

THE BLACKSMITH

An old hand-forged ox shoe was recently donated to the museum by Leslie Goresky. The two pieces of iron (for a cloven hoof) brought to mind Texada's past when people relied on brute animal power.

At one time workers laboured to cut and split cordwood which oxen and horses hauled to power Texada's mines, mills and smelter. These animals were also needed on farms for both transportation and daily labour.

Essential to all was the man who was always busy - the blacksmith. The "smithy" was responsible for crafting and repairing almost everything made of metal: from horse, oxen and donkey shoes to other farm equipment such as hoes, scythes, plows, axes and cowbells.

Making and repairing wagon wheel rims was essential. Hardware items such as hinges, gates, nails, bolts and fireplace fittings were among the hundreds of necessary products which relied on the blacksmith. He was a vital support for the mining and logging industries as well.

On display in the Texada Museum is a typical early farm shed featuring several hand-smithed farm implements, wagon parts and horseshoes.

The reddish glow of the adjacent forge illuminates the blacksmith display. The anvil and hammers seem ready to use in the dim light. Darkness was necessary to judge the colour (temperature) of the searing iron as it was removed from the forge with tongs, worked on the anvil with the hammer and quenched in the water bucket below.

BC's directory of 1900 lists two blacksmiths in Van Anda - a Richard Walker and Alexander McKelvie (who also operated the smelter). Alex McKay was a noted blacksmith to local industries for many years. More recently, Jean Bigras, Texada Mines blacksmith, is remembered for originally fabricating the sign over the gate at the Woodland Cemetery.

Blacksmithing employed powerful men but many suffered from hearing loss. However, the sound of the iron ringing and the thrill of the inferno drew onlookers and their sheds became popular gathering places.

The blacksmith held a special place in a town's folklore. After all, ever since the days of the first peoples blacksmiths have been imbued with the "magical powers" of the Roman god, Vulcan, who was able to transform and harness earth, air, fire and water for human use.

