

The Institute – A Way of Life!

By Helena Zinn

Times have changed a lot since I became a member of the Hampstead Women's Institute in May 1929 at the Branch's annual meeting. I was 17 then and the membership fee was 25 cents. Many girls who lived at home with their parents belonged to the Institute. I remember a meeting at our home where there were fifty ladies in attendance. We had to bring in benches for the women to sit on.

At that time, the Hampstead WI had two wooden benches in which they stored their dishes. Members brought sandwiches to their meetings, but the hostess made the desserts - always tarts and pies. Not much has changed in that department!

In the winter, we went to the meetings with a horse and cutter or sleigh. We would pick up a number of ladies along the way. The roads were never plowed back then. In those days, meetings didn't have much business, but there was always speakers on various topics,

readings, music, singing and contests. "How to" demonstrations were given on such diverse subjects as baking an apple pie, drawing, dressing a chicken, cooking a T-bone steak, ironing a man's shirt and making a lamp shade.

A "Children's Day" was organized for the July meeting, where we held a picnic, played games and held races. During the war years, the ladies knit socks for the soldiers overseas. Quilts were also made at members' homes and given to the Red Cross to be distributed where needed.

One year, the Hampstead Branch put on a play called "Early Bird." It was a great success and we were asked to perform it at the community hall in Shakespeare. We walked to the practices at the school in Clachan. At the 50th Anniversary of the Branch, we performed in a kitchen band and I played the zuka. After that, we were asked to play at election time at the North Easthope Town Hall in Shakespeare.

Throughout my seventy-seven years as an Institute member, I served as President, Secretary-Treasurer and Treasurer. I held many more offices several times. The Institute was a way of life for me as I grew up. We looked forward to the meeting



each month – learning new things and seeing each other. We made our own fun! We thought nothing of walking two miles to quilt for a day and walk back home, even in the winter. After we did our chores, we might strap on our skates and go skating on our neighbour's pond in the evening. It was lovely!

Yes! Times have changed, but for me at the age of 92, those memories are as real as they were when I was a young girl making those pies on the morning of the Institute meeting.

Helena Zinn is a 77 year member of the Hampstead WI, Perth Centre, Guelph Area.



declining membership. Now, her colleagues see her as a dynamic force for positive change at the local Branch. Flikweert said it's just a matter of developing interest through activities that appeal to the membership and the community at large.

The annual Easter Bonnet Parade, for instance, has been growing in popularity since she introduced it in 2001. Donning their bonnets, from left to right, are members Norma Flood, Joanne Flikweert and Jean Turner.

*Extracted from an article by Nick Gardiner The Recorder & Times, Brockville.
Photo courtesy of Darcy Cheek, The Recorder & Times.*

WI Changing With the Times

Fifteen years ago, Joanne Flikweert knew next to nothing about the Women's Institute and had no real interest in learning anything more. Now, the Ways and Means Chair of the Junetown WI can't imagine her life without "the Institute." "It's a great way of getting to know the people in your community, your neighbours. You get together once a month and you learn things," she said.

Flikweert credits a Women's Institute public speaking course for helping her shed her shyness and developing a celebrated power of persuasion that helps to keep the 30-member Junetown Institute a vibrant organization in days of