



## Fall Fair Centennial

by John Millen

Denman Island Farmers Institute was functioning by 1913 when the records held at the Denman Museum show it keeping account of stocks of explosives – used for blasting stumps as well as rock during land clearing.

The Institute held the first Fall Fair on the Island on September 23, 1916. Judging of garden produce, cooking, needlework and livestock was the focus of the Fair. Home production of all the necessities was a feature of Denman life at that time. This first Fall Fair was held in the ‘old hall’ that had been built in 1897 in the centre of the Island on the land now occupied by the Fire Department. In 1917 the Fair was held in the new, larger hall known as the Athletic Club Hall, a building that after many rebuilds and additions is now the Community Hall.

The Fair became a larger event in the following years, helped by a government grant to the Farmers Institute to support it. By 1922, as reported in the Comox Argus of Thursday September 28, it was a grand affair. The Argus took four and a half columns of its broadsheet to describe the Fair and report all the results of judging the different classes of produce and handwork. The headline summarized: “Denman Island is Self-contained: Fair shows that Islanders have not lost Home Craft skills.” Mrs. F. Bonavia came from Victoria to judge cookery and kindred classes such as preserves and needlework. Mr. P. W. Anketell-Jones, from Chemainus judged the fruit, vegetables and field crops and there was a third judge for livestock. Mr Anketell-Jones had won many prizes for his own entries in exhibitions and became well-known for judging fruit and produce at fairs held in Vancouver, Victoria and even as far away as

Spokane, Washington. As well as classes for garden produce, flowers, field produce, fruit, poultry, calves and pigs, entries were judged for ‘machine sewn garments’ (by both adult and child 12 – 16) and ‘handkerchief by child aged 9 – 12’. There were 10 categories of lace; and for crochet, knitting and embroidery. Several of the entries came from Hornby Island.

For the 1925 Fair the Denman Island Agricultural & Industrial Association published a 16 page booklet as a prize list. As well as the ‘Rules & Regulations’ on page 1 there are 5 pages listing the 162 classes which could be entered. A silver cup, to be competed for yearly, was offered for the ‘Best Jersey Cow’. Advertisements from local businesses filled the remaining pages. One that caught my attention was: “Tip Top” Taylors Made to Measure suits \$27, fit guaranteed by J.N. Mcleod, Courtenay. A copy of this booklet is held in the Museum.

The extravagance of the 1925 Fair apparently could not be topped. That series of fairs came to an end. Being self-sufficient on the home farm had become less important as good wages were offered in the logging industry, dairy farmers shipped cream from their Jersey cows to the Comox Creamery and much produce found a good market off-island.

The Blackberry Fair, held on the Sunday of the September long weekend continues the traditions of a Fall Fair on Denman Island. This year we can celebrate the centennial of its origins.