Copies Of New Riverview History A Hit With Locals

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RIVERVIEW — Although this growing town of about 16,000 has only been incorporated for 13 years, a group of residents feels its history is rich enough to warrant a 200-page book.

In fact, editor Alex Pincombe, a noted historian from Moncton, takes the reader back to the Upper Devonian Age nearly 350 million years ago to the creation of the Petitcodiac River Valley.

While most of the history contained in "A History of Riverview" is more recent, it leaves the reader with the impression Riverview is more than just a "bedroom community" across from Moncton.

The book, released just before Christmas, is a belated bicentennial gift to the town. But, while the idea came from the local bicentennial committee headed by Tom Prescott, the Riverview Historical Association was charged with pinning down funding and putting the work together.

Helen Renouf, a long-time town resident and a writer, said the association was "hastily" put together near the end of 1983, with the aim of landing some of the province's bicentennial grants.

"By the time we got our application in, the money had all been spent. With this avenue out, the historical association did go ahead next and got a grant from New Horizons."

Through the $6,300 federal grant, the association was able to conduct a number of interviews, assemble data and prepare the book for publication.

Involvement Wanted

Not all members of the association are seniors, but Renouf said the important aspect from New Horizon's point of view was to involve as many seniors in the project as possible.

"As long as they were consulted and memories were revived, they were involved," she said.

From the time the historical interviews were conducted to the publishing of the book, nine of the people who were consulted have died. Renouf said this emphasizes the importance of writing a history while the memories of the town's beginnings are still attainable.

The association was able to retain one full-time employee during the summer of 1984 to collect information while the bicentennial committee loaned its student employee on occasion.

As a result, most of the data was collected by early 1985. However, Renouf said the book was delayed as the association wanted to retain Pincombe as editor.

Since he had several other projects on the go and New Horizons gave several extensions to its project deadline, Renouf said the association didn't push to have the book completed any sooner.

Advance Received

The group was also advanced $4,000 from the town to help pay for some of the publishing costs. After selling 400 copies in the past few weeks at $10 a book, Renouf said the association will soon be able to repay the town coffers.

"It's gone very well," she said of sales. "I'm really surprised. With the doorbell ringing and people calling, it's been a very busy holiday."

She was also surprised by some of the people who are buying the book.

"I had figured most of the appeal would be for people who had lived here a relatively long period of time."

But, newcomers are also snapping up copies, anxious to learn more about the area.

Inside they'll discover Riverview was once three communities: Bridgedale, Gunningsville and Riverview Heights — communities which grew out of farming settlements which were established in the mid-1800s.

It wasn't until 1944, when Byron Dobson saw the need for post-war housing that the now sprawling suburb began to take shape. He and his family built hundreds of homes in the ensuing years and most of the house in what was Riverview Heights were erected by his company.

The growth of all three villages led to their amalgamation in 1973, with the name Riverview authorized in 1974.

Few Monuments

Renouf noted that, although the town's history dates back more than 100 years, there are few monuments to the earlier days. Some of the older homes around which the town grew have since been demolished to make room for such commercial enterprises as a night club.

Probably the most-impressive landmark which has disappeared, according to Renouf, is the Interprovincial Home for Women. Built in 1925, the home was established for Maritime women 16 years and up in an effort to take them out of the common jails and "bring them into a Christian redemptive home environment."

The home was closed in 1972, and all that remains is the Honor House, a place where the women received more privileges for good behavior. The Honor House was recently expanded and houses the town hall and library.

The town continues to progress with construction in both housing and businesses on the rise again. There is also talk by Mayor David Richardson of having the fifth-largest municipality in the province change its status from that of town to city.

For residents such as Renouf, this isn't a popular idea. She says despite the suburban connotations, Riverview is very much a community unto itself.

"I feel it's sort of a small town," she said of the atmosphere. "I'd sooner see it stay independent as a town."

PLEASANT SURPRISE — Helen Renouf says the Riverview Historical Association is pleasantly surprised at how well copies of Riverview's new history book are selling. Renouf says the association was able to conduct a lot of background work for the book with the aid of a $6,300 New Horizons grant.