

Women's Institutes a vital part of communities

Around the Lakes

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tion of the history of our early Canadians. For this reason, the Bent River Women's Institute decided that the location of the "old" school should be identified and set aside as a historic site. The ladies raised \$500 for the plaque and asked the Township of Muskoka Lakes to mount it for them. The Rev. Peter Simmons of the Anglican Church in Ullswater officiated at the dedication.

The school was formally known as S.S. (School Section) 7, Watt Public School and was operated from 1887 to 1912. It was on land owned by a Mr. John Young and was sold to the school board for 25 cents. That board was composed of Robert Fullerton, Alfred Cecil Saugton and William Kingshott and there are descendants of these people in the area today.

When the "new" school was built, the old school was moved to another site, Granite Bluff, and used as a staff house. Unfortunately, there is nothing left of the old building except what resides in the memories of some of the seniors of the area and the names which have been handed down to the present generation.

The first teacher in the school was Mrs. Clem Bunn. She was followed by Miss Cecelia Gill, Miss Longhurst, Mr. McNulty, Mr. Hutchinson, Miss Hattie Forge, Miss Ada Lousley, Miss Eliza Oldham, Miss Myrtle Guest, Mr. Arthur Webb, Miss Ashsley Stubb, Miss Margaret Wilkinson, Mrs. Joseph Fullerton, Carrie Clarke and Lola MacDonald. In 1912, the "new" school was built, however, that was closed in 1966 and shortly after became the Bent River Women's Institute Hall.

Nancy Thompson of the Bent River Women's Institute provided me with quite a lot of background material on the local group. They meet on the second Monday of every month at 1:30 p.m. To raise money and help pay for the hall they run card parties every second Monday night. They co-host an annual dinner at the Rosseau Community Hall (Sept. 20 this year) and co-host making a quilt and selling raffle tickets with the Rosseau Women's Institute. They will also hold a luncheon/bazaar/bake sale this year on Oct. 25.

Back in the early '60s, I started teaching in a little town, about an eye blink in width called Enfield. It was located about 20 miles north-east of Oshawa in farm country.

Being from the city, I knew very little about rural life and when I heard that there was a Women's Institute, I thought it was some large building or centre in Oshawa or Bowmanville. I soon found out that the Women's Institute was not a building but a group of local farm wives and daughters who met once or twice a month to organize and administer various worthwhile community projects.

I must confess that being in my early 20s at the time, my interest was more in the young ladies of the group than in the work of their organization. When I moved back to the

city, I had little appreciation for the work of the Women's Institute and I really knew very little about the organization.

I don't recall hearing about it again until we moved to Bala, where, through my newspaper writing and the publicity generated by Inez Calvert and her involvement with the Glen Orchard Women's Institute, I learned much more about the valuable work this organization does. I have come to realize that the Women's Institute in each community is much more than a group of ladies meeting once a month to share local gossip. In fact,

it is a dynamic and active organization located all across Canada and dedicated to "achieving social, economic, environmental and physical well-being for individuals and communities throughout the province."

On Sunday, it was my privilege to be invited to cover an event in Bent River which was sponsored by the ladies of the Bent River Women's Institute. A commemorative plaque was dedicated at the site of what is called the Old School on Rosseau Lake Road.

One of the things stressed by the Women's Institute is the preserva-



COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE: On Sunday, Sept. 7, the Bent River Women's Institute dedicated a commemorative plaque at the site of the old Watt's Public School. On hand for the occasion and shown left to right are: Mary Kingshott, Edith Smith, Isabel Quinton, (secretary) Fran MacKinnon, Rosine Findley (president), Freda Kingshott, and Nancy Thompson. (Photo by Isaac Taylor)