

HOMES & COUNTRY

A Mystery Solved

By Marion Egerter

The Niagara District Women's Institute has been involved in the search for an historic plaque, which disappeared from the Peace Bridge about 40 years ago. The plaque commemorated an important ceremony that took place on June 16, 1936, involving delegates returning from the 1936 Washington Conference of the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW).

All traffic was halted on the Bridge as representatives of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada (FWIC) and the Federal Home Bureau in the United States unveiled a plaque celebrating the friendship and cooperation of rural women across a common border.

The event was broadcast nationally and internationally. The ACWW President Mrs. Alfred Watt spoke briefly. Several hundred people, including WI members and the public, listened to the speeches from Canadian and American officials with the aid of loudspeakers. The Peace Bridge had only been closed to traffic one other time, for the Bridge inauguration in 1927 attended by Edward VII, then Prince of Wales.

Appeals from WI member and local historian Bev Jewson in the late 1980s and early 1990s to local authorities for information about the lost plaque proved fruitless. More recent efforts also proved fruitless, until the District went public. Using a 1936 Buffalo newspaper photo of the Peace Bridge ceremony, a cardboard facsimile of the plaque was reconstructed. This was included in several displays in local libraries and letters were sent to newspaper editors in both countries.



Celebrating the find are, from left to right, Jerinne Porteous – Lincoln District President, Marion Egerter – Lincoln District and Hamilton Area PRO, Bev Jewson – local historian and Bowen Road WI member, and Doryne Levere – Niagara District President.

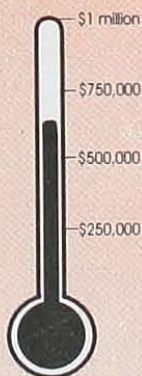
The Niagara Falls Review decided to run a story about the search, including a photo of the model plaque. A few days later, the lovely bronze plaque, in excellent condition, was anonymously returned to the side porch of the Jewson home in rural Fort Erie. Success at last!

But as this ceremony was researched in microfilms of old newspapers on either side of the border, another mystery cropped up! The June 16, 1936, issue of the Niagara Falls Evening Review revealed a picture of the ceremony, but with a different plaque! Further research revealed that at the ceremony on June 16, a facsimile plaque was used, possibly because the larger one was not ready. This plaque has yet to be found.

On July 29, 1936, six weeks later, the real plaque commemorating the June 16th "Pilgrimage of Friendship" was unveiled before several hundred Canadian and American women, and again the Bridge was closed to traffic.

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To date:

\$591,738.71

Goal - \$1 million

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