

Map of Wellington W.I. history celebrates group's 100th year

MARGARET HAYLOCK-CAPON
THE COUNTY

A map depicting the history of the Wellington Women's Institute will be presented to Wellington Library, on Sunday, Jan. 20, the 100th anniversary of the organization's formation.

Artist and mapmaker Iris Walker, of Wellington says, "This map will be dedicated to all members who have come before us and given so much to this community and in loving memory of my mother, Edith A. Ball, a member of the W.I. from 1925 to 1937."

The Women's Institute was founded in Canada by Adelaide Hoodless of Stoney Creek, Ontario, in 1897, to provide domestic science education and fellowship for women. A non-denominational organization, it now exists in 60 countries, worldwide.

The Wellington W.I. founded in 1908, was the first branch in Prince Edward County, say Gail Ellsworth and Tina Gemmell, who provided the historical synopsis for Mrs. Walker's map. Meetings took place in the Masonic Hall, then in the Fitzgerald Block (now the site of Nashs' Home Hardware) and later in the Alexander Hotel (at the present site of Pierson's Foodland). The hotel burned down in 1917 and the meetings were moved to the school, behind the town hall, then in 1923, to the domestic science room of the new Wellington Consolidated School.

During The Great War, Wellington W.I. members knitted 1,000 pairs of socks for its soldiers and sugar for jam-making was sent to Britain.

Monies raised through quilting, teas, bazaars, banquets, plays rummage sales and catering provided furnishings for the operating room at the new hospital in Picton, new gates for Wellington Cemetery and lights and trees in the village park.

A scholarship for the top student at the school was established in 1925, when W.I. members also began to manage a government travelling library from a rented storefront on Main Street. When the Wellington Library opened, in 1928, W.I. members were invited to hold their meetings there, at no charge. They accepted this offer and donated books valued at \$200. to the new village library.

A 25th anniversary concert raised funds for the library and "Relief Work" during The Great Depression.

The W.I. returned its meetings to the Town Hall, in

1939, when the library was needed as an enlistment centre, during the Second World War. Members "worked feverishly" in the war effort, making new clothes from old, for bombed-out victims in Britain. They also sent comfort parcels to the soldiers.

The Tweedsmuir History of Wellington was initiated in 1941, to preserve community history.

Post-war fundraising included saving "coppers" and a great deal of catering to send local youngsters to camp, support adopted war orphans, purchase library books and provide disaster relief and support for the hospital, including the furnishing of a new, private room in 1954.

During the 1960s, the W.I. sponsored well-attended weekly night classes in oil painting, bookkeeping, metal craft, typing, sewing, upholstery and welding.

Members also organized a rota to staff the Wellington Museum, in the Quaker Meeting House, when it opened during Canada's centennial (1967).

Fundraising initiatives included "Birthday Boxes", "Pennies for Friendship", card parties and more catering. Members improved their knowledge and skills at meetings, learning more about their community, agriculture, crafts, local business and industry, citizenship, culture, education, health and leadership development.

Eventually, the W.I. experienced a decline in member-

ship, a trend that reversed, with the arrival of the Millennium. The group celebrated its 95th anniversary with a large picnic in Wellington Park.

In 2003, the W.I. was invited to return home to the recently expanded Wellington Library for its meetings and in 2005, members procured a \$15,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to furnish their new meeting room.

Current fundraising activities include raffles, sales of notecards and CDs and the innovative "No-Bake Sale".

Scholarships established 82 years ago are still awarded to the top students at the school and the W.I. continues to support the museum, the food bank, the library, the hospital auxiliary, Wellington Cemetery, the hospice, the Children's Aid Society, Habitat for Humanity, Garrett's Island Farm Retreat and the Santa Claus Parade. Comfort parcels are still being sent to the troops, this time in Afghanistan.

Wellington W.I. has participated in the District Annual Art and Craft Sale, since its establishment in 1983. Proceeds from this sale allowed the county to establish the Quinte Access Bus Service, for seniors and the mobility challenged, in 2007.

The map that will be presented to Wellington Library, this month, will commemorate the centennial of the W.I..

Also, to mark this noteworthy occasion, a commemorative public bench has been placed on the dock in Wellington Harbour.

“ *The Wellington Women's Institute, founded in 1908, was the first branch in Prince Edward County.* **”**

W.I. mapmaker always wanted to come to Canada

Although artist Iris Walker, who crafted a map commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Wellington Women's Institute, spent most of her life in England, she has strong ties to Wellington Village.

Born in Wellington, in 1926, she attended Wellington Consolidated School, as a small child. In 1937, she returned to England with her parents.

"My father was a tinsmith at Nash Hardware and after he went to England he worked on Hurricanes and Spitfires."

Mrs. Walker adds that her father, whose parents were British, was born in the United States. His family lost everything in the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and he was sent to live with his grandparents in MacLean, a small community north of Kingston.

While working in Kingston, he met Mrs. Walker's mother, Edith, who was from England. She had come alone to Canada, at the age of 17, to live with an aunt.

"We are a travelling family," laughs Mrs. Walker.

She says that she and her husband always wanted to come to Canada.

"We went to a presentation, in 1947, because we thought we would like to come here."

However her husband was told that it was advisable for him to remain in England. He was an accountant and it was largely blue collar workers that were being encouraged to come to Canada.

Mrs. Walker says she and her husband did not realize their dream, until 2000, when they left England to settle in Prince Edward County. Their children had already made several trips to Canada and Mrs. Walker says her daughter, Tina Gemmell, now lives only a few doors from her, in Wellington.

The historical map that will be presented to Wellington Library this month is dedicated to all members of the W.I. and will be given in loving memory of Edith A. Ball, Mrs. Walker's mother, who was a W.I. member during the years she lived in the village.