

We're History

by Doreen Howes



We are an organization of rural women in the area around Parham that has worked, survived and grown, and we have gradually come to this. We're history! I am speaking of the Parham Women's Institute formed in 1923.

In the beginning there seemed a great need for such an organization. It was some times called the rural women's university because it did educate and develop the talent of rural women in so many ways. Many educational courses were offered through the Department of Agriculture in Ontario, who paid for office facilities, the printing of our *Home & Country* newsletter every three months and the salaries of the trained women who gave us instruction at the short courses. All this for the enormous sum of 25 cents a year for membership!

We were never rich in funds; we weren't suppose to be. You were suppose to use the money you raised to do things for the community, particularly for the young people. And so this is what we did. When I came to Parham in 1943, the WI provided the school with "something hot" in the winter in the form of cocoa three days a week and soup on the other two days. The WI sponsored public speaking contests and awards in our schools and bought trophies and cups. They sponsored 4-H clubs and provided competent leaders.

In the community, the Women's Institute contributed in numerous ways to different

local needs. They worked to help organize and sponsor the competitions and prizes for the local Agricultural Society and Fair, the services and programs for Remembrance Day and the safety awareness days for the Volunteer Fire Department and Ambulance Unit. The list goes on and on over the years of their existence.

A decade ago, the provincial government decided they could no longer provide grants to our organization; the WI had to make their own way. Inevitably, fees had to rise.

The Women's Institute is a wonderful organization and I have been a part of it for over 60 years, like most of us with the Parham WI. I am feeling too old, too worn out and too drained of spirit to continue doing the same thing. We do not have enough active members to fill the executive positions, so we have had to take on two jobs. We decided to meet in the afternoon when night time driving became problematic for some. But that cuts off the membership to the young working women and so we don't have any new blood. We are dying!

As of March 31, 2003, we were disbanded. There is an Associate Membership with FWIO that each of us can take out to keep in contact, but we will miss the friendships and sharing at our monthly meetings. It is so sad to have this happen. Did we neglect something? Did we not make ourselves known? Or was it inevitable? Will we be missed? Another indication of how modern times have changed us!

Extracted from an article by Doreen Howes, Parham WI, Frontenac, Kingston Area, in The Frontenac News, March 2003.

Beamsville WI Celebrates WI Week

In celebration of WI Week in February, the Beamsville Women's Institute held an Open House "Gardening Seminar," led by Jim Lounsbury from the Vineland Nursery. A Tin Punching Workshop, under the direction of Sharon Skea, was also held the same week. All workshops were open to the public. Two friends of the WI (seated) are shown with members Sharon Skea (left) and Sylvia House (right).

Submitted by Angela Valli, PRO, Beamsville WI, Lincoln, Hamilton Area.



Thanks for the Memories

Many Institutes have had to close their doors because of declining membership. This is sad to observe, yet they felt it was the only thing they could do. But there is hope for those groups that are still holding together.

I have belonged to the Rosedene Branch for the past five years and have loved every minute of it. Many think the Women's Institute is a bunch of women sitting around drinking tea and coffee and gossiping. They are surprised to find out that we do much, much more. That we make a difference in peoples' lives, that we make a difference in the lives of our family and friends, and that we make a difference in the communities we live in.

Institutes, in part, are a source of wonderful memories to be passed on to the younger generation. Our Branch is thriving with a growing number of new and younger members. Women are joining in their late twenties and early thirties and are bringing fresh ideas with respect to the needs of growing communities. It is wonderful to see these young women looking to find their way and wanting to improve life in their community, as I did.

Some of these ladies are coming to us because Institutes in the surrounding area have disbanded. We try to meet in a central location, we meet with an open mind and warm welcomes, and we meet as women trying to make a difference. Most often these younger women return and become enthusiastic members.

I wish to thank the Women's Institute members who have made such a difference in my life. Thank you to all who have helped me find a way to give something back to the community in which I live and work. I look forward to each meeting and I look forward to passing on memories to our younger membership.



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