It Takes a Community to Build a Library

By Susan McDonald

What does a community do when it discovers its little one-room library is in such disrepair that to fix it would be throwing good money after bad? Well, in South Marysburgh and Athol Townships, the community gets together and works hard to raise the funds to build a new library.

The South Marysburgh Public Library was founded by Ann Farwell, a local South Bay sheep farmer and former Toronto librarian, and Jeanne Minhinnick, a South Bay resident and former Toronto bookseller. In 1951, with the support of Reeve Carson Scott, they established the library in the Milford Town Hall. It was the first rural library in Prince Edward County. In 1952, operations moved to a small one-room library, built on donated land with a $1650 loan from South Marysburgh Township. In 1976, the library was renamed The Ann Farwell Public Library, following her death. In 1982, Tom Huff, Chair of the Library Board, in an effort to increase funding, successfully appealed to Athol Township to affiliate itself with the renamed Ann Farwell Library. When the time came to build a new library, both townships worked together to raise the building funds.

In 1991, the Library Board, having secured a government grant for an accessible washroom, realised the library building was in such disrepair that a new building would have to be built. Although the board was allowed to keep the grant for the washroom, the Athol/South Marysburgh community would have to raise an enormous amount of money. And raise it they did! Vernice McConnell and Cheryl Reed planned the fundraising efforts and enlisted the many people needed to make a fundraising campaign successful.

The committee held many successful events, including an auction which took place in the shed at the Milford Fair grounds. The community generously donated a large variety of items, including many antiques. John Rorabeck, auctioneer for the event, started bidding at 6:00 pm. The auction ended around midnight and raised over $7,000, a testament to John's auctioneering skill and the quality of the donated goods.

To keep the community engaged, the committee came up with some unique and fun ideas. A "Wild West" themed dance was held at the shed, complete with hay bales, horseshoes on the walls, a saloon style bar, a corral for barn animals, a live band and square dancing demonstration. Cornmeal was spread on the floor to make dancing easier. Halfway through the festivities, the bar was "robbed". The culprit was jailed in the corral and those in attendance were required to" raise bail" to get him out!

25 Years Ago, 25 Years Ahead
A Celebration of the Milford Branch Library

In 1993, the Milford Branch Library moved into a brand new building at 3053 County Road 10, thanks to the community's fundraising efforts. What will the next 25 years bring? Come to the Milford Town Hall for lunch and the launch of summer-long programming at this Branch of the Prince Edward County Library on Sunday, June 3 at 1:00 p.m. at the Milford Town Hall, 3076 County Road 10. Activities focused on art, reading and history will appeal to all ages.

For details, contact the Milford Branch at 476-4130 or milford@peclibrary.org