

This week, a beam

ing Thyra Warner Hudson was busily working alongside Chief Librarian Ina Kinkard, arranging books moved from the former village library in the basement of the Masonic temple.

"Dad would be thrilled that it's going to be a public place, especially a place of learning," Thyra said.

The building changed hands in the mid-1970s when Thyra's father died. It was a grocery store until about 1983, then it was closed and vacant until last year.

The man who made Thyra's Christmas dream come true was her son, Ottawa real estate developer Bruce Hudson. He says that he finally began to listen when, last year, his mother once again filled him in on the state of the abandoned store.

"I had been on the fast track for so many years I didn't know what was going on around me any more. My mother had been talking but I wasn't listening."

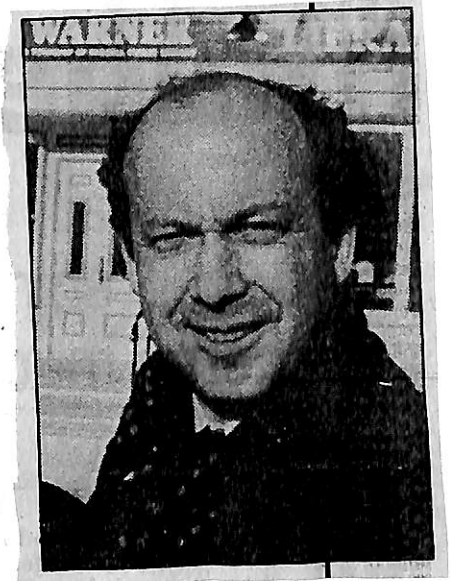
Hudson said he was accustomed to dealing with multi-million-dollar projects — fast-food chains in Smiths Falls and property on the Byward Market. But when his mother showed him pictures of the wreath she had placed on the door of his grandfather's former store, "pride took over."

Hudson made some phone calls and found out the store was bought as part of a larger property acquisition and was for sale.

He made a deal and plunged into the restoration with hardly a financial consideration. Six months and \$350,000 later, Hudson feels like a winner and Russell's 3,000 residents have a new, bilingual library for Christmas.

A \$33,000 Ontario commercial rehabilitation grant that Hudson matched allowed him to restore the 80-year-old building's façade to exacting heritage specifications.

A petition, a demonstration and a banner across the main street were needed to convince



Bruce Hudson
(Grandson of Mr. Morgan Warner)



— Photo courtesy Russell Museum



the Russell Township Library Board that residents wanted to keep their library in the village core. The board had considered moving it to a fringe shopping plaza.

Russell residents are delighted with the results. Ken Ion, co-owner of the Village Meat and Grocery across the street from the Warner Library, calls the restoration "the most fantastic thing that ever happened to Russell."

"I've got to give Bruce Hud-

son a pat on the back as being the businessman of the year around this town."

Hudson's work isn't over. The next step is to designate the building under the Ontario Heritage Act which, as Hudson happily points out, will "protect it forever" from re-development.

Thyra still recalls when gas lamps illuminated the former store's Christmas stock, when steaming horses and cutters ruled the side parking lot, when the Warner general store was at

the hub of commercial activity in the Castor River Valley.

"Dear Store," last year's letter continued. "You were the hope of many parents with 'letter to Santa' requests, the solution to many husbands' last-minute shopping dilemmas, and the place where saved first pennies were handed to the owner for a pretty hanky for 'Mother'."

In the true spirit of Christmas, Russell has given the Warner store a new, happy future.