

# History of the Rocky Mountain House Public Library

In the spring of 1938 a group of women organized the MacDonald of Garth Chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.). The new chapter decided that it would make a lifelong project of establishing and maintaining a public lending library for Rocky Mountain House and surrounding area.

The very first library was located in a rickety old building on Main Street that opened in October, 1938 with a collection of 500 books of varying merit that had been donated or loaned. A month later, on November 26<sup>th</sup>, 1938, the library re-opened in Jesse Brown's Electrical Store. After two years of operation, the I.O.D.E. library moved into another building and doubled the shelf space.

Visitors claimed that the library was one of the best small-town libraries in Canada. New books were often beyond the means of the library, so a scheme was devised where citizens would lend their new books to the library for three months. These books were rented out for 10 cents and at the end of three months were returned to their owners.

# History continued...

There was no membership fee to join. Patrons were asked to buy a 25 cent card which allowed them 25 books. Along with overdue fines, the rent from the books and other fundraising efforts, the library was able to remain self-supporting, paying for its' own stationery costs and a small fee for room rental.

Over the years the library was relocated six times until the I.O.D.E. ladies decided that it was time to have a building of their own. "Operation Library" began and money was raised by various means including garden and flower shows, fashions shows, cooking schools, animal fairs, bake sales, turkey shoots, teas, bridge tournaments, art exhibits, raffles and even taking bets on the breakup of the North Saskatchewan River.

In June of 1958 the I.O.D.E opened the library in their new building on Main Street with 5000 books. All the members of the chapter gave countless hours of volunteer work and continued to raise money to buy new books and to pay off the building debt. At the time, every dollar that was spent on new books was matched with a grant from the provincial government.

# History continued...

By 1962, the new building was entirely paid for. In 1973 space in the basement was renovated to expand the children's area. The village of Rocky Mountain House had grown to a town of about 3000 people.

By December of 1977 the decision was made for the Town of Rocky Mountain House to undertake the establishment of a public library in accordance with the Libraries Act, appointing a library board and creating a partnership with the Parkland Regional Library System. The official takeover date was January 1, 1978.

At that time, I.O.D.E. volunteer Myrna Speers was appointed librarian. The newly formed library board held their first meeting on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1978 to discuss plans for library operations and to think about finding a new library facility

In September of 1978, the library was moved once again to a new location in the basement of the Mountaineer building. With the volunteer help of the Town crew, the Kinette Club and Oil Wives Club, thousands of books along with the shelving were set up in the 1200 square foot facility and the library opened its' doors once again on September 15<sup>th</sup>.

# History continued...

It soon became apparent that the library was outgrowing the space, so plans were made to build a new facility. Chair person of the library board, the Honorable Helen Hunley was instrumental in seeing the project through. In June of 1983, the library moved for the 9<sup>th</sup> time to its' existing home. The 8500 square foot facility was spacious and modern, boasting an atrium, a large meeting room, an audio-visual room and plenty of space to expand and grow with the community.

In July of 2004, Myrna Speers retired and Karen Paquette became library manager.

In 2005 preparations were underway to completely renovate the library building. After much discussion, the board decided to re-locate the library to a building in the industrial area for the duration of the renovation. The renovation was completed on budget and on time, and in August, 2005 a team of volunteers helped to pack up the books one more time, move back into the newly renovated building and help unpack once more. After three weeks, the library opened on September 12, 2005. The transformation was amazing!

# History continued...

The following letter was written on the occasion of the reopening.

*“This morning I had a trip down memory lane that warmed this old girl’s heart. I am so proud of this library and when I think back to the library on main street, the movers and shakers of that library were members of the IODE. At one time, we put on musicals to raise money for the library....*

*It was with a great deal of satisfaction that I saw the original library move into better accommodation and subsequently to the present facility. Over the years, my visits to the Rocky Mountain House Public Library became infrequent but my satisfaction came from knowing that it was there as a very important resource for the public. My heartiest congratulations go out to all the movers and shakers of today who believe in this necessary public service. We can all be justly proud of this excellent facility and I feel sure that it will prove to be a source of pride, satisfaction and information for all.”*

*Greeting from*

*The Honorable Miss Helen Hunley , 2005*

# History continued...

In October of 2008 the library celebrated 70 years of library service. During the 70 years, there have only been five librarians: Statia Urch, Catherine Elliot, Frieda Fleming and her assistant librarian, Angie Edgerton, Myrna Speers and Karen Paquette . In 2010 Cathie MacDonald became the new library manager.

On Friday November 18, 2011 the library facility was dedicated to the memory of The Honourable W. Helen Hunley, Chairperson of the library board in 1983 and considered to be one of the most important “movers and shakers” in this libraries history.

The Rocky Mountain House Public Library has always been a vibrant, progressive library. Everyone has worked for the common goal of creating the best library possible. Along the journey, there have been many memorable moments, providing plenty of fun and good times.

The library has a history of having tremendous support from the community, from the municipality and especially from the many volunteers . In 2012 the library is still going strong, growing and expanding, providing access to new technology and continuing to meet the needs of the community. One thing we can be sure of – our library is an essential public service and a source of pride for all!