The Lime Green House on the Corner

by guest columnist Cynthia Minden

Scroll back to 2002. A vintage house on the corner of Denman and Northwest roads was for sale. This had been the home of Dora Drinkwater, a beloved member of the Denman Island community.

Dora came to Denman Island with her husband and two children in 1946 and settled in the corner house. Sadly her husband died shortly thereafter and Dora did whatever she could to make ends meet. She also famously started the lending library housed in the community hall where it remains today. When I came to Denman in 1990, I remember Dora at the cafe in the back of the General Store where the post office is now, playing scrabble with a gang of other long-timers. The Scrabble dictionary lived on the window ledge. Dora was a friend to many, welcoming newcomers and old timers alike.

When Dora moved into care in Vancouver and her property came on the market, there was a lot of speculation about what would become of the old house and corner lot. The house by then was sagging badly towards the ocean. A laser level revealed a foot drop to the south-west as it rested on tree stumps and had no foundation. Before Dora moved, she had abandoned living on the second floor and maintained two downstairs rooms. The whole place was in a sorry state after she was gone.

But memories were fond and strong and the urge to preserve not only an historic house but one of a cherished community member inspired a group of us to figure out how to save it from the wrecker ball. In no time at all, 41 people pooled their resources to buy the property. The venture to restore Dora's house was called The Village House Project and the group of us known as "the village people!" The intention was to sell the house and property back to a community group at cost when the renovation was completed.

Nickel Brothers were hired to lift the grand dame up into the air so that a foundation could be build. The airborne house had a peculiar look and the new foundation underneath appeared crooked. But once it was eased back down, we found that doors and windows, long stuck, opened once again.

So many people worked to restore Dora's house! It was a true coming together of islanders, many volunteered their time, many were paid for their skills. I remember stripping seven layers of wallpaper from the upstairs walls. Our goal was to preserve at least some the historic features of the house, although renovations to to combine rooms and create a more useable space were also undertaken.

And so in 2006, Arts Denman opened the doors to the newly established arts centre in it's bright green

paint. Proudly situated on a prominent corner in Denman's tiny "downtown," this year marks the twentieth anniversary of the community space, a testament to a fine collaborative effort.

There's more to say of course, people to name and thank and hopes for the future of this small, quaint, community space. But let's pause here and wish The Arts Centre, aka "Dora's House" a fond happy twentieth year!