

# CEREMONIAL OR RITUAL BOWLS OF SURREY

by Don Welsh

The following study is an attempt to gather together information about a particular class of archaeological artifact within a limited geographical territory. Within the Fraser River / Gulf of Georgia area are found stone bowls decorated with anthropomorphic or zoomorphic images. The circumstances of their deposition and the subject matter depicted on them have led archaeologists to interpret them as ceremonial items - the possession of a ritualist or shaman. These bowls have been found within complex shell midden sites and conversely in remote locations.

Many of these bowls turned up when land was cleared for farming. Others surfaced when houses were constructed on shell middens. These artifacts often made their way to local museums, usually without good site provenience. If records did accompany the artifact, successive staff changes have often resulted in loss of information. The following study is an attempt to gather together such information as remains regarding bowls of this type, found in Surrey.

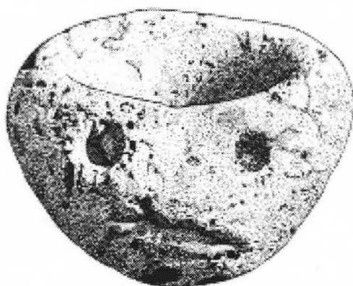
## Surrey Museum and Archives

The majority of the bowls found in Surrey have found their way to the Surrey Museum and Archives in Cloverdale. I would like to thank Jim Whittolme and Lynn Saffery of the Surrey Museum and Jaquellyn O'Donnell and Janet Turner of the Archives for their assistance in the past. I would also like to thank Bev Somers and Lana Panko of the Museum and Peter Johnson of the Archives for more recent assistance. I would also like to thank Hellen Murphy and Jack Berry - both members of the Surrey Historical Society for their recollections and assistance.

All bowls currently in the Cloverdale Museum are on public display and may be observed during museum hours.

## The Emil Asbeck Collection.

Emil Asbeck was an early resident of



*Bowl #95 [409-62]*

*Length: 18.0 cm Width: 14.5 cm*

*Height: 9.5 cm Bowl depth: 5.5 cm*

*Material: Basalt*

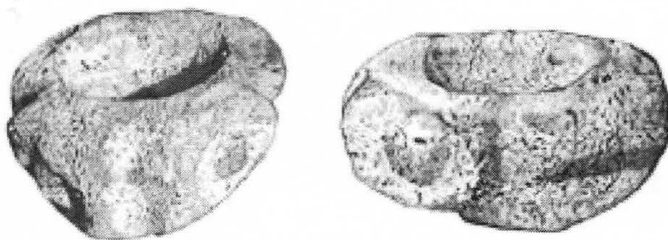
Crescent Beach, living on the second lot north of Beecher Street, [2743 Gordon Ave.]. What is now the alley between Gordon and McKenzie Avenues was known as Asbeck Street. Hellen Murphy recalled that, "He worked along the bluff." He also collected a large number of artifacts from the construction of Dr. King's medical clinic next door to his residence, [2781 Gordon Ave.]. Any records of these artifacts that were available, were organized by Grant Keddle, [now of the Provincial Museum], while he was employed in the Surrey Museum. We can be confident that the artifacts came from Crescent Beach but we have no exact locations currently available.

#95 [409-62] has two depressions for eyes, a third depression in the chin area as well as carved lips. All surfaces have

been extensively smoothed. The smoothing could be water wear.

#96 [410-62] is carved in a manner that makes it somewhat hard to define, [as well as photograph, taking 3 attempts]. A small oval cobble has been pecked into a bowl with 4 V-shaped notches roughly defining four quarters. Two contain eyes carved in the round. These eyes diverge in two planes approximately 120 degrees apart and angle downward approximately 30 degrees. The post-orbital constriction follows under the eyes making this end sit up from the basal surface. A horizontal line that ends slightly before the side notches marks the remaining quarters. From the side, this line appears to be a mouth in a rather longhead. From other angles, the eyes have a distinct owl-like quality, with this line defining the body. Because of lack of beak, I hesitate to commit myself to the owl interpretation, as it could look as much like a frog. My impression is that this is a clever carving representing all these things depending on the viewpoint of the observer.

#118 has a slightly different eye treatment. Depressions mark the pupil while the round eyes are marked by a carved depression. Depressions mark nostrils, also defined by a slight groove following from the eye. The mouth is straight and fairly large. Marked postorbital constrictions define a somewhat heart shaped head. Eyes are in

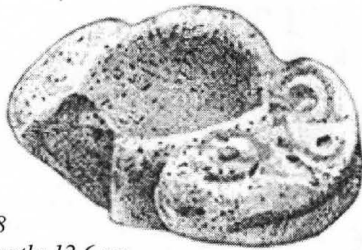


*#96 [410-62]*

*Length: 11.0 cm Width: 9.5 cm*

*Height: 5.0 cm Bowl depth: 1.5 cm*

*Material: Vesicular Lava*



#118

Length: 12.6 cm

Width: 12.3 cm Height: 8.1 cm

Bowl depth: 3.4 cm Material: vesicular basalt

the same plane, staring upward giving the head the appearance of a salamander or sculpin. Following the head is a round bowl depression followed by a broad tail. It could be argued that this represented a beaver.

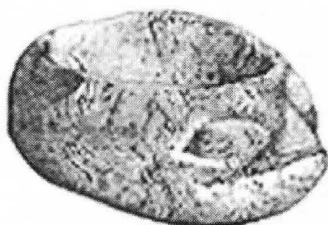
### Mrs. Doubleday

Mrs. Doubleday is listed as donor and her address of 17948 Trans Canada Highway, Cloverdale. This is the old Trans Canada Highway now known as the Fraser Highway. Whether this is the location where the bowl was found was not included in the notation. This is not an unlikely example of a bowl from a remote location.

#147 [75.63] takes the idea previously presented, a little further. The eyes are carved in the round, in the manner of much Salish carving, the lower curve being flatter while the upper is more arched. The eyes form two planes 120 degrees apart. A straight mouth line lies below a somewhat pointed snout and above a prognathous lower jaw. This artifact could arguably represent a sockeye salmon.

### Helen Murphy

Helen Murphy has been a long time member of the Surrey Historical Society and an active friend to all archaeologists working at Crescent Beach.



#147 [75.63] Doubleday Bowl

Length: 11.5 cm Width: 8.9 cm

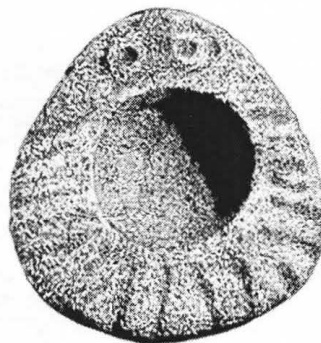
Height: 6.0 cm Bowl depth: 3.0 cm

Material: tuff stone

#165 [10-68], the Murphy Bowl, was published in the Surrey Leader in Sept. 5, 1968. It was uncovered by O'Connell Murphy, while operating a backhoe to dig a service trench to 2604 O'Hare Lane, a beach-side property at Crescent Beach. The artifact was approximately a foot down, 100 feet from high tidemark. This is consistent with a Marpole Culture level from Len Ham's nearby excavation. This artifact is obviously a flat fish of which starry flounder is common in Boundary Bay.

d. Doreen Hales

#260.73, donated by Mrs. Doreen Hales, [with no location], is the least modified natural cobble. Two naturally occurring bubbles in the lava provided eyes while the cobble is minimally modified to form a head framing these features. The effect is striking yet very minimalist in execution.

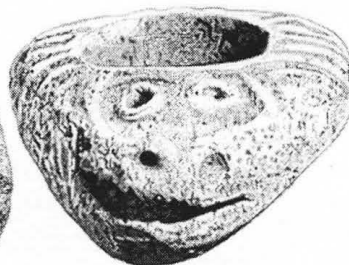


Bowl #165 [10-68] Murphy Bowl

Length: 19.5 cm Width: 17.0 cm

Height: 9.0 cm Bowl depth: 2.8 cm

Material: sandstone



### University of British Columbia

Recorded as the McDonald Bowl, [U.B.C. book: A14], DgRq 2:1 is available for viewing by appointment at the U.B.C. Archaeology Laboratory. This artifact came from the farm of Mr. N.S. McDonald on Hall's Prairie Rd., east of Cloverdale. Heritage Branch crew recording the site were unable to relocate the exact location within the farm extending from 184th to 192nd St. along 32nd Ave. Once more this is typical of a provenience in a remote location. I would like to thank R.G. Matson and Mrs. Joyce Johnston of the U.B.C. Laboratory of Archaeology and Carol Shephstone, librarian for the M.O.A. ethnology library for their assistance in accessing this artifact.

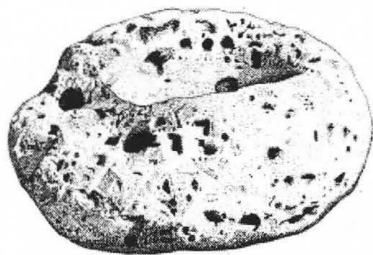
### Vancouver Centennial Museum

This bowl is on permanent display in the Vancouver Centennial Museum. I would like to thank Lynn Miranda for her assistance in viewing this bowl.

This artifact has the largest publication history. Known as the Sullivan or Bear Creek bowl as well as the Eddy bowl, it was donated to the Vancouver Museum [acc.# QAA 1084] by Mr. and Mrs. David Eddy. Published in the Surrey Leader in Feb. 7, 1952, it was also published by Pearson in 1958 in Land of the Peace Arch, apparently from the same photo [Pearson 1958: plate 2, facing page 20]. This was also the mode used to produce the illustration by F. L. Beebe used by Wilson Duff [Duff 1956: p.144]. Duff later published a photo of this specimen in Images Stone, B.C. [Duff 1975: p.42, 170].

This pyrozone stone bowl was plowed up in 1950 by Mr. Eddy on his farm, the old Loney place, north of Sullivan. "It was pure chance that it was turned up," Mr. Eddy related, "as I plowed a dead furrow two furrows deep, and was returning up the furrow when the point of the plow dug into the earth and turned up this stone." Even then, the bowl's adventures were not over, for Mr. Eddy thought it was only a rock, one of the few on the farm. A few days later he and Mrs. Eddy were walking down to investigate some bulldozing being done on their place, and Mr. Eddy picked up the "rock" to heave into Bear Creek which runs only a few feet away. Mrs. Eddy noted the carving and rescued it from oblivion [Surrey Leader: Feb. 7th 1952].

The old Loney farm was located on either side of 152nd Street in the area east of 150th Street. Most of the Farm was on glacial deposits, but included Mahood Creek now known as Bear Creek. On the south side of 152nd is a portion of the old land, which is level, and includes an old



*Bowl #260.73*  
Length: 18.0 cm Width: 14.5 cm  
Height: 7.0 cm Bowl depth: 3.8 cm  
Material: Vessicular basalt

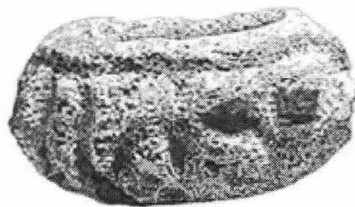
alluvial plain of the Serpentine River. This is the only area of the farm, which would not have been quite rocky due to its glacial till substrate. The exact location is not known, but it must have come from within throwing distance of the creek. This area is near the present location of Coyote Creek Golf Club and the artificial lake known as the Surrey Lake or by the tongue in cheek name, "Duck Lake". [You need to duck when the golfer shoots].

## Private Collections

### Ken McDonald

Ken McDonald found an isolated stone bowl while farming on a property on Mud Bay, between the Serpentine and Nicomekl Rivers. The bowl was found on the edge of an old slough scar, known as Snider Creek. This location is registered as site # DgRr 28 in the provincial site registry. This general area, between the rivers, was identified by Gibbs, as the location of the Simiáhmoo [Semiahmoo] camp in 1956 [Gibbs 1865]. The south bank of the Serpentine River was a good location for oyster gathering. In post contact times, the oysters were sold in the market at New Westminster [Suttles n.d.].

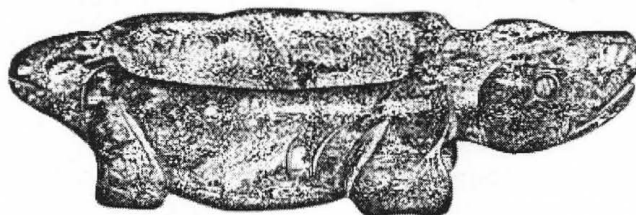
The bowl is asymmetric, slopping towards the left side. The bowl is



*MacDonald Bowl, UBC*  
Length: 12.6 cm Width: 8.4 cm  
Height: 6.8 cm Bowl Depth: 3.4 cm  
Material: Vesicular basalt

surrounded with a slight raised rim. McDonald supplied a photo of the bowl next to a tape measure along the length. All other measurements were estimated from this and two other photos of the bowl. Red ochre stains cover much of the artifact and is particularly noticeable in the dish of the bowl. It seems likely that this "bowl" is indeed a mortar that was used to grind ochre, further suggesting a ritual function. Although ochre was used ritually, it also was used for pragmatic purposes to prevent sunburn and to repel mosquitoes.

Given that this area was used at least seasonally, was close to Crescent Beach and close to the Nicomekl/Salmon River travel route, this location may not be remote. Conversely, there is no evidence that this was a large or complex site, or that at the time of the bowl's deposition, was a site at all. In conclusion, this appears to be a case of remote deposition rather than midden burial.



*Zoomorphic Bowl QAA 1084*  
Length: 30.5 cm Width: 11.4 cm  
Thickness: 7.6 cm Material: Nephrite

### Wickham

The Wickham bowl was found in Crescent Beach in association with a conical topped hand maul and a nephrite adze blade. These were photographed and published in *The Surrey Story*, [Treleaven 1992: p 133]. The photographer was Jack Berry who provided the address where these artifacts were found. He was firm in his recollection that these were donated to the Surrey Museum [Jack Berry: pers. com.]. The Surrey Museum has no records of this bowl, so its current location is a bit of a mystery. These artifacts were unearthed at 2710 McBride Avenue, in the back yard.

The bowl is somewhat asymmetric, stopping towards the left. This feature is in common with the McDonald bowl.

## Discussion

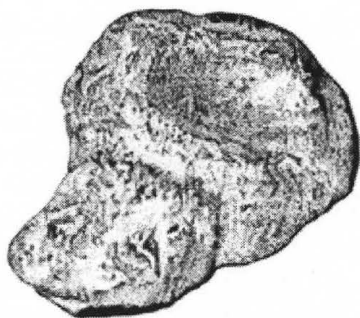
The Loney or Sullivan Bowl was interpreted as a bear with a turtle tail, in the style of many early art interpretations, in which the animal or animals involved were identified. Compared with other examples of Salish art, the main head could easily be a wolf or fisher. The second head definitely looks reptilian, but could be a snake or lizard as easily as a turtle. The overall design is much like the top figure of the Skagit atlatl, which has been interpreted as a lightning snake [Borden 1969a].

The two mythological snakes of the Salish, the lightning snake and the two-headed snake are both depicted with legs. Among the Kwagwulth, the double-headed snake is generally depicted with a large head with two snake like "wings" which are the two views [left and right] of the body and second head. If the bowl was cut and spread out in this manner, it would have a large central head flanked by snake-

like "wings" with two legs each [see also Borden 1969a]. The Salish, although sharing the belief in the double headed serpent do not represent it in the split representational manner of the Kwagwulth.

Duff on the other hand points out that turtles are not found in the Fraser Valley and yet there are other bowls shaped as turtles or including turtle-like parts. Provincial Museum reports note the Green Pond turtle living in the White Rock district. At least one informant that grew up on the Fraser River on River Road in Delta, remembered painted turtles when he was growing up. The range of turtles was larger than today where painted turtles are limited to east of the Cascades. Ham and Percy report turtle bones from Crescent Beach and St. Mungo [Ham: pers. com. And see later]. It seems like many meanings may be read into this well made sculpture. Possibly this is another





Site # DgRr 28 Bowl  
Length: 23.1 cm Width: 14cm  
Height: 7 cm  
Material: Vesicular Basalt, Ochre Stained

case of all of the above. The author prefers the two-headed snake interpretation. This spirit was a dangerous and powerful medicine power that may have been the power of a shaman. This dangerous power may have motivated the bowl being left in a location remote from other artifacts.

The double-headed serpent was reported to live in swampy areas. Local ethnographies report its presence in Burn's Bog and at the head of California Creek [Suttles: n.d.].

The McDonald bowl and the Wickham bowl are both artifacts, which have features, which have led to their being termed "turtle bowls". Both have heads on elongated necks, which could look like turtles. The identification however is not complete as there is no depiction of legs or details of the shell. In the discussion regarding the Eddy bowl, the turtle image was questioned but data was presented that indicated a presence of turtles in this area. Other possible models such as lizards and salamanders were presented. Several other bowls were tentatively identified as various fish species. Len Ham points out that these are all species, which have multiple young and could therefore represent fertility [Ham: pers. com].

Rick Percy reported turtle shell from the Crescent Beach Site.

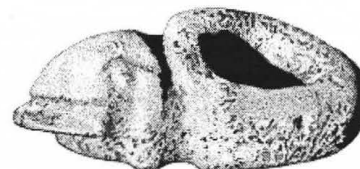
The only piece of turtleshell recovered during the project is an object that has been worked to an asymmetrical pentagonal shape. The item, catalogue no. 400, is probably an unfinished pendant and lacks only a suspension hole. The five edges have all been carefully ground but not polished. Viewed from the side, the piece is slightly curved and shows a

natural protuberance along what can be called the bottom edge. Possibly a start was made to remove the protuberance as witnessed by small grinding marks on its side. At some time in its past the object has been in contact with red ochre, some of which adheres to its surfaces and is detectable with the aid of a microscope [Percy 1974: p222].

Ham reported turtle shell from the St. Mungo Site as already noted.

Bone pendants manufactured from exotic materials have been recovered from Charles assemblages at the Crescent Beach and St. Mungo sites. The Crescent Beach artifact is an ochre stained blank ground from turtle plastron [Percy 1974: 222]. Those from St. Mungo are also ground from turtle plastron [4], a large sturgeon dermal plate [1], and a fragment of a beaver mandible, to form large pendants.

Only 2 of the turtle plastron artifacts have been drilled, while the holes in artifacts 4196 B2/PP [turtle] and 3568 A2/T6 [beaver mandible fragment] are very



Wickham Bowl  
Estimated Length 27cm

well worn [Figure A4.4]. [Ham 1984: p81].

Both of these excavations recovered turtle shell, which was intended for decorative purposes. There is no direct evidence that this decorative function had ritual or ceremonial significance, but the ochre stain might suggest this conclusion. In summary, turtles were present in the Fraser Delta in the past, they may have had ritual significance and they could have been the models for sculptured bowls as some authors have suggested.

Although some images can be interpreted as specific animals, and most authors attempt to do just that, most of these images are rather vague and can be interpreted as other animals by other authors. Within the Salish culture, spirit



Reported location of Bowls

power is never spoken about too openly as it can be stolen by another. At spirit dances, the spirit may be hinted at, or it's general class known, but specifics are not discussed. If these bowls represented spirit helpers, then it would be in the advantage of the owner to keep the specific spirit represented secret [Mike Kew: pers. com.].

The spiritual initiations undertaken by the Coast Salish involve the use of specific pieces of equipment such as staffs. This equipment is only used for one initiation and is afterwards deposited in a remote location because it is believed to contain forces, which could be harmful to others. These locations include cliffs, islands and caves as well as inside hollow trees. As many of this class of artifacts are found in remote locations, it is likely that the same beliefs apply to prehistoric stone bowls.

Are there other potential explanations for these bowls? The assumption of spirit power is consistent with Salish ethnography but bowls could be utilitarian items used for anything. The relative scarcity of these artifacts and the circumstances of their deposition make this explanation unlikely. If they were however, in fact utilitarian, then their use probably involved social status - only the rich being able to afford their manufacture.

How long does it take to make this type of bowl? In practical terms, the time involved depends on the hardness of the stone and the amount of detail involved. The author made two similar bowls from vesicular lava and one from tuff stone. They took 5 minutes, 1 hour and 4 hours

respectively. The last one took four hours because it was the most detailed of the three. Although this is a small sample, they could potentially be made in less time than a wooden container, so social status does not seem to explain these artifacts.

What is the age of this type of bowl? This form of bowl, was first reported by Harlan Smith, in his excavations at the Marpole Site and other sites within the Fraser Valley [Smith 1903: p 158]. Over the years, quite a number have surfaced, but their dating remained elusive. The general archaeological assumption has been that they date from the late Marpole time period - around 500 A.D. Other archaeologists are not as comfortable with this date and hypothesize that they may have continued into and through the recent Gulf of Georgia Culture and into the Developed Coast Salish Culture initially contacted by Europeans. Recent excavations at Dionesio Point on Galiano Island have recovered two of these bowls in context. One was found in the lower C occupation layer while the other was in the uppermost B occupation layer. This site has 13 radiocarbon dates ranging from 1770 - 1440 radiocarbon years ago, two of which are from carbon in direct association with the bowls. One dated to  $1570 \pm 70$  radiocarbon years [WSU 5W33] and the other to  $1440 \pm 60$  radiocarbon years [Beta 130,056]. These dates confirm the general assumption of around 500 A.D. as the time period represented by these bowls, but the tight time range of the site occupation does little to answer if they were used at a later date.

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