

Sunshine Women's Institute

In submitting this article for the 125th Anniversary of St. Bernard's Parish of Fournier, the 1991 members do so in tribute to the founding members, those who have moved away from the area, and those who have gone to their eternal rest. All are fondly remembered for their contribution to Sunshine Women's Institute as we know it today.

Adelaide Hoodless, founder of the Women's Institute movement, organized the first branch in Stoney Creek, Ontario (near Hamilton), on February 19, 1897. Her objective was to establish an educational organization dedicated to the development of rural women and through them, the improvement of family living and society. The motto "For Home and Country" clearly outlines the objectives. This was the beginning of a movement which has spread throughout Canada and the world. All branch members are members of the Federated Women's Institute of Ontario (FWIO), the Federated Women's Institute of Canada (FWIC) and Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW).

On June 8, 1938, Mrs. Sadie Barton (W.G.) of Vankleek Hill, District President for Glengarry and Prescott counties, held an organization meeting at the home of Mrs. Sadie Sproule in Fournier. The name of "Sunshine Women's Institute of Fournier" was adopted at that time. Alma MacGillivray acted as first president, Milly Wilkes (Ernest) was first secretary/treasurer. Other members of the first executive and directors were Alice McCusker (John), Hannah Kinnear (W.G.), Sadie Sproule (W.), Violet Bradley (Alfred), Ethel Surch (Emmet), Charlotte Scott (Delbert), Charlotte Sloan (G.A.) and Stella Lalonde (Arthur). The first year's membership consisted of 30 ladies. After two years, members from the Lemieux area left Sunshine to organize Lemieux Women's Institute.

By 1948, a sufficient number of branches (10) had been organized to warrant leaving Glengarry and organizing Prescott County District Women's Institute. First district president was Beatrice Stewart (Robert) of Pendleton. Members of Sunshine who have acted as Prescott district president have been Esther Ryan (Carl), Mary Gates (Whitney), Ruby Proudfoot (W.G.) and Marie Wilkes (Orville). Prescott, with its seven branches today (Lemieux, Pendleton, Everready-Vankleek Hill have disbanded), is one of 13 county districts making up Eastern Ontario Area No. 1. Ruby Proudfoot served as Eastern Ontario area president for 1987-1989. W.I., through the years, has given them the experience and expertise needed to fill such positions.

Records show the Sunshine Women's Institute members have been volunteers and very active in the community. They have moved with the times, always accepting change and responding to the needs of the young, the youth and the adults. The early years were the beginning of the Second World War, and Sunshine members, true to the motto "For Home and Country", took an active part in helping the Red Cross with knitting and sewing. Parcels of food and cigarettes, as well as letters, were sent to the local boys overseas.