

A MOSSY SURPRISE

Texada Museum visitors who peruse Miss Emily Raper's 1899 autograph book on display may notice the signature of a Mr Walter Planta. His name brings to mind a gentleman who hiked and prospected the island wearing a smart suit and bowler hat.

Good-natured and filled with local knowledge, Walter Planta was one of the "more colourful of all island pioneers".

Born in Australia in 1871, Walter immigrated to Nanaimo with his teacher parents when he was nine. He showed early entrepreneurial spirit in his teens when he and some friends set up a small operation to bore for coal. Shale gas blew up their derrick and the young "consortium" ran out of funds.

In 1899 Walter accompanied BC's Lt-Governor to Atlin in hopes of publishing a magazine (*The Northern Light*) to advertise the North's economic and tourist potential. Unable to secure funding he returned to his first interest - mining - which led him to Texada. Initially he staked claims and worked for awhile with James Raper at the Victoria mine near Kirk Lake.

One day in 1901 as he sat eating lunch on a rocky outcrop near Van Anda, Walter moved some moss aside and revealed to his surprise a "rich shoot of heavy gold quartz" in two veins 30 feet apart. The Marjorie mine was born!

"...lumps of gold like unto hen's eggs ... have again turned the eye of the prospector toward the precious yellow metal" and gold-seekers flocked to Texada. (*The Colonist* - June 4, 1901)

Marjorie's \$6,500 payoff enabled Walter to marry a girl from Seattle and, later, settle her and their two daughters in a house in Vancouver.

Walter Planta's name appears often in Texada history in a variety of capacities. He served as postmaster after 1906, became sales agent for Tacoma Steel (Marble Bay mine), logged the lagoon area (1910-1912), worked a limekiln at Blubber Bay and cleared land for BC Cement (1928). Throughout it all he continued to traverse Texada in search of mineral wealth.

As a popular young man Walter helped organize community events such as the 1899 "Bachelors at Home"-themed dance. His enthusiasm, knowledge and love of "all things Texada" continued into his later years. Walter was remembered as a gentleman and friend to all.

