



## Denman Votes 'No' to a Library

*by John Millen*

It happened....! Back in 1935 Denman Island voted against joining a Vancouver Island library system. The Union Library plan of the day would receive a \$15,000 contribution from the Carnegie Library Corporation and would provide service to communities from the Malahat to Campbell River. Communities had to vote to join and would be required to make a financial contribution. For the similar library system established four years previous in the Fraser Valley the tax was \$2 per year for each property owner. Polling was done by rural School Districts. Denman votes were 13 yes and 20 no. The next year Fanny Bay, Union Bay and Royston all got their libraries but not Denman or Hornby Island.

The Denman Island Women's Institute had arranged for the services of a 'travelling library' in their first year of operation – 1920. The books were kept at the home of a member. The library books were later, until the late 1960's or early 1970's, in the care of the Burroughs family when they lived in the house that is now the Guest House Bistro on Denman Road.

Our present library is named after Dora Drinkwater who had come to the Island in 1947 with her husband Joe and two small children. They purchased the house at the corner of Denman and Northwest Roads that had been built in 1908 by Alby Graham. Joe was not well and died in 1949. Dora then supported herself and her two children by working at the General Store, delivering mail and taking in boarders. But, despite all the hard work she found time for books. She learned there was a program that provided children's books for the summer which could be lent out, and thus began her role as a librarian. When the Burroughs family could no longer manage the lending library it was moved to Dora's house. At that time there was a bookmobile from the Vancouver Island Regional Library that made monthly visits, providing books that could be borrowed.

In the late 1970s a LIP Grant enabled the addition of the Back Hall to the Community Hall. In early 1980

the Library Committee headed by Marsha Woodburn arranged for the library to be moved from Dora's house into the upstairs space of the Back Hall. Later the library was accommodated in the room off the main Hall subsequently used by the Blackberry Preschool. Finally, with the major renovation of the Community Hall completed in 1990, the present space adjacent to the Front Door of the Community Hall was created and fitted out for the library we all now know.

Through all these changes Dora was a constant participant in library work. And that was not all she did. She played the organ at Saint Saviours Anglican church and sometimes the piano at weddings; and for a time was holding the monthly Public Health Clinic for new-born babies at her house. The community decided to honour her by naming the library after her in 1997.

By 2000 Dora was having difficulty living by herself and she moved to Evergreen House in North Vancouver.

When Dora's house came up for sale in 2004 a group of 23 Denman Islanders bought the house hoping to eventually make it available for community purposes. Realistically they knew it should be demolished as it had no foundation (difference in floor level by a foot, end to end) needed a new roof and inside it was utterly unsuitable for community use. Nevertheless they felt the character of the house should be preserved. So they fixed it up on a concrete foundation and added the wrap around veranda, redid the interior and leased it to Arts Denman. Within three years Arts Denman had found donations and grants to purchase the Arts Centre property.

The Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) issue came up again. At the January 2004 meeting of DIRA a presentation was made by a representative of VIRL about the possibility of a new library for Denman Island. Subsequently a survey of Island opinion was made by DIRA. In November the results of the survey were reported as 88 in favour and 20 against, but no VIRL action has resulted.

The Dora Drinkwater Library provides excellent service, has new books purchased from Abraxas, does not fine you for late returns (but they know who you are!) and keeps files of many community activities.