

Reading in the Hills

Story by Patti Post Photos by Jon Borgstrom

The bookstores of Halton Hills each have their own specialties and personalities. Like Gibbs M. Smith, (book publisher,) says: "It's more than an individual. It's more than a physical location. It's almost magical. The store develops a personality. The store itself becomes an old friend. You're glad it's there, glad you can visit, glad that you can have the connection through the varying phases of your own life."

Reeve & Clarke Books

It was clear from the day nine-year-old Brian Kennedy was recognized by the Huntsville Public Library as taking out the most books that year- second only to the school principal- that there was a future in books for this avid reader.

"Back then, there was no bookstore in town, but you could take out as many library books as you wanted," he says, with a glint in his eye.

Reeve & Clarke Books, in Glen Williams, grew from this lifelong love of literature. Kennedy retired from his law practice last summer, and is now able to concentrate full-time on his passion for antique books, with full support of wife, Lynn.

The quaint, historical shop was once a general store where Timothy Eaton first worked after coming to Canada in 1853.

In the Glen's more recent history, the place is fondly remembered as Wheeler's store, where many residents still talk about Mr. Wheeler's kindness when they stopped there for ice cream on the way home from school.

Now this special building is still a place where, not only collectors, but everyone is encouraged to come in and browse among a wide variety of beautifully maintained books. Regular customers like Flo Bellman, of Georgetown, have found a little oasis there.

"I am a book lover, so when Brian and Lynn opened the store I was excited. It is more than just a great store. Little did I know at the time what a wonderful place it would become... I have met many wonder-

ful people, including a lot of local artists.

"They have made the store a warm and inviting place to be. Everyone is welcomed in the same caring way and you never feel any obligation to purchase something. A visit to Reeve & Clarke is about books, community living, conversation, stories and laughter."

Kennedy was always a collector, of stamps, coins, cereal box cards, hockey cards, and eventually books.

"I never knew about book collecting as a pasttime until I discovered the 15 bookstores that ran along Queen Street West in Toronto."

In one of those stores, 35 years ago, he met David Mason, an antiquarian bookseller who was well known in the trade. Mason was generous and helpful in sharing his knowledge about the finer points of book collecting.

Kennedy says the foremost reason books have value is the content.

"An author who is cherished- that's important.

"Also that a book has stood the test of time; is desired by others. You'd like to possess that which is sought after. People generally don't consider an author great unless he or she is collected and revered long after they've died. Some say 50 years."

Authors such as Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens will likely be loved and collected 500 years from now, explains Kennedy; whereas, some popular and prolific authors will be ignored. One example would be John Galsworthy, who was extremely popular in the 1920s, but no one seems to be reading him today.

Along with fine and rare books, Reeve & Clarke sells ephemera- which is vintage paper and package items, or very old souvenirs. There is also sheet music from the 1930s and 40s, and magazines from the 1960s and earlier- both are often collected for cover art by well-known illustrators and artists.

Kennedy says that collectors want to have what is as close to an original creation as possible. That's why they look for signed first editions, better still if they are personally inscribed to family or friends, and especially valuable are letters or notes written by the author. A famous author's manuscript would be highly sought after.

Also, if a story is connected to the books, that enhances value as

well. Lynn has Margaret Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman*, inscribed by both Atwood and the cover illustrator, artist Charles Pachter. Atwood and Pachter were friends since they were teenagers teaching at a summer camp together. These anecdotes give the book more meaning for a collector.

But however obscure or scarce an item is, or how good the author is, "the condition of an item overrides everything," says Kennedy. "A custom leather binding, heavily tooled, all edges gilt - can be a work of art."

Collecting such art can demand a lot of household space. The Kennedys tell the story of one collector they know, who is so afraid of his wife's reaction to bringing home more books, that he has a shelf reserved at a bookstore where he can hold his purchases until he finds a way to bring them home.

For any collector, "it's important to have a sympathetic spouse- a kindred spirit," emphasizes Kennedy, as the couple exchange knowing smiles.

Reeve & Clarke Books is in an 1847 building that has solid, original post and beam structure, and a good thing too, according to their contractor. Before setting up the store, many boxes of books were stored upstairs.

"He (their contractor,) said the books we had up there were equivalent to the weight of a Volkswagen," says the couple, laughing.

Storage is a constant, shifting challenge, and scouting for more books is Kennedy's favourite part of the business- that and talking to people about books.

There is something for everyone in the store. Besides items of interest to the serious collector, there are many reasonably-priced books. Also, as soon as weather permits, a small wooden shed beside the store opens, where good reads can be bought for \$5 and under. There is also a patio with chairs where customers can linger.

"The village has evolved," says Kennedy, "and now this store is a good fit for an old hamlet.

"We hope the Wheeler family is pleased with how the property is used today," Kennedy adds.

While Reeve & Clarke Books specializes in fine and rare books and ephemera, there are also three second-hand

