

South Algonquin Library to host author talk with Linda Hutsell-Manning Sept. 5



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Township of South Algonquin Public Library will be welcoming author Linda Hutsell-Manning to talk about her book *Fearless and Determined: Two Years Teaching at a One Room School at Madawaska Hall in Madawaska*, located at 26 A Major Lake Road on Sept. 5 at 7 p.m. The event is free to attend and the book is available at the Madawaska and Whitney branches of the South Algonquin Public Library.

Hutsell-Manning told Bancroft This Week on Aug. 14 that she always looks forward to talking to people about her one-room school experience and is continually impressed that so many people she talks to at readings either went to or taught at a one-room school. She says that 1963 to 1965 was a long time ago and for a number of decades when she was writing and being published, she didn't think her experience was noteworthy enough to write about.

"Every time I had a new book out, one of my former students would ask me when I was going to write about my two years teaching. Finally in 2017, I decided to see if I had enough information to make a book. I found I had saved a detailed scrapbook of the first year and this was my starting point. Luckily, I was able to contact and interview over a dozen of my former students who added greatly to my research," she says.

After the Second World War, Hutsell-Manning found there was almost nothing published about one-room schools. In 1965, after her school was closed, nothing was saved and after a few years, it was torn down. She said she did find the stone plaque that had been over the front door of the school, on an adjacent property's back patio. She said it was partly broken but still readable and said "Erected in 1880, Knowledge is Power."

Over the past 40 years, Linda Hutsell-Manning has been published in a variety of genres, including poetry, short fiction, children's

literature, plays, memoirs and comedy. She can be contacted at lman@nexicom.net, and for more information on Hutsell-Manning and her career, please visit her website at www.lindahutsellmanning.ca.

This will be Hutsell-Manning's first visit to South Algonquin Township and she says she's grateful to retired teacher Carol Peterson for contacting the library for her.

?The book came out in October 2019 and in 2020, 17 of my in-person readings were cancelled due to COVID-19. During 2021 and 2022, I did a number of virtual readings using a power point presentation which I will use when I read. A number of my readings have been reactivated including this one,? she says.

On Sept. 5, Hutsell-Manning will read several short excerpts using her power point pictures as well as setting up a display she made that includes the scrapbook. She says she finds that older listeners often identify with many of the episodes while those who are unfamiliar with this type of schooling find it equally interesting. She'll also have copies of several of her earlier books and will talk briefly about her upcoming picture book, due out in late September.

During her presentation, Hutsell-Manning says that she'll take listeners back to the early 1960s, what she calls a very different world from today.

?My school was on Hwy 2 between the towns of Cobourg and Port Hope. There was no telephone and of course, no cell phones. During an emergency, I had to send a student down the highway to the only neighbour's house. The school had a wood stove, two inside pit toilets, a cold water tap and 32 students from Grades 1 to 8. My one year at Toronto Teachers' College did not prepare me for this,? she says.

Hutsell-Manning says that what saved her was the fact that she'd attended a two-room area school from Grade 6 to 8, and she remembered how the teacher organized her days and used that as a guide.

?Every weekday evening, I spent three to four hours hand-writing questions to use for the following day. I would arrive at school around 7:30 a.m. and fill all the blackboards with these questions for Grades 4 to 8. Then each morning, I would work with Grades 1 to 3 while the older grades worked on their respective questions. Thankfully, several of the senior girls who finished their work early would work with the primary children while I switched to teaching the older students,? she says.

While it sounds a bit disjointed, Hutsell-Manning told Bancroft This Week they made it work and by Christmas of the first year, they were operating more like a large family and everyone was helping out where necessary. The second year, she says her workload was less as she could use much of the prep work from the first year.

?Before the second year began, I was told this would be the last year for this school, and that the students would be split up and sent by bus to several area schools. I knew this would be difficult for many, as siblings had always been together. However, children are resilient and during my interviews I heard stories of where the students ended up. All of them said that their two years at my school were the best years. High praise and humbling. Circumstance gave me this opportunity,? she says. ?Time has deemed it to be one of the most challenging and great experiences of my life.?