

## **A Blind Bay pioneer story**

A Shuswap Passion column for the Shuswap Market News

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By Jim Cooperman

It is always a joy to discover articles or books about Shuswap history. Thus, when the copy of “In those Days – The Reedman Family Story” arrived in the mail, the thin book was read quickly with interest. John Reedman, who was often called the “mayor” of Blind Bay, was one of the first to homestead there.

One of the most fascinating portions of this book, written by Isabelle Reedman who was married to Ken, one of the family patriarch’s many grandsons, is the description of why the Reedman’s decided to emigrate and how they ended up in the Shuswap. Her research included interviews with family elders and was aided by the diaries and journals of John’s son Archie who passed away in 1958. Stories like these, of how the pioneers arrived in the Shuswap, provide us with insight about the motives of the original settlers and help us understand how our communities formed.

The Reedman family hailed from Stamford, England, where they had lived for generations. It flourished in the Middle Ages as one of England’s prime wool towns, but although it later declined in importance it was still recognized as one of the country’s best-preserved medieval towns. John was born in 1855 into an upper-class family and he ran the family furniture business. As well, he was an auctioneer, an occasional tea-taster and a government representative who helped levy taxes in five parishes.

It was when the government passed a new bill imposing an unpopular poll tax that life in England began to unravel for John. When investigations under the new law uncovered massive gambling debts for a good friend and respected businessman, who then committed suicide, John began to have serious doubts about remaining in England. After his second wife died, John hired Florence as a housekeeper to help with his three young sons from his first marriage. He grew fond of her and they soon fell in love and married. This union set “tongues wagging” in the class-conscious England of the early 1900s and some former friends were hurtful to Florence.

That was the last straw for John and the emigration posters, such as one that said, “Go to British Columbia” depicting an apple tree with silver dollars on its branches, began to look very attractive to him. He sent Harry, his oldest son, first, to reconnoiter and report back. His letters were filled with enthusiasm and he found both Alberta and Saskatchewan particularly appealing. Meanwhile, back in England, John and Florence started a family and began making plans to leave.

Finally on April 6, 1905, John and his family boarded the steamer “Virginian” and sailed to Canada. It took ten days to cross the Atlantic and another six days before

they arrived by train in Calgary, where they met Harry and a few days later celebrated John's 50th birthday. Their plan was to journey to Lloydminster, Sask., where Harry had found good farming land, but fate intervened when a fellow lodger at their hotel introduced them to another recent immigrant from a town close to their hometown of Stamford, Frank Barnard.

Frank had a son, Arthur, who had also scouted out potential areas to homestead the previous year. He along with a friend had travelled to Salmon Arm and Fortunes Landing (now Enderby) and explored the Shuswap on logging trails using a rented wagon and team of oxen. They were most impressed with Blind Bay and thus the Barnards decided to homestead there after completing work in Calgary. When Frank heard about John's plans to settle in Saskatchewan, he told him, "You can't take a young wife there, you'll kill her!"

As luck would have it, the Reedmans missed their train and the next day they joined the Barnards and journeyed to Notch Hill. Finally, on May 6, 1905, John and Harry left the others to set up the tents and after taking a few wrong trails they emerged at Blind Bay to witness the pristine beauty of the lake with the mountains in the distance still covered in snow. Deciding then that this is where they wanted to make their new life, they proceeded "to have a bath," obviously not minding the cold water.