

TEXADA'S VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS

BC's early coastal communities' greatest fear was fire. Buildings, constructed of wood, close together, heated with unsafe stoves and lit by coal-oil lamps were vulnerable to fire - especially when sea breezes fanned the flames.

The early town fires in Van Anda are good examples. Disaster struck in June 1910 when a strong westerly wind swept flames from a brush-clearing to destroy the hotel, both general stores and five other buildings. Bucket brigades, hauling water by hand from Van Anda Creek, couldn't cope with the flames that consumed the town within 40 minutes!

The "brigades" were called into action again in the 1912 and 1917 fires. Most of the town burned including the Kirkness brothers' store for the third time.

Calamities continued when the church burned down in 1942 followed by the Imperial Oil gas station in 1956.

However, when Texada Hardware and Deighton's store burned over Christmas, 1959, it took only 3 days to organize the Van Anda Volunteer Fire Department.

Thirty-two men enlisted immediately with Ken Orpen as Chief. A water system with standpipes was planned throughout the town. Residents were assessed \$25 per home (renters \$10, businesses \$50) to raise funds to buy a 1936 Ford Fire Truck from Powell River (originally built in Courtenay - see photo). The present building lot was leased and a Fire Hall was erected in the early 1970's.



Fire protection in Gillies Bay originated with the Texada Mines' crew giving assistance when necessary. A pump house on Gillies Bay Creek provided water to standpipes throughout the community. A hand-drawn cart carried the hoses. Residents could be alerted by the sound of the hand-crank siren in front of the cookhouse.

When "Fireman Bill" Steinert became Company Fire Chief a new water and hydrant system was installed in the townsite and a 1942 Fargo pumper truck was purchased (now on display at GB Firehall).

The closing of Texada Mines prompted the formation of the Gillies Bay Volunteer Fire Department in 1977. Eleven years later a firehall was able to be built for only \$22,000 due to many donations and tons of volunteer labour.

Our island community respects and appreciates the sacrifices of the men and women of the volunteer fire departments who have helped keep Texada safe through its history.