



**FAIR PREP:** It takes a dedicated band of Acton Agricultural Society members a week to turn Prospect Park into a fairground for this weekend's fair. On hand clearing out the poultry barn on Saturday were, from left: Charlie Plouffe, Frank Hanes, Hans Kuechler, Clarence Harding, Hank Walsma, Dale Hewitt, Kent Frost and Terry Foster. — Frances Niblock photo

# Margaret Atwood charms Writers' Festival

By Rebecca Ring

The Eden Mills Writers' Festival was a wonderful weekend of words, music, art, delicious food and sunshine. Authors of all genres were on hand discussing, signing and reading books. Among them was Margaret Atwood, reading from her new book *Moral Disorder*. It was released during the festival on Sunday.

*Moral Disorder* is a collection of interconnected stories that follow the life of a central character, Nell, and the lives that intertwine with hers. The book is like a photo album

in that each story captures a piece of her life, from her childhood in the 1940's to the old age of her parents in the present.

Atwood pointed out the photographs on the front cover of a maid in her evening uniform and her day uniform. They were taken from a cookbook written in the 1930's called *The Art of Cooking and Serving*, for which she named one of the stories. Her fascination with the photos seemed to suggest Nell's repulsion and fascination with the domestic arts in the story.

In "My Last Duchess," Miss Bessie is based on one of Atwood's high school English teachers. She said, "She was an excellent teacher. In



**CANADIAN ICON:** Margaret Atwood was among the many authors who made the Eden Mills Writers' Festival a smashing success. *Rebecca Ring Photo*

exploding." She joked that they called their farm "Tax Laws Farm", as it was not very profitable. They made hay, acquired all kinds of animals, including peacocks, "but avoided pigs and goats." They had many visiting pigs from the neighbouring farm however, who enjoyed getting drunk on the fermenting apples fallen from their tree. She laughed as she remembered them lolling about in the morning, a little hungover from the previous night's festivities.

Reading to the rapt audience, Atwood laughed with it at the antics of Gladys and Nell, as "Nell pretended to be a person riding a horse and Gladys pretended to be a horse being ridden by a person." Gladys was rescued by Nell's horse-savvy friend Billy, who was unable to keep her. Nell, a horse novice, reluctantly agreed to take her, not wanting to feel selfish when this wheezing, elderly, neglected animal needed her.

Atwood's second reading of the day was certainly the Grand Finale. With wit, humour and compassion, Atwood illuminates the human condition with all of its tragedy and joy in stories that provoke and entertain.

More on the festival next issue.

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