

Muir, Irene

A cornerstone of St. Andrew's

By Bill Hunt

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Irene Muir says she has never missed a Sunday church service at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

That's pretty good for a woman now in her 10th decade of life.

At 95, Muir still lives on her own, doing her own shopping and cooking her own meals, at her house on Foster Avenue. She's lived in the same house since her parents moved there when she was four years old. Muir recalls there were no houses on the east side of her street south of the "cottage" house ... except for the house on the corner of Foster and Victoria. In the space between the houses was an open field "and I used to play ball there," says Muir. Her parents, William and Mary, had a barn on their property (now a garage) where they kept two horses and a cart. William and Mary never owned an automobile.

Muir worked at Stroud's, under former owner Joe Blackburn, for a short time before taking a job at the entomology lab, formerly on Dundas Street East. But when air conditioning was put in it, she left because it gave her hay fever, and returned to Stroud's, from which she retired.

But St. Andrew's church has been the guiding force in her life. "I do a lot of anything I can at the church. I'm going down there tomorrow to a chicken dinner," she says. In earlier years Muir sang in the choir and helped with bazarrs. She can still remember a few of the Sunday school teachers there — Miss Nellie P. Merry, who was also Muir's form teacher at Belleville High School, and Miss Rebecca Templeton, whose father owned the Templeton drugstore downtown. Rev. Laurie Sutherland used to drop by the Muir household and chat with Irene's brother, Wilfred, on the back veranda. Today Muir is the oldest member of St. Andrew's church. She's also the oldest member of the Rebekahs in Ontario, having joined as a teenager. "I joined it when they were on Front Street," she recalls.

Front Street itself holds many memories for here. For example, there were the Orange Parades held each July 12. "I think they had white jackets if I'm not mistaken, and some woman stood beside me and complained they weren't white — they were dirty," she says with a chuckle.

The flood of 1918 is another event that stands out in her mind. "Mother and I walked down and we stood there by Geen's (drugstore)...and I watched the water and (somebody) said, 'My goodness, you sure took a chance because you might get washed away any minute.'"

Throughout the years Muir has always voted and had a friend drive her to the polling station for the most recent provincial election. She still goes downtown or elsewhere for walks whenever the weather is nice. "I've gotta get out of the house," she says.

If you wish to suggest a name for Quinte Personalities, jot down the individual's name including some background information and send it to: Quinte Personalities, c/o The Sunday Intelligencer, 45 Bridge St. E., Belleville, Ont., K8N 4C7; or by e-mail, intell@intranet.ca We will consider all suggestions.



Irene Muir