

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Electricity is something we take for granted but, until the mid-1950's, islanders had to make do with alternative power sources.

In 1892 Alfred Raper dammed Kirk Lake to operate an 8-foot waterwheel to power the rock crusher and whipsaw at his Victoria mine.

Steam power replaced horses and oxen in early logging shows and slab wood fuel was burned to generate power for Texada's pioneer enterprises - mines, limekilns, sawmills, barrel factory, etc. Later, diesel generators powered industrial operations. When available, power for community events (such as "picture shows" at the Van Anda school) was supplied by the mine.

A few households had a "32-volt gas-driven lighting plant" but candles and kerosene lamps were the norm and ice blocks and wood stoves sufficed in the kitchen.

After taking over Lowther and Young's fuel tank farm at the Van Anda wharf, businessman Al Waters bought the Little Billy mine's diesel generator and power lines when it closed in 1953. His Van Anda Light and Power Company offered households service from 6am to 9pm to those willing to pay for the pole and line connections.

There wasn't enough power to meet the demands of electric appliances - only lighting - and Al was vigilant in his night patrols, ready with a tongue lashing for those citizens who left lightbulbs burning unnecessarily!

BC Electric Company (now BC Hydro) recognized a need and arranged full service to Texada when it installed Powell River's transmission lines in 1955. BCE purchased Al Waters' company and proceeded to lay high voltage submarine cables to the island.



In ten days a 130-foot long barge laid four cables (80,000 feet total) across Malaspina Strait. Trenches in the rocky shores had to be blasted to accommodate the cable but the remainder of it rested 1050 feet below the surface in the thick silty bottom.

A giant Christmas present for the people of Texada arrived on December 19, 1956 as the island was finally connected to the power grid. Home lighting, electric stoves, refrigerators, freezers, dryers and, of course, television sets became commonplace.

Our museum has original light bulbs, glass pole insulators, huge generator gauges and vintage electric appliances (irons, toasters) from this period on display.

Thank goodness for modern technology!