

MAKING DO

Texada prospered in the boom years of the early 1900's but falling copper prices after World War I ended the good times.

The closure of Van Anda mines in 1919 was a shock that affected everyone. "The town died in a matter of days." [Roy Padget] In 1929 a Powell River newspaper reported a population of only 400 on the entire island, with only about 10 families remaining in Van Anda by 1931.

Many businesses and services shut down or moved away. The once grand Marble Bay Hotel was left to ruin. The hospital was closed and the school enrolment dropped below minimum. Without job prospects many left the island, abandoning their unsaleable houses to decay. Some residences mysteriously burned down. Insurance companies quickly cancelled all their Texada policies.



Without steady employment and with no social assistance available, Texadans were forced to "make do" through those lean years.

A 1975 interview with Texada-born Joe Pillat (1900 - 1991) recounts how things were back then when folks had to "seagull it" (take whatever jobs they could get - here and there). Joe himself worked as a miner, logger, sawmill worker, deck hand. He picked brush, painted houses and delivered mail. Road crew work such as the extension from Shelter Point to Gillies Bay in the 1930's helped pay off taxes.

People were forced to learn new skills. "Doing it yourself wasn't just a hobby - it was a way of life!" [Joe] People bartered, shared and did favours for one another. Those who went "stump farming" (clearing acreages for homesteading) were able to raise pigs and milk cows, keep chickens, plant orchards and grow vegetable gardens. Deer hunting, fishing and clam gathering enlivened the menu and produced a "King's Dinner" [Joe again] despite the economic hardships. People's main entertainment was each other. Picnics, tea parties, cards, barn dances were enough in the pre-media age.

Texada's fortunes boomed again post WW II but, in Joe's opinion, the coming of electricity in 1956 "changed things more than anything else."

Although Texada's fortunes have continued to change over the years, the island has retained the community spirit and sharing values forged by an earlier generation in the Depression.