

# This Place

## Origins of the Denman Island Museum

by DD Fuchs

Doris and Jim Kirk, who began operating the Denman Island Post Office and General Store in 1950 were the original owners of what is now the Denman Island Museum collection. Theirs was a private collection of rocks, fossils and sea shells which they displayed in the General Store. Over time, they moved the collection to their home, building an extension in 1967 to house the collection. The collection was open to the public at no charge, and was gradually added to by other members of the community.

In 1979 the Kirk family moved their home away from the center of the island and put the collection in storage. At that time, Doris Kirk contacted the Provincial Museum Advisor in Victoria, John Adams, and requested guidance in establishing a museum on Denman Island. Mr. Adams suggested that she turn over her private collection "to a non-profit society, either a newly formed one for this specific purpose or possibly to an already established one such as the Ratepayers and Senior Citizen Organization."

The Senior's Club was the only community group on Denman Island that expressed interest in the collection, but at that time they did not have a building for their own activities much less one with room for a small museum. A grand plan was hatched. According to a letter written by Dr. Tess Trueman, (May 12, 1981) "the Senior's Club agreed to accept (the Kirk collection) and to care for it .... (and) decided to make it the nucleus of a new Museum and Seniors' Activity Center."

Land was donated, as were the services of an architect, but it took this group "two years to achieve the necessary zoning for the property, to become incorporated and to become registered as a charitable society for tax purposes" (Trueman, 1981).

In October 1980, the *Denman Seniors and Museum Society* was incorporated. The purposes of the society as stated in the constitution were:

1. The construction of a building to be known as the DSMC Center to house a museum and other facilities;
2. The maintenance of the completed center and care of the contents of the museum;
3. To promote and maintain harmony and goodwill among the people, irrespective of race, colour and creed;
4. To provide facilities for adult social events;
5. To give aid to the needy and less fortunate, and its members shall comfort and help those who are

sick or in distress.

A fund-raising campaign led by the new society's president Dr. Trueman, established a goal of \$300,000.

By 1982 the Society completed the first phase of its plan, the building of a Seniors Lounge containing display cabinets for the museum collection. A Museum Committee was formed that began cataloguing the existing collection and accepting new items from the community. The Museum Committee consisted of five executive members supported by twelve volunteer workers.

Throughout the 1980's the museum in the lounge was open to the public, free of charge, every afternoon during July and August. 480 visitors were recorded during 1987 and 766 in 1989 and in these same two years, donations and sales of craft items grew from \$220 to \$335. In 1988, Charlotte Molnar, the chair of the Museum Committee, wrote in the annual Report of the Museum Committee: "The success of the museum is of course very much dependent on the active and moral support of the (Denman Seniors and Museum) Society as a whole, and for that unstinting support this committee is truly grateful."

In 1992, a \$7500 bequest to the museum from the estate of Eileen May McGee was the inspiration for the next phase of the *Denman Seniors and Museum Society's* grand plan. At that time, the museum's collection was still housed in the lounge of the Activity Centre, so the following year a fundraising campaign was begun to raise \$40,000 to build the 820-square foot building where the museum now lives. The project was supported by a grant from the New Horizons Agency, raffles, bake sales and volunteer labour from the community. The new museum was formally opened on June 18, 1995.

