

Belmont Women's Institute Observes 40th Anniversary

By STAFF REPORTER

Belmont Women's Institute of East Peterborough celebrated its 40th birthday Thursday in the Belmont township hall, about three miles east of Havelock.

Centre of attraction was a large cake, iced with colored roses, and the words "B.W.I., 40th Anniversary", within a heart of pink icing. Surrounding the cake were quantities of good food, cooked as only members of a women's institute can cook.

Thirty institute members were present, including four charter members, Mrs. H. Tinney, Mrs. W. E. Anderson, Mrs. George Smith, and Mrs. George Hartin.

STOVE-SIDE MEETING

Immediately after the hearty meal, the ladies gathered around an old pot-bellied stove that was giving off a healthy one-sided heat. They sipped tea while listening to Mrs. George Rigby, of Havelock women's institute, and her daughter, Mrs. W. H. Sparks (Edna), who has just returned from Germany. The speakers' topic was "things seen and unseen in women's institutes."

While wisps of snow peeped through windows, and red and yellow fire glowed through openings in the black stove, Jimmy Dafeo, age 5, and Janice Green, 3, played together behind the circle of institute members.

Mrs. W. M. Platt, and the press reporter of the Belmont WI, Mrs. J. E. Corneil, had prepared a history of the institute.

The Belmont women's institute of East Peterborough was organized in the township hall, November 24, 1915, by Miss N. V. Powell of Whitby, assisted by Mrs. C. Macoun of Campbellford.

The scrutineers for the election of the first slate of officers were Miss Mae Ketchen and Miss Maggie Peoples.

Mrs. John A. Sexsmith was elected president, an office she held until April, 1926. Her husband, the late John A. Sexsmith, served as federal member of parliament for East Peterborough for many years, and it was largely through her efforts that the Belmont Women's Institute came into existence.

Other officers were: Vice-presidents, Mrs. Harry Tinney, Mrs. James Freeman; secretary-treasurer, Miss Maggie Peoples; directors, Mrs. J. Seabrook, Mrs. George Smith, Miss H. Sexsmith; auditors, Mrs. C. Rylyott, Mrs. W. E. Anderson.

Twenty members were enrolled but by the end of the institute year, April, 1916, the number had increased to 42. There are 15 of the members who joined that year still living. They are: Mrs. Joseph Seabrook, Mrs. W. E. Anderson, Mrs. George Smith, Mrs. George Hartin, Mrs. Leonard Keene, Mrs. James McMillan, Mrs. James Longmuir, Miss E. Clark, now Mrs. Henry Sexsmith of Toronto, Miss Mary Seeney, Miss Mae Ketchen, now Mrs. John Reynolds of Lasswege, Mrs. Harry Tinney, Mrs. T. W. Sexsmith (Norwood), Miss Mae Clark, now Mrs. Hinds of Harold, Mrs. G. B. Sanders, Miss Hattie Russell, now Mrs. J. McKeown of Stanwood.

At the first meeting held at the home of Mrs. W. E. Anderson, a resolution was put on the books, "that as the Belmont Women's Institute have noticed that the district representatives of the department of agriculture at Norwood have, during the past few years, instituted a number of rural school fairs in the county of Peterborough and after an inquiry the members are convinced that much good can be derived through the holding of these fairs by arousing the interest of the children in the many subjects dealt with and as a number of people in several sections of Belmont township desire that a rural school fair be organized in the township of Belmont; be it resolved that a copy of this resolution be sent to the district representatives at Norwood requesting them to organize a rural school fair for Belmont township in 1916".

That was the beginning of the rural school fair held annually in the town park for many years which attracted large crowds.

The institute realized the netted \$40.66 from sales at a booth they sponsored at the first school fair.

At this meeting, owing to the absence of Miss M. Peoples (the late Mrs. Dunlop), Mrs. Joseph Seabrook was elected to the office of secretary-treasurer, an office she held for 23 years with the exception of one year.

As the Belmont Women's Institute was formed in the early stages of the First World War, the greater part of their activities during its duration was patriotic work. Donations in money were made to the British and Canadian Red Cross societies.

During the Second World War the story of their activities was very much the same: one of hard work and untiring effort.

COMMUNITY HALL

Turning to their other activities, the community hall or as it is better known, the township hall, was badly in need of repairs when they were organized. The many renovations included a new kitchen, with cupboards. Nearly all their meetings are held there and the first supply of dishes for their refreshments period were supplied by each member bringing a cup and plate. Later a piano, sink, ware and stove were purchased and a lending library started.

The grounds were landscaped and memorial trees were planted. This was accomplished by the men of the district who organized several bees and worked with horses, scrapers and shovels. The branch sponsored the girls' club and assisted with the local oratorical contests.

Assistance was given to needy families as the need arose and Christmas cheer boxes were sent each year to the aged and shut-ins. Many short courses were held.

To raise the funds for all these

activities they sponsored bingos, bazaars, card parties, bake sales, Seth Parker nights, made quilts, and so on.

The 1955 executive consists of the following: President, Mrs. Horace King; vice president, Mrs. R. Outwater; second vice president, Miss Nellie Davidson; secretary-treasurer, Mrs. Arnold Dafeo; pianists, Mrs. W. Anderson, Mrs. C. Jones; press reporter, Mrs. J. E. Corneil; district director, Mrs. G. Hartin; alternate district director, Mrs. G. Wright; directors, Mrs. R. Vansickle, Mrs. A. Keene, Mrs. C. Jones.

The institute meets once every

month at the township hall, as they have done for the past 40 years, and will probably continue to do so for many years to come.

The following is a list of those who have held the office of president since the branch was organized. Mrs. J. A. Sexsmith, Mrs. H. L. Scott, Mrs. Donald Anderson, Mrs. Charles Kennedy, Miss Iva Smith, now Mrs. J. Trudeau, Mrs. William Smith, Mrs. Arthur Russell, Miss G. Dafeo now Mrs. E. Payne of Lakefield, Mrs. Robert Anderson, Mrs. Eric Ellis, Mrs. Robert Wrightly, Mrs. Charles Ellis, Mrs. Wm. Kitchen, Mrs. Charles Jones, Mrs. George Hartin, Mrs. William Harris and Mrs. Horace King.