



By Sandra Egger

Last April, a few interested women attended the regular meeting of the Canboro Women's Institute at the home of Audrey Ricker. The New Branch Organizer for the Area - Isobel Booker - spoke at this meeting about the history, aims and objectives of the WI.

In August, this core group of interested women who attended the April meeting gathered to brainstorm about program topics for a new Branch, keeping in mind they were busy with their families and worked outside of the home. They suggested guest speakers on the following topics: financial planning, farm safety, learning disabilities, interior decorating, women's issues (from the perspective of a local women doctor or lawyer), and public health.

In September, women were contacted by phone and a notice about the organizational meeting was put in the local paper. Fourteen interested women came to my home. Audrey Ricker, Board Director for Haldimand East, and Regina Wagter, District Secretary, guided us through our first meeting.

Our guest speaker was one of our own members - Laurie Vanden Hurk. She spoke and presented slides on Tanzania. Laurie, her husband, Ted, and their three children have spent two terms in Africa sponsored by the United Church of Canada.

At our October meeting, we signed our charter. We called ourselves the Oswego Friendship Branch - Oswego after the creek that runs through the corner of the Township where most of us live, and Friendship because of what we share.

In November we held a 'craft night,'

and in December, a 'family night' with a pot luck supper.

In preparation for this profile a questionnaire was circulated at the pot luck supper asking two things: Why did you join the Women's Institute?, and What do you hope to do for your community? Some of the responses are outlined below:

"To get to know my neighbours better."

"I wanted an opportunity to get to interact with neighbours and friends. And to take an active part in safety aspects and to help others in the community."

"My mother-in-law is very involved in WI, so I wanted to find out what it was like. It is a good chance to make new friends and meet neighbours."

"To get out with women my own age and do something for my community, and yet for myself too."

"I'm impressed by the accomplishments of the WI in Canada and wanted to be a part of this community-based organization working to improve our homes and country. I wanted to get to know neighbours better, and to develop the kind of neighbourhood support network that I grew up with. After we become better established we will understand what issues are important to us all and try to find ways to address these."

"To meet women the same age and to get involved in my community. To make our community a safer place for our children."

"WI has been a part of my family for many years and now I feel I have some time to join such an interesting organization and meet with my neighbours on a regular basis. [I wanted] to keep our community a safe, friendly place for my children to grow up."

Sandra Egger is the President of the Oswego Friendship Women's Institute Branch.



The Oswego Friendship Women's Institute members from left to right are: Laurie Vanden Hurk, Wilma Ipema, Sandra Egger, Helen Tiersma, Joyce Kirkpatrick, Marjorie Hoekstra, Diana Langeraap, Pat Ricker, Cindy Huitema, and Laurie Ricker.

Profile:

Ruth Ella Riehl of Brunner



Ruth Ella Riehl fondly remembers September, 1926, when a new one-room school was opened in her community of Elmhurst, and how that same year a support group came into being - the Elmhurst Women's Institute.

Ruth Ella was elected President of this newly-formed WI Branch and one of their first projects was to supply the school with some necessary furnishings. The Institute fed over 200 people at a fowl supper in the new school and raised enough money to buy a tower bell for the belfry, a "comfortable" swivel chair for the teacher, and a piano with an adjustable stool.

In addition to WI work, Ruth Ella had plenty of work to do at home as the mother of four boys, including twins. In addition, during her days as a farm wife, she made meals for a fifteen member threshing gang who travelled from farm to farm.

In retrospect, Ruth Ella was truly a community leader. She exemplifies the very principles on which the Women's Institute was founded - For Home And Country. She has held all of the offices at the Branch level, and always encouraged and supported WI projects and community concerns.

At 101 years of age, Ruth Ella Riehl has seen many changes take place in her lifetime. She was born Ruth Ella Packham of Downie Township and has lived her life in and around the Stratford area. She is a delightful conversationalist and vividly recalls the early days of living in rural Ontario.