

THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW

How did a small coal-oil lamp become a legend on the BC coast?

In the 1920's Malaspina Strait mariners came to rely on that tiny flame shining nightly from Mrs. Grace Pringle's kitchen window overlooking Van Anda harbour.

The Pringles had moved to Van Anda in 1921 to establish the headquarters of the Presbyterian (later United Church) Coast Mission. Reverend George Pringle's 40-foot teak boat, the *Sky Pilot* was a familiar sight as she plied Georgia Strait from Halfmoon Bay to the north past Toba Inlet. The mission served the spiritual and community needs of several isolated settlements, lighthouses, logging camps, canneries and First Nations towns.

Reverend Pringle was a popular figure whose visits were welcomed up and down the coast. In addition to church services he brought supplies, library books and Sunday School papers to remote communities. And to lonely people on the coast he brought conversation and companionship. The *Sky Pilot* was always ready to transport people for medical care at any hour and in any weather.



One might wonder how often that one flickering light in the window, seen through the inky blackness, brought joy to the reverend as he turned safely into Van Anda harbour. That light became an unofficial beacon, well-known and welcomed by all mariners who traversed the fickle Malaspina Strait. Mrs. Pringle maintained her tradition of lighting the lamp nightly, even after more modern navigational aids came into greater use.

In appreciation of Grace Pringle's dedication the Union Steamship Company presented her with a case of coal-oil when the Pringles left Texada in 1928.

But a greater, more spiritual appreciation of her small "light in the window" was articulated in 1925 after a visit by UBC president Dr. L. Klinck. He wrote:

"In the kitchen it was only a lamp on the window sill, but to the souls that are out in the darkness and danger and storm it shines brightly with promise of the desired haven and peace and love and rest. ...as the Word says, 'Let your light shine'".

Peter Lock

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