

History of Theatre on Texada

It's well-known that the famous Van Anda "opera house" (built by volunteers before 1900) had a "lovely stage and dance floor". However no record exists of the presentations offered. One may surmise that a booming mining community would have fostered a "dramatic society" producing popular pageants. Did theatre companies travelling by steamship bring touring shows to coastal communities as well? School, church and club community plays usually led the way in small towns such as Blubber Bay.

In the 1960's Van Anda Elk's Hall "cabarets" were popular and featured full productions such as *Annie Get Your Gun*. Let's not forget the Texaquatics diving club whose late night party skits were often inspired by imbibing "rapture of the deep".

A member of Texaquatics, John Kelly, wrote several full-length plays, many of which were performed by the new drama club - the Rock Island Players. The R.I.P. got off to an inauspicious start in 1963 at the Gillies Bay Hall when a power blackout shut down their production of *Kempy* just before intermission. "On with the show" was the cry as gas lamps were brought in and the play continued. Afterparties at Staaf's were, for some, the highlight of the whole thing.

In 1965 the R.I.P. presented the world premiere of *I'll Remember You Love In My Prayers* – a Kelly script of life in a remote coastal village. The packed hall and rave reviews resulted in a two-week run at the Metro Theatre in Vancouver in 1969.



In the 1970's many R.I.P. productions achieved places of honour in regional drama festivals. An Ontario group toured John Kelly's *Fantasy, Flight and Feathers* for three months (French version in Quebec!) and his *Loggerheads* (featuring Keith Hughes and Ruth Sulyma locally) was later produced on CBC TV. The "new" Rock Island Players were brought together in 1992 with the revival of *Loggerheads* and have staged a play every year since then.

Although we don't know when the first play was produced on Texada one can be confident that the honoured tradition will continue.

Peter Lock

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