

Balsam Hill WI celebrates 100 years

by Lynn Clelland

A ceremonial candlelighting reminded the 11 members and 16 visitors of the Balsam Hill Women's Institute that they were about to share the same program as 16,000 other members across the province. This unique program was created to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the February 19, 1897 organizational meeting.

The roll call had members and friends reminisce about new skills learned through WI workshops and 4-H clubs supported throughout the years by WI branches.

As in the past, a motto was presented — "Celebrate the Past — Challenge the Future".

Everyone joined enthusiastically to sing a special song written for the centennial celebrations.

The Balsam Hill members entertained their guests by performing a short humorous skit written by fellow member Carol Bennett McCuaig.

The guests also had a chance to take a trip down memory lane as they perused the pages of the Tweedsmuir History.

Women's Institutes — Women Involved. This organization, with a history of helping families and communities throughout the world, eagerly looks forward to maintaining these valuable traditions as we enter the 21st century.

Following is the text of a speech read at the 100th anniversary of the Balsam Hill WI.

One hundred years ago, the Women's Institute was

born. Tonight we celebrate that birthday. We celebrate the vision and the energy that created a worldwide organization with the growth and development of women as its mandate. We celebrate the fact that this organization has evolved and adapted so that it is as vital in 1997 as it was in 1897.

We associate Adelaide Hoodless with the past when we talk about the WI. This is a lady who turned personal tragedy into triumph and who attacked a problem with all the resources at her disposal, never taking no for an answer. She wanted to make sure that all rural women had the best use of the resources around them so that their personal potential, and the potential of their families would be realized. She envisioned an organization which would provide education and a social support group for women.

Thousands of women have followed her dream ... think of the changes that Adelaide would have seen in 100 years since she banged the gavel at the very first meeting. Hemlines that go up and down depending on the decade, women wearing pants, the invention of the car which changed the time required for travel (and courting rituals), the telephone which increased the ability to share ideas, two World Wars and a Depression which tore the very heart out of families, the development of medical technology, and drugs which have increased life expectancy.

Remember when you had to take Latin or French at

school and you said that it was all Greek to you?

How about today's language that has people conversing about bits, bytes, gigabytes, web sites, downloading, DOS, mouse, modem, Windows, ROM and the Internet? You may get by without learning this new language ... but your grandchildren won't.

The guest speaker at the WI Centennial celebrations later this year will be Canadian scientist and astronaut, Dr. Roberta Bondar. She exemplifies the future and the challenges it presents for all of us.

What would she and Adelaide Hoodless have in common? What would they talk about over a cup of tea? Both ladies were born in Canada but now are known all over the world. Both have their visions of the future ... Dr. Bondar said that seeing our earth from space was a humbling experience that reinforced her belief in the need for increased education to prevent pollution and other measures destructive to our planet. I think Adelaide would approve, don't you?

For the past few weeks a documentary TV show entitled Women: The True Story has outlined the history of the roles of women, their problems in society and the evolution of feminism. The final episode "A Postcard from the Future" showed how vital women's input is to the survival of this planet.

Thousands of women took turns being present outside a nuclear weapons site in England for seven years to protest the use of these weapons in the world.

While the Russian and Chechnian armies fight each other in a civil war, the mothers of the soldiers are cooperating to release political prisoners, provide medical care for both sides, and return 16-year-old recruits to their families.

Because women in Kenya must spend a large part of their day travelling on foot to find firewood, they are taking the initiative to plant fast-growing trees near their communities so that their daughters will not have to work as hard as they do.

In Canada, small businesses are providing the basis for much of the new growth in our economy. The largest percentage of these businesses are operated by women.

The future is indeed a challenge for us all. Ideas that once were considered science fiction are now a reality. Earth's ozone layer is threatened by man-made causes. We have polluted the very water and soil that we take for granted.

Adelaide's dream of an organization of women who are leading the way, fighting for the things that matter to Home and Country is just as important ... perhaps even more important today than 100 years ago.

Let us celebrate the past: give a cheer for all those women who have kept the vision alive through the years ... and let us face the future with the same willingness to preserve those values so that our children and grandchildren will also be able to take them for granted.

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Balsam Hill Women's Institute

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