

Harrowsmith W.I. celebrates 85 years

by Julie Druker

Sixty members from eight districts that make up the Frontenac Women's District Institutes gathered at St. Paul's United Church in Harrowsmith for their annual district meeting.

While the all-day meeting was mostly spent taking care of the usual business, it was also an opportunity for members from the other districts to learn the history of the Harrowsmith branch, which currently has 30 members and this year celebrates its 85th anniversary.

Joyce Watson, past president of the Harrowsmith Women's Institute, prepared and shared a summary of that history which began with the founding of the branch in 1924 by its first president, Eva Stewart. Meetings were held the last Tuesday of every month at the Harrowsmith Town Hall, which once stood where Starkes grocery store now stands and burnt down in 1972.

One of the Harrowsmith W.I.'s first accomplishments was establishing a library branch. Rules required that a fund of \$200 be in place, along with a 50-person membership, both of which the W.I. satisfied. Motion pictures and plays were performed at the town hall to help establish funds to be paid to the library board.

The branch also raised funds to care for the local cemetery, which at that time was in a deplorable condition.

In 1934 the branch passed a motion to have music taught in the local schools. They also purchased a piano for the town hall to be used on social occasions. Nursing, health and safety courses were popular back then and the institute organized many.

During WW2, Harrowsmith's W.I. collected maple syrup and maple sugar, which they sent to the Navy League. Contributions were also regularly made to the "Milk for Britain" and "Baby Foods for Britain" funding projects. They also assisted the Red Cross by sewing bandages and knitting socks.

Support for 4H Clubs in Harrowsmith and Hartington was ongoing and a scholarship fund that was set up in 1958 to support a student at Sydenham High School continues to this day.

Today Harrowsmith's W.I. raises its funds with ongoing



L to r: FDWI president Jane Adamson, HWI president Jerry Babcock and HWI's longest standing member, Gwen Leonard

monthly sales of Wilton cheese products, a fundraising idea instituted by current president Jerry Babcock. The institute continues to educate the community by offering various skill-related and craft workshops. The members also regularly cater to funerals and anniversaries and continue to support the Salvation Army with their Christmas basket campaign.

The hosting of relevant programs to meet the needs of community members has always been a focus of the institute and, in the past, topics have included fraud awareness, stress management, and information about pacemakers.

These women are eager to learn but also love to get together and have a good time. The lunch the W.I. provided to their other branch members at the meeting was both ample and delicious and included some of the best potato and jellied salads that I have ever tasted and an

impressive anniversary cake.

Gwen Leonard of Hartington, at 96 years of age, has been a member of Harrowsmith's W.I. for 67 years. She joined back when the member's monthly donations used to equal the cost of a loaf of bread, roughly two cents.

Gwen was present at the meeting and was given the cake-cutting honours. She joined the Institute in 1942 and was very active in leading nine of the 4-H home-making clubs that they sponsored. Joyce Watson remembers being taught by Gwen many moons ago, "I helped knit long socks and scarves for the navy and for soldiers during war time."

After lunch the Piccadilly Pickers entertained the ladies and the meeting continued on into the afternoon. The Frontenac District W.I. president Jane Adamson chaired the remainder of the meeting with humour and charm, telling a number of not-to-be-repeated jokes that had everyone in stitches.

Harrowsmith's W.I. monthly meetings are still held on the last Tuesday of every month at St Paul's Church. New members looking to learn new skills and make friends can contact Eileen Manson at 613-374-2626. ■

**Local Businesses
provide services and jobs
Support your local businesses**

**STORRING
SEPTIC SERVICE LTD.**

Pumping of septic & holding tanks

Licensed by M.O.E. since 1972

(613) 379-2192

Tamworth