbands died unexpectedly, the playing field was in no way even. All the same, I want to suggest, the coastal islands did leave a distinctive mark on these early families, just as I expect they continue to do to the present day. ◇

Comments, advice, and responses are very welcome to Jean Barman, Department of Educational Studies, UBC, Vancouver BC, Canada V6T 1Z4; phone: 604-822-5331; fax: 604-224-9388; e-mail: <jean.barman@ubc.ca>.

³¹ Lewis-Harrison, *People of Gabriola*, 39–42, 61–63, 69, 105, 124; George H. Melvin, *The Post Offices of British Columbia 1858-1970* (n.p.), 42.