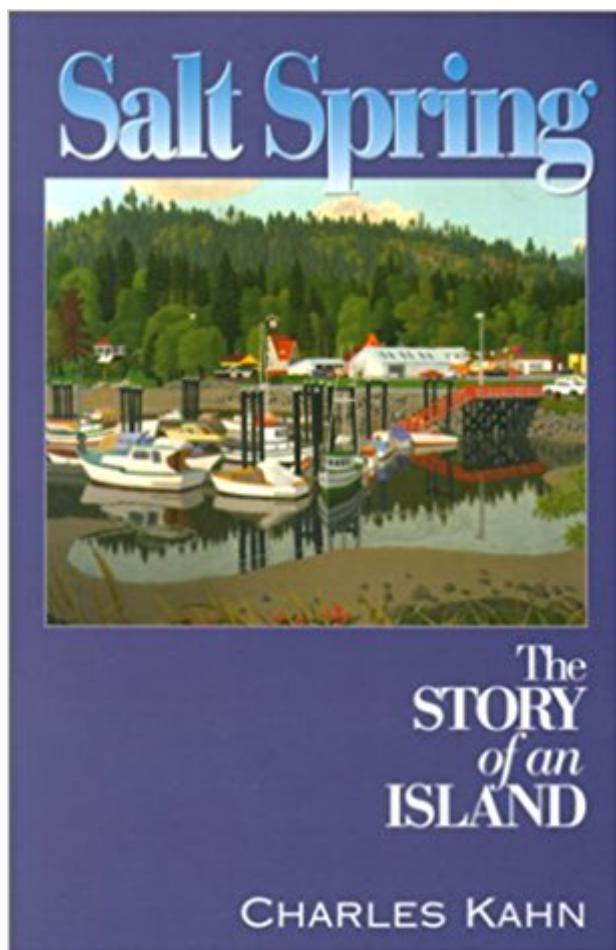


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Salt Spring: The Story Of An Island



Synopsis

The largest of BC's southern Gulf Islands, beautiful Salt Spring Island has long been a favoured holiday destination and a prized real-estate area for those in search of an idyllic rural residence. Now available in trade paper, *Salt Spring: The Story of an Island* chronicles the island's rich history from the days when Coast Salish people inhabited Salt Spring's shores, through some 150 years of settlement by many diverse groups. Because of the island's rugged geography, the early story of Salt Spring is largely the story of hard-working people in small isolated communities industriously carving farms out of rough terrain. Many of the settlers who followed came to find a place where they could live their lives free of the constraints of most societies. This was as true for the African-Americans, many of whom were among the first non-aboriginal settlers to arrive in 1859, as it was for those fleeing conventional middleclass life and for Americans seeking to avoid the Vietnam War. And it's true of almost every new islander who arrives today with a unique personal dream.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Charles Kahn was born in Montreal in 1945. He has worked as a freelance editor and writer for over thirty years and has had numerous travel articles published in the *Globe & Mail*, the *Montreal Gazette* and *Touring and Travel*. He has edited and co-authored several educational textbooks and is also the author of *Hiking the Gulf Islands*. In 1992 Kahn moved to Salt Spring Island where he is an active member of the Salt Spring Island Historical Society and the island's Trail and Nature Club.

A MYSTERIOUS NEWCOMEROne Salt Spring islander greatly influenced almost everyone and everything around him. Not everyone liked Harry Wright Bullock, and few understood him, but he was truly larger than life. The single, rich, twenty-six-year-old Englishman who came to Salt Spring Island in 1892 must have intrigued islanders. Bullock was short (about 5'8"), broad, bespectacled, and balding, with a large beard and a round kindly face. Donald "Goodie" Goodman, who worked for Bullock from 1922 to 1926, said his employer "was a man of very much regular habits, including a fair amount of eating, usually about five meals a day, and he showed it all right." Bullock's somewhat mysterious quality led many people to exaggerate when discussing him. His dress and demeanour were consciously that of an upper-class English gentleman. Almost every photo or description portrays him formally dressed in a starched white shirt, tie, vest, black waistcoat or long black frock coat, and satin top hat. He even kept his beard black and shiny with a product called Beardblack. In the frontier community of late nineteenth-century Salt Spring, where most people survived by hard physical labour, Bullock's fanciful appearance sometimes inspired far-fetched stories of outlandish behaviour. Bullock's wealth, lifestyle, and eccentricities - he liked islanders to call him "The Squire" - invited discussion and anecdote. Bullock, the second son of a wealthy Bristol family, was born in 1866 near his mother's home of Chalfont, Buckinghamshire. His family provided ample financial support when he left for the colonies. Denise Crofton, a frequent guest in Bullock's home, remembered hearing that Bullock was in love with his brother's wife and left England to avoid painful encounters. For five years, Bullock rented two rooms at Stevens Boarding House and lived there while his house was being built. Anne Stevens was a good cook, and the boarding house at Central was next door to St. Mark's Church, very important to the devoutly Anglican Bullock. Bullock purchased land on the lake that now bears his name and hired Reid Bittancourt to build a twelve-room mansion, which reputedly cost \$2000. Fruit and nut trees were planted almost immediately. One of Bullock's first housekeepers was Miss Hind, a former matron of Victoria's Protestant Orphans' Home, who came to Salt Spring in 1903. Mary Palmer replaced her three years later. Over the years, Bullock's house grew. Bill Palmer, his employee for years, said the house had ten bedrooms, a dining room, a drawing room, a huge hall, Bullock's den, a sitting room, a small dining room where the household staff ate, and a large kitchen. Donald Goodman remembered that Bullock had a furnace in the entry hall, "which only a bachelor would do, because no wife would ever arrive and let him get away with it." He said the house contained "a helluva lot of antiques," and the walls were covered with valuable paintings. The indoor plumbing, perhaps the first on the island, required an unsightly network of exposed pipes on inside walls. Bullock was a knowledgeable farmer, but left most farm work to Japanese labourers. Each year, his 300-acre (121 ha) farm

produced about two thousand boxes of apples, plums, pears, and cherries - 80,000 pounds (36,288 kg) of large, high-quality fruit. Bullock also produced cream from his Jersey cows, pork, poultry, lamb, garden crops, and honey from his hundred or so beehives. Ham and fish were cured in a smokehouse. Bullock's state-of-the-art equipment included one of the island's first tractors in about 1922, a gasoline generator, and a steam engine to thresh grain. Day-to-day operations were overseen by a succession of competent managers. The first, in 1905, was Keith Wilson, Rev. E.F. Wilson's youngest child. Three years later, Bill Evans came to work on the farm and eventually replaced Wilson as estate manager. Bullock built a house for Evans and his wife, Nellie Dowson, who arrived from England in 1912. When Evans left to manage a farm at Duncan in 1917, Bill Palmer took over.

BULLOCK'S BOYS

After 1900, Bullock always hired a couple of twelve- to sixteen-year-old boys to care for his house and property. Most came from the Protestant Orphans' Home in Victoria. After Mary Palmer retired, the senior boy would serve as cook-taught by Bullock, himself a good cook-and the junior as houseboy. The cook was also responsible for preparing the shopping lists. The houseboy cleaned the house, served at table, and did the dishes. In winter, the boys cleared snow and brought in well water, as Bullock Lake was too boggy to provide drinking water; in spring, they helped plant the gardens. Each boy received room and board plus \$10 a month in his first year, with an increase of \$2 a month for each successive year. A boy needed to buy only clothing from his wages, as Bullock supplied everything else. Donald Goodman remembered Bullock investing \$125 in a radio just for the boys' use. Bullock was very strict with his boys, insisting on proper behaviour and dress (he dropped the requirement for elaborate uniforms after World War 11). Although Palmer said his employer occasionally carted him and made the boys "toe the line," Goodman said that Bullock never really mistreated them. Still, Bullock's class biases were apparent in his "upstairs-downstairs" household. He ate only in the dining room, for example. Occasionally he would break his own rules, Palmer recalled, by having a cup of tea in the kitchen. He also did not believe that working-class children required schooling, so his boys never attended school. The only exception was Bill Palmer, who attended a Salt Spring private school and completed Grade 13 in Victoria, perhaps at his mother's insistence. Donald Goodman recollected one Bullock failing: "One of his bad faults was that he couldn't tolerate seeing you without something to do." The boys started work at 8:00 or 8:15 a.m. but dragged it out until 9:00 p.m., "because if he caught you without a job, he'd find a new one for you.... When he went out, we'd finish up within ten minutes and be gone." It was the only way they could get time off. Some felt that, when Bullock was older, the boys took advantage of him, as Donald Goodman reported: "[Bullock] was foolish to an extent, especially years after I left. He was loanin' the kids money with no thought

of ever getting it back. . . They could touch him for 20 dollars any old time they wanted. And he'd give it to them and smile. He knew he wasn't gonna get it back, but he'd still loan it."Over the years, Bullock hired as many as sixteen boys from the orphanage. Bullock's boys must have learned valuable skills from him, because most did well after they left the estate. Today people might suspect the motives of a man who had such close involvement with young boys. However, no hint of scandal attached to the man in his own day, and Bullock's boys continue to speak highly of their mentor.

The book arrived in excellent shape.

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