

## “TEXHADA” ISLAND ORE GRAB

So appeared the headline in Victoria’s *Daily Colonist* newspaper on February 8, 1874 when recent iron-ore discoveries on the island prompted a rush of land claims. The lust for profit ensnared politicians and business leaders in the first major scandal to confront BC’s new provincial government.

Blubber Bay settler Harry Trim (also a sailor, fisherman and prospector) had discovered a rich iron-ore deposit at Welcome Bay on Texada’s west coast in 1871. After two years he took the sample down to his friend, Sewell P Moody who ran a sawmill and assay office on the north side of Burrard Inlet, Vancouver.

When the sample assayed at 69% iron, Moody immediately chartered the side wheel paddleboat, the *Cariboo Fly*, to rush potential investors to Texada. On board were Moody, mayor Dalby of Victoria, MLA JC Hughes and Premier of BC Amor de Cosmos (formerly known as Bill Smith - a prospector from California).

Upon arrival the group was impressed by what the *Colonist* described as “...exposed [iron] veins 100 feet wide and traceable in many spots for a distance of 200 feet.” The consortium hammered in stakes to pre-empt four 160-acre sections and they registered them with the Land Commissioner in Victoria upon return.



When the news of the pre-emptions hit the street the people were outraged! Amor de Cosmos was already under attack for appearing to give in to the federal government’s request to delay completing the CP Railway to the coast. The questionable “ore grab” added fuel to the fire.

The previous evening a crowd of angry citizens had charged the main Legislature door, police were called and the Premier hid with the Speaker in his chambers. Shouts of “Hang de Cosmos from a sour apple tree” rang through the mob as they hanged him in effigy. The *Colonist* labelled him “...a corrupt and dishonest politician.” De Cosmos resigned the next day.

Legislators soon established BC’s first Royal Commission to investigate charges of corruption. Famous “hanging” judge, Matthew Begbie, chaired the inquiry which subsequently found that “although there were suspicious circumstances surrounding the pre-emptions on Texada Island ... there is not sufficient evidence to believe that any members of the government [acted in] a manner prejudicial to the public.”

“Texada” had been thrust (dragged?) into the headlines, but not for the last time.

Texada Island Heritage Society