

Minutes of the General Membership Meeting held at 7 p.m. on Monday, March 28th 2022 in the Cobble Hill Hall, 3550 Watson Avenue.

Those present: Roger Painter - President, Robin Brett - Treasurer, Brenda Burch, Russell Dann, Nellie Poelman, Gord Dickenson, Blair Herbert, Bill Wikkerink, Dawn Smiley, Irene Evans, Shirley Cooke, Linda Bilkoski, Dave Bilkoski, Dave Thomson, George Baird, Bonnie Wadds, Mike Wilson and Gerry Giles - Secretary.

The meeting was called to order by President Roger Painter at 7:03 who welcomed everyone to the meeting after a 2 year absence due to the Covid-19 restrictions. He said he hoped the pandemic is behind us now and we, as a community, can return to some semblance of normalcy. Roger then provided the following report.

President's Report:

My report is in some ways about how we've come through Covid. It is an overview. There are others that will give greater detail on certain events. Faced with a very dim future when Covid restrictions hit we found ways to make things happen. We were looking at no Fair, had cancelled Seedy Saturday with just over a weeks' notice, and had shut down our halls to rentals. There were other things but that was the gist of it. We also had to shut down any ongoing expenses on projects we had.

One of the first tasks was our finance committee sitting down and coming up with a Covid budget that allowed us to see what we had in financial resources and how long we could last. At the time it was pretty bleak as we were looking at 3+ months at best in funds.

From there we started building plans to not only find ways to make money but to continue what activities the Institute usually did. We were very fortunate that during this time community sponsors were willing to help us out. I will mention some of the things we've done over the past two years, but they are hardly a complete list. I'm sure other people will talk to a number of items I've missed.

An interesting side note folks, during the past two years our Executive continued to function: meeting monthly and at full membership. This includes subcommittee, like the executive and Fair committees.

So, since Covid hit two years ago we have held:

- 2 very successful Virtual Fairs which have raised considerable and much need revenue. Support from a number of our usual community Sponsors continued unhindered. Considering their own financial situations surrounding Covid, it was very gratifying to see this kind of support from the community.
- We initiated a program for providing food to people in need through two Grants from the Red Cross and supplied over 10,000 meals through this program.
- This led to development of an ongoing fundraising activity of our own as we got into the business of selling meat pies and now fruit pies. These fund-raising activities have brought us from the face of potential financial disaster to a strong in-the-black position. At the same time, we were able to contribute 500 of our frozen meat pies to the CMS Food Bank this past Christmas.

- Last year, as things started to look better and regulations started to lift, we held a 100th Anniversary of the Cobble Hill Hall celebration and concert in August, supported by our Local Rotary Club. This coincided with members putting on a highly successful Show and Shine.
- In the fall we had a Halloween bonfire and welcomed the community with hot chocolate and other treats.
- This spring we will have an Easter Egg Hunt.
- On the Hall front wherever, possible we tried to work rentals in for groups that met covid restrictions, which was not an easy task.

Ground and Maintenance

1. Clean-up days were regularly held
2. The Youth Hall was painted and the kitchen replaced making the building much more user friendly. This was thanks to a Duncan Dabber Bingo Grant
3. Volunteers planted 30+ blue berry bushes along the horse field fence and these blueberries were picked and used in our blueberry pies this year
4. Volunteers also planting 10 fruit trees, which came from the CVRD and they seem to be thriving
5. We renovated and expanded the Food Storage Room off the Dining room, which has greatly enhanced our ability to store our equipment
6. South Cowichan Rotary painted the Dining room, Bar/Reception area and wheelchair bathroom
7. AND we were supported by a number of volunteers in doing general maintenance throughout the overall property and buildings. There's more but I'll stop there I'm sure there's something I've missed. The bottom line is that the Assets of the Institute have been well looked after during the past two years and now with the financial success we've had, particularly over the past year we can look at our priorities and start planning for future goals

Couple of key elements to think about

We continued to function successfully while strictly following the Provincial rules for Covid 19. Safety and legal responsibility were one of the main discussion points we followed in undertaking any activities.

As your president, leadership isn't about being up at the front and telling people what to do. Its more about working with people, finding them the resources, and getting out the way, or rolling up your sleeves and helping out. Over the past 2 years we've had considerable support from our community volunteers. Not just the business community but from general volunteers. For me as your President it has been very heartening to see the commitment and numbers of people come out and help. You know when something like something like Covid happens, you expect people to hunker down and not want to do anything. That has not been the case with our Institute. We were never short on volunteers and never did I feel like all the jobs were being left to a small few people. If I did a quick estimate, I'd say we've had well over 50 plus individuals help out in many aspects. Considering the restrictions, we had to work with, that's pretty good.

The final item I'd like to address is related to the main hall itself. 2021 was the Main Hall's 100th Anniversary. We had planned to do something to recognize this event and it seemed that putting an addition on the main hall, specifically, to expand the Dining room and Kitchen's capabilities was what we all agreed would be the plan. So, we went with that. Unfortunately, the best laid plans and our own history have gotten in the way of making that happen last year. We had to go through a number of hoops to make this happen. In doing so we've raised about \$50,000 from community donations and now we've received a Federal Grant for enough to complete the project. I'm not going to talk about details. I'll leave that to our Secretary in her report. I consider this project a true picture of the health and dynamics of our Institute. With Covid, we're still moving ahead with a project of this scope that would be as demanding under a normal year.

In closing, I'd like to take the time to thank the Board and Executive for their support and hard work over the past two years. They have been great to work with and I have appreciated being a part of this wonderful group of people.

Treasurer's Report:

Robin Brett reviewed the financial statements provided with the agenda and she gave the following treasurer's report:

We are doing well with the bank accounts holding steady for the most part and the Current Earnings better than normal for this time of year, largely because we set aside insurance money in advance. As months go by, I hope we will be able to set aside money again for these larger bills in advance of need, because by doing that, our Operating Account can keep a steady balance.

If this period of Covid has taught us anything, its to make sure we stay out of the red in Current Earnings, because life is full of surprises. Keeping our Current Earnings in the black and money set aside for large bills like insurance, we are better prepared and more sustainable even in extreme circumstances like Covid. And even as rentals and other activities return, we need to be mindful that it takes money to ramp up again.

As to the Income Statement we can see that the Catering (Meat Pie) Project continues to make 100% profit, which has been the largest contributor to our funds. This program could not run without the support of a steady group of volunteers who have been totally dedicated to keeping the institute alive. We owe these people a debt of gratitude because without them the Institute could not have survived, never mind thrived.

We've had a few more donations to the Centennial Fund and a small expense in this fiscal year for copying drawings.

The Cobble Hill Fair has also had some income, but it and the expenses on this statement pertain to the last fiscal year. We have also had a substantial government grant towards the 2022 Cobble Hill Fair, but it should be noted that these funds can only be used for the specific purposes specified in the grant application. That is why I am tracking it separately and not just jumbling those funds into the other Cobble Hill Fair Funds.

Hall and Grounds portion has a loss of \$3,343.03 largely because we have had virtually no rentals in the period November 2021 to February 2022. It should be noted, however, that this loss is much lower than past years.

The Institute portion also shows a loss. This will continue until we get our annual CVRD which used to arrive in March, but now comes in October. So, we can expect to see a loss in this area until then.

Once again, our thanks to the volunteers in the Pie program who continue to work extremely hard to support the financial needs of the Institute.

Secretary's Report:

Gerry spoke to the Red Cross program and the value the program brought to the Farmers Institute in terms of volunteers and recognition in the community. She then talked about the donations made to "help make the life of volunteers easier." After touching on the past year and a half trying to get the names on the properties own by the Farmers Institute registered in the correct legal name and the land survey done, Gerry provided the following report on the Centennial Project and other items.

On January 30th 2021, the Farmers Institute Board of Directors approved the consolidation of the seven lots upon which the Cobble Hill Hall and grounds are situated. The consolidation of this property is necessary in order to build an addition onto the dining room/kitchen area to allow for additional storage and walk in freezer. She reported we are currently awaiting the approving officer's signature with MoTI on the survey and the new plan to be registered. Once this process is completed the building permit for an addition to the kitchen/dining room to accommodate storage and freezer space can be applied for.

It is interesting to see the new surveyor's posts around the hall particularly on Fisher Road and at the Cenotaph. As time passes people (read the CVRD) tend to forget the Farmers Institute owns a portion of the Cenotaph property. The yellow surveyor's tape and white post in the centre of the bench in the Memorial Park shows how much of this land belongs to the Farmers Institute. In time the post will disappear but we should remember we own a collective say in what transpired on that property.

Through the generosity of our community and members of our society, close to \$50,000 has been raised to date for the Centennial Project. In addition, the Federal Government has also provided a grant of just over \$77,000 toward this project, which we hope will be completed by the spring of 2023.

When we applied for grant funding for the addition we used a quote from the S&B Construction. However, Roger and I recently met with them and they did not think they would be in a position to start the project until the spring of 2023, which is the date the project needs to be completed. We are currently in the process of bringing in another contractor to undertake this work and likely we will need to find more funding to finish the project.

With restrictions surrounding the global pandemic being lifted in BC and on Vancouver Island queries about rentals are picking up and a few weddings and events have been booked in our facilities. However, I am noticing people are still being somewhat cautious about event number and most are holding participants to under 100.

The dog and rabbit shows have gone ahead and the Heather sale is planned for the beginning of April. As well, the Mill Bay Garden Show is booked and will take place over two days in May. The Society for Creative Anachronism is back in April. It is also good to report TOPS has moved over to the newly renovated Youth Hall and they have indicated they are very comfortable there. They are pleased with the changes made to the venue, and with the investment made to that facility it will likely be used more heavily in the future.

We are fortunate to be welcoming five new members to the organization this month: Pauline and Thomas Hyde of Mill Bay Farms, Warren Mile-Pickup along with Anne and Bob Haugh. Anne and Bob are wonderful additions to our pot pie program.

The pot pie program sold approximately 2,000 pies in February and while I don't expect we will do the same amount in March we will still sell a fair amount. I will be suggesting to the group the last of the meat pies be sold in April and if the volunteers are still interested in participating in the program that we transition over to fruit pies. This month we have offered the fruit pies on a trial basis and we will likely sell well over 200 fruit pies.

After 2 years of serving between 240 - 260 takeout meals on the second and fourth Monday of each month, we will likely see the South Cowichan Seniors luncheons start up again inside the hall in May. We are currently looking for volunteers to help with this program as some of our past volunteers have moved on. Our kitchen staff remains a tight unit: it is the serving/cleaning staff we will be seeking. Capacity for seniors inside the hall is 150. I know we are going to be asked if there is a way to continue providing the takeout meals as well but at this point I'm doubtful.

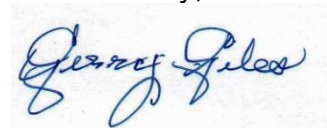
Bill and Dee Motherwell will continue to sponsor the Easter Egg Hunt again this year as South Cowichan Storage. It will be held at 10 a.m. sharp on April 17th on the Fairgrounds. They have very generously sponsored this event for a number of years.

113th Cobble Hill Fair - Blair Herbert reported the traditional Cobble Hill Fair would be held on Saturday, August 27th 2022 and planning for it has now begun.

Constitution & Bylaw Review - Russell Dann highlighted the main points of the draft proposed amendments to the existing Constitution and bylaws of the organization. This draft was distributed to the members with the agenda. Dave Bilkoski brought forward two suggestions for consideration which will be taken back to committee. The first was in 3.6 and changing the wording from one month to 30 days. The next was in 7.4 and changing the term of one year to 90 days.

There being no further business it was moved by Gord Dickenson the meeting adjourn at 8:06 p.m.

Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gerry Giles". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name of the signatory.

Gerry Giles,
Secretary