

TEXADA - AN AGRICULTURAL ISLAND

Today's resurgence of small-scale farming on Texada with new families enthusiastically "returning to the land" reminds us of the important role local agriculture played at the turn of the century. Texada's dramatic mining boom of the early 1900's often overshadows the story of the 35 farm families who provided food and work animals for its citizens.



The largest continuous area of cultivated land on the island (about 10,000 acres) is located on the "High Road" above Gillies Bay. The soil mix of clay and sandy loam was ideal to produce fruit (apples, pears, plums, cherries) for the Van Anda market as well as fodder crops (peas, oats, clover, hay). Cattle, goats, horses, pigs, ducks and chickens provided meat, eggs and milk.

Pete Staaf, who arrived on Texada in 1907, was eager to extol Upper Gillies Bay's agricultural virtues in reports he sent home to Sweden. Many immigrants answered his call and the area became known as "Swedetown."

By 1912 the major land pre-emptors were : Lundquist, Abercrombie, Hamilton, Holtberg, Nelson, Hennard, Copp, Johnstomne, Erikson, Wesslen, McElroy, Olson, Hicklin, Palm, Fleming, Staaf, Peterson, Gustavson and Bernard.

The small, active community established a post office and a schoolhouse (both at McElroys' farm). The settlers united to form a Farmers' Institute (membership \$1/ year) and the local telephone system they created kept everyone in the know.

The scattered families got together for potlucks, fishing expeditions and bonfires down the hill at Shelter Point. Everyone shared. Butchering a cow or pig was occasion for a community event. The ocean provided fish and clams (to be canned or smoked) and herring (pickled in kegs).

Over time the upheaval of WW I and the prospect of more lucrative jobs elsewhere took their toll. Buildings were ultimately left to ruin, fields left to lie fallow. (PHOTO - McElroy farm in 1958)

The current influx of new people eager to rejuvenate local agriculture is encouraging. They are attempting to re-create Texada's self-sufficiency of over 100 years ago.

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