

TEXADA'S GREEN TREASURE

(No, it's not what you think!)

In 1950 the *Vancouver Sun* published an article on the “new industry” on Texada Island - brush picking. During WWII florists sought cheaper alternative greenery for wreaths and floral arrangements. Texada's huck bushes (evergreen huckleberry) and salal served the purpose.

Forest pickers would cut huck shoots in 18 by 14 inch flat sprays then tie them into 1 1/2 pound “bunches”. Fifty “bunches” made a “bale” that brought \$11, a decent day's work. It was an ideal year-round occupation for women at home, laid-off workers and those who favoured an independent lifestyle. The *Powell River News* reported in 1949 that brush picking on the island was a \$30,000 a year industry!

A chance meeting with Texadan Bill Nicholas in a Vancouver taxi in the late 1940's alerted the driver, Carl Hagman (senior), to the prospect of trading his taxi for a career in the forest. His wife, Virginia (Palm), knew Texada as she had grown up on an Upper Gillies Bay farm.

Their sense of adventure led them to Davie Bay where Carl found a large number of pickers living. As well as brush picking himself Carl became a middleman, purchasing the bales on the spot and shipping them to Vancouver (then on to Toronto).

In the winter he opened a sorting shed in Van Anda - the “brush hut” - on the ground floor of Paddy Moran's building next to the creek. At that time (1948) it also housed the first Legion upstairs. At peak times 25 pickers were employed along with 5 girls who graded and made up the bales.



By 1966 the *Powell River News* reported that there were “several buyers operating on Texada Island and there is a lively competition for pickers.”

Probably the giant of brush pickers was 5'3 Joe Pepin. Living alone in a remote Shingle Beach cabin, Joe would “pick and bunch” for a few weeks then make a big show of driving his full-to-the-brim 2-ton army truck around Van Anda to the brush hut.

His harvest sold, this colourful Quebec woodsman headed straight for the pub. After a few beers his friends could enjoy his “tall tales” told in an increasingly incomprehensible Quebecois accent.

Although a few pickers are still active on Texada today the booming business it once was is a thing of the past.