

## “THERE HAS NEVER BEEN AN EPIDEMIC ON TEXADA”

Those words of Bruce McKelvie in the *Vancouver Daily Province* (August 16, 1943) expressed a common opinion at the time.

That year in Victoria Herbert Hargrave (MLA for Mackenzie District) was assured in the Legislature that health authorities would “study the matter and seek to ascertain the reason for the apparent immunity of the Island.”

McKelvie reported that some old-time residents claimed it was the drinking water containing minerals such as “magnesia” which “builds up a body resistance.” Another theory cited “air currents.” Some mentioned the “yellow clouds of sulphur smoke that rose from the roast piles and the stack of the smelter.”

In any event it seems Texada, with no fatalities, escaped the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 which claimed 4,000 BC lives and 50-100 million people worldwide.

In Powell River citizens were compelled to wear gauze bandanas sprayed with Lysol when on the street. St. Luke’s Hospital in the townsite treated many afflicted. With the help of nurses, Doctors Henderson and Marlatt (recently transferred from Van Anda hospital - see photo) worked to contain the epidemic, suffering 9 fatalities.

Texada experienced no deaths but should have lost 10 - 12 people (per capita). Upon further research McKelvie discovered that, in fact, there were “three cases of flu nursed on Texada” but all were sick before arriving in Van Anda. The three recovered and the contagion did not spread.

Schools remained open much to the disappointment of many kids who “felt we were being cheated” [Bill Young] especially when Vancouver’s Medical Health Officer, Dr Isobel Arthur (the Bonnie Henry of 1918) shut down schools in the city in October. Unlike today there was no province-wide coordination of emergency response.

Although the island’s isolation may have been an effective barrier in the distant past, more recent epidemics of measles, influenza, mumps, etc seem to disprove McKelvie’s 1943 assertions.

However, Texada may not have entirely escaped the long-term effects of the Spanish Flu. One wonders how much the 1918 pandemic contributed to the worldwide economic depression that resulted in the closure of Texada’s mines and subsequent island depopulation after 1919.

