

## TEXADA'S FIRST NEWSPAPER

Rivalries between the booming towns of Van Anda and Texada City were forgotten in 1899 when mine presidents HW Treat (Van Anda Copper and Gold Company) and JJ Palmer (Marble Bay Mine) agreed that a local newspaper would unite the communities and be a benefit to all.

John P Lawson, a former Vancouver teacher who had set up a print shop on (what is now) Main Street near Pender, helped transport the huge Washington hand press with accessories to Texada in December that year. In those days type was placed painstakingly letter by letter (in reverse) then inked with a roller.

With a newly-constructed building and Justice-of-the-Peace Louis J Seymour as editor, the *Coast Miner* welcomed the 20<sup>th</sup> century with its first edition in January 1900.

Seymour, a walrus-moustached patriotic Englishman, soon moved to Victoria and Lawson took on the job of editor. He hired Will Raper as "printer's devil" (assistant type-setter) and young Bruce McKelvie as street vendor.

Though only two copies of the *Coast Miner* have survived, they speak of a prosperous town with myriad social events: "Socially Van Anda is not to be outdone by any place. The people are pleasantly disposed to a round of pleasures. Scarcely is one notice tore down ere another announcement of a dance, concert, contest or other entertainment takes its place."

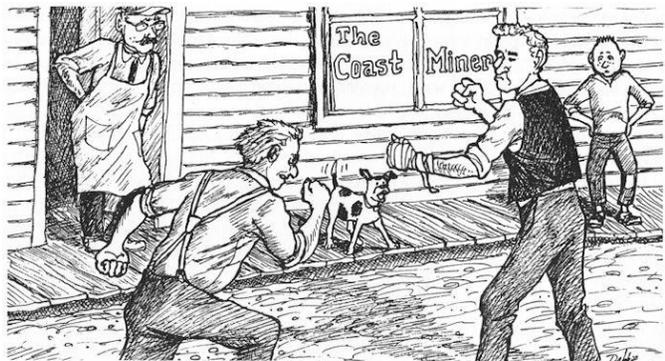
In fact, the newspaper's demise later that year was rooted in a social faux pas. A metallurgist's wife hosted a tea for the "elite" followed by a second party in which "ladies of lesser eminence" were invited. Lawson wrote a scathing editorial denouncing the establishment of an upper-class "400 club" in a mining camp. The irate husband stormed into the *Coast Miner* office and the two began a brawl that continued onto the street which soon filled with spectators. McKelvie tells how Lawson's experience in boxing helped him subdue the husband's arm-flailing, head-first charges.

However, although he won the fight, Lawson lost his job. The "powers-that-be" decided that, perhaps, a newspaper wasn't such a unifying force after all and closed it down!

John Lawson had to leave Texada but he took with him the lovely Emily Raper, Texada's first schoolteacher, as his wife.

Peter Lock

Texada Island Heritage Society



The "Tea Fight." Courtesy Debbie Dan.