



A WI Success Story

By Jean Tandberg

Do you remember that old song that went: "I found a million dollar baby in the five and ten cent store?" Well, that is how I feel about the Women's Institute. Who would ever expect to find such a prestigious organization in a small, out-of-the-way place like Aspdin?

The women of Aspdin in the Muskoka District had enough foresight to organize a Branch of the WI back in 1948. It wasn't easy; not one of these ladies drove a car. Women just didn't drive back then. Some of them walked miles to attend a meeting, most bringing their pre-school children with them over unplowed roads in winter and fighting annoying mosquitoes in warm weather, and never missing a meeting. Just imagine!

Reading through the old minute books is a real "eye opener." When our local fall fair was floundering and threatening to close down, who came to the rescue? The Aspdin WI of course! The fair is now 117 years old and still going strong, thanks to WI!

In spite of our history and strong community efforts, however, the day came that our Branch was down to two members. Age and health had caught up to us and some members had moved away. Two members? Yes, we were down to two members! Neighbouring Branches suggested we disband and join them. Everyone was most welcoming, but the two of us hung on for over two years. So when the realization hit that we couldn't go on like this indefinitely, we decided to get busy and recruit additional members. But how?

For years, everywhere, at all levels of the Institute, that seemed to be the question. How? At District, Area or the provincial



Ten of the 12 members are shown here from left to right: Pat Miller, Mary Carpenter, Joan Risto, Doreen Allen, Dorothy Pollard, Betty Howes, Betty Galloway, Shirley Roberts, Lois Stead and Jean Tandberg.

level, the same question was asked. How? And if you sat back and listened at any one of these levels, you heard the same thing: "The Institute is not the same now. We used to have all these courses through the Department of Agriculture." The Department would give courses on everything, from smocking to handling finances, from baking bread to understanding that modern invention the microwave, from needlework to gardening. The list was endless.

The Department of Agriculture would choose a craft or subject and the Home Economist would organize and teach it in a locality. The Home Economist would send out notices to each Branch. She asked each Branch to send at least two members or more to take the course and then go back and teach it to other members and to their community. I attended and enjoyed all of the courses, and I missed them when they were no longer offered. We thought if these courses were so important, and believe me they were, we should do something about it. And we decided to do just that!

We organized a Branch Meeting for 10 a.m., followed by a potluck luncheon (and who doesn't like getting together over food?) and an afternoon of crafts. We invited everyone in the neighbourhood to join us, no charge, just to come and enjoy and learn. In the beginning, no one was actually invited to join our Branch. But in no time we had 12 members. Our schedule has changed to accommodate our members, but we are still learning. There are

always new topics to choose from and the speakers from the different organizations are glad to come, if asked. And here, in a small place like Aspdin, the list is endless!

Fifty-four years of WI and I am still learning and enjoying. And we are not so remote any more. Nearly all of the ladies drive a car, our roads are plowed and paved and Aspdin is no longer such an out-of-the-way place. Our members still sew and knit, help out in the community and learn and enjoy it. Our attendance is above average and the participation and fellowship is whole hearted.

I could go on and on, but you will have to excuse me. I have a WI meeting coming up that I can't miss! Good luck with your recruiting!

Farmers' Week Project

What do hungry young farmers want for lunch? Why food, of course! For the past few years, six Grey and Bruce WI Branches have worked together during the first week of January to provide meals for Grey-Bruce Farmers' Week. Centreville, Elmwood, Lambash, Louise, Malcolm and Solway Women's Institute members brought pies and provided 671 meals that week.

On Beef Day, members prepared for 190; but by 11 a.m. the word was out there would be 240 people requiring lunch. Did this faze our Institute members? No! They peeled more potatoes, adjusted the amount of vegetables and cut more pies to let our farmers have another hearty meal.

Laughter and hard work mingle as we enjoy working together for Farmers' Week.

Submitted by Helen Weirmeir, Louise WI, Grey.