

# Lots of research is key to local author's book

By JODIE LOMBARDI

After 3½ years of patient research, a Mississauga woman has unearthed the history of a village and its people that was never before documented.

In her first published book, entitled *Hillsburgh's Heyday*, Patricia Kortland captured the flavor of the town located approximately 55 miles north of Oakville.

A chunk of Hillsburgh's history in Erin township, Wellington County, was lost in the dingy basement of the now defunct Hillsburgh Beaver, where moisture and mice destroyed all but eight newspapers representing almost 35 years of publishing. As well, there were no existing copies of the Erin Advocate before 1909.

Although research was hampered by lack of historical records, Kortland, who lives in Orchard Heights, decided to launch this project on her own after receiving permission from the Boston Mills Press in 1979 to write the 20th book in the Credit Valley Series.

Kortland, 45, has written a "smattering" of personal works including poetry, children's stories and short stories. She is also a member of the Etobicoke Writers' Group, but has had no interviewing experience.

Caring for a young son made research sporadic, but with help from her husband and mother she began by "knocking on doors to get things going."

Although she said it took almost one year before the townspeople "realized the seriousness" of her venture, Kortland ultimately gained their support and became entrusted to borrow family and area photographs, two treasured scrapbooks and, after its attic discovery, the private diary of farmer Alexander Parry.

To facilitate research, she was allowed to stay overnight in the home of a Hillsburgh woman living in the area for about 11 years.

Much of her research was done through conversations, personal and by telephone, over "cups of tea accompanied by delightful home baking and the walks to the mill alongside the pond."

Kortland's research also led her to Orangeville, various libraries in Hillsburgh and Erin, the Ontario Archives and the Toronto Library.

Finally, as a writer for Boston Mills, she proofread the whole manuscript herself and it was published in December, 1983.

Kortland said growing up in the Qu'Appelle Valley in Saskatchewan helped cultivate her interest in history. Left to do her own exploring on a Grade 5 class excursion, she remembers being fascinated by the marks left in the ground by uprooted barracks at Fort Qu'Appelle, the present site of a golf course.

"It was quite exciting to be able to wander around and find these things," she recalls.

Kortland seems equally in awe of her discoveries at Hillsburgh. She marvels at the old Hillsburgh school, still standing, yet disguised by paint; the generations of about 12 families who have remained in the area for more than 150 years; and the "good sense of co-operation and caring among the townspeople" even today.

Her book, not only peppered with absorbing detail but also packed with anecdotes of the townsfolk and a multitude of antique photographs, tells the story of the "development of a small village supporting a farm community."

One thousand copies of *Hillsburgh's Heyday* were distributed at \$9.95 throughout the village as well as the



With the family dog at her feet, Patricia Kortland of Mississauga proudly displays her first published book entitled *Hillsburgh's Heyday*. Previously undocumented, it is an absorbing account of a township's history that was almost forgotten.  
(Staff photo by Roo Beintema)

Fat Pig Boutique and W. H. Smith stores in Mississauga. Although she feels it is "a pity" that she only received \$630 for the book, the former North York public school teacher said it has not dulled her enthusiasm to tackle future projects.

In fact, just as she dug up the history of Hillsburgh, she said she may do the same for Bolton or possibly take a chance on her two favorite children's books which have been stored in her closet — Mr. Google Eyes and Tic Toc Stop The Clock.