

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

Last month's demolition of the 124-year old "Astor House" marks the most recent and, perhaps, the greatest loss of Texada's heritage in current times.

The imposing white building was constructed in 1899 on the hill overlooking the Marble Bay Mine site (now the ballfield). Mine owner JJ Palmer's "mini-mansion" acquired its nickname from the white wooden verandah posts which humourously brought to mind the huge marble columns of the mansion of New York magnate John Jacob Astor.

The "Astor House" has witnessed a variety of Texada's history over the years and has accommodated many families since Palmer vacated in 1902. For years it was the Beale family residence. In the 1960's Ideal Quarry used it as a guest house for visiting company executives. The house also hosted popular events such as barbecues, Christmas parties and Chamber of Commerce meetings.

In the front garden the tall trees, now toppled, were once lovingly nurtured by the caretaker, Joe Kempe, who groomed them in his unique topiary style. At Christmas the verandah would host a holiday community choir as Joe lit the colourful tree lights while everyone enjoyed hot chocolate.

Many Texadans have expressed their fond memories of those occasions. And many are realizing the gradual loss of our heritage buildings.

It was not that long ago that the original residences in the townsite of Blubber Bay were demolished. Their general store and school (1910) were dismantled in the 70's with the school tower's brass bell sent to Vancouver. The historic 1910 Gillies Bay District School (on the "Highroad") and other heritage farmhouses were demolished in the 70's to discourage "squatters."



Unless individuals, groups or companies can find the enthusiasm and the money to maintain them, empty buildings age, mould, rot and ruin and are bulldozed away. Van Anda's first school building (the Elk's Hall) is nearing that state now.

Preserving heritage landmarks increases awareness and appreciation of our history and helps to boost community pride in our island. But it seems that we must find a monetary profit in preserving our history or the loss of our past will continue.

Your Texada museum is dedicated to collecting, preserving and displaying our history.

Peter Lock

Texada Island Heritage Society