

TEXADA'S WHISKY BUSINESS

As Canada prepares to legalize a formerly illicit substance, one is reminded of a somewhat similar situation almost 100 years ago when Canada repealed its Prohibition on alcohol just as the United States was enacting the ban.

It was 1920 and a fleet of up to 60 well-known BC schooners, steamers and yachts prepared to transport alcohol down the US coast to thirsty American cousins. Canadian operators were free to sell bonded alcohol products but must pay Canadian export duties.

Ostensibly bound for "Mexico" the alcohol was sped south then transferred to motor launches just beyond US territorial waters in order to avoid American patrols.

Many shady operators found it "convenient" to avoid taxes and duties altogether and chose to brew and sell their own illegal whisky - "moonshine." Upcoast distilleries hidden in isolated coves supplied the trade. Smaller boats would transport whisky in 5-gallon tins, crates wrapped in paper to reduce boat vibrations. Their destination was the mother ship fleet docked at "Rum Row" in False Creek.



The largest illegal whisky still on the coast just happened to be located on Texada's east side. It was a 3-storey wood building at Pocahontas Bay housing pumps, tanks, pipes, barrel rollers, etc. A "reflex still with a Scotch boiler" was able to produce up to 500 gallons of moonshine a week for almost 10 years.

Pocahontas Bay provided a remote and convenient site to unload the Vancouver Barge and Tug Company scows. The tugboats *Trucilla* and *Etta Mack* hauled a couple of tons of "pig feed" (barley, rye, yeast) to the bay where a horse offloaded the grain. The scows were towed up to Raven Bay so as not to attract undue attention.

Even though the builders disguised the site, the horse was eventually spotted unattended on the beach. This led police to raid the still on December 6, 1928.

Many stories have been told about the raid, most "long on colour and short on fact" (Bob Blackmore - 1994). It does appear that the existence of the still was well-known on the island. In fact, "Ma and Pa" stills were often a part of homesteading up and down the BC coast in those days.

The still was dismantled in 1929 (see Expresslines - October, 2017) and another Texada legend began!