

# Grand Opening



The opening ceremonies at the Grand Opening of the Provincial Office of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) included a traditional ribbon cutting. Donna Russett, President of the FWIO, and Les Foote, Reeve of Guelph Township, cut the ribbon with scissors donated by the 1994 retiring Board Directors. (2-7)



At the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) 1991 August meeting, Board decided, unanimously, to turn a page of WI history - to acquire their own office space. They will continue their long-standing and amiable association with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, but time brings change. As a member of the Board who lived close to Guelph, I was asked to investigate the availability of office space to rent, lease or buy.

The Executive and I looked at several properties, but the FWIO finances could not support the rent or purchase of office space in Guelph. At the Guelph Area Convention, two WI members suggested the vacant house at Guelph Township Park.

Peggy Knapp, President at the time, and myself were warmly received at an initial meeting with Guelph Township Reeve Les Foote and Clerk Janice Shepherd. A Space Task Force Committee - comprised of myself, Glenna Smith, Rosine Findlay, Margaret Eberle and Peggy Knapp - was quickly formed and negotiations began.

The Committee met with the Township Council early in 1992 to discuss an agreement. Council members were supportive of our purpose and responsive to our proposals. It was a long, slow process, however, because negotiations had to be taken back to Executive for approval.

It was agreed that the cost of all renovations to the house would be the responsibility of the Township; renovations began in the fall of 1993. The following February, a lease was signed and moving day was March 28, 1994.

Maisie Lasby  
Chair, Space Task Force Committee



Along with the traditional ribbon cutting, the opening ceremonies were closed with the passing of the key. Les Foote (centre), Reeve of Guelph Township, presented the key to the house to Maisie Lasby (right), Chair of the Space Task Force Committee, who then presented it to Donna Russett (left), President of the FWIO. (2-10)

*"Women's Institutes have always met their challenges and their changes. ... I want to congratulate ... those other Presidents and those Board Directors, ... who sat around the Board table a few years ago and made with courage and foresight the decision to go ahead with this change and this new beginning. Long may you continue to make a difference for women, for families, and for communities around our province."*

Peggy Knapp, ACWW Area President for Canada

*"Once we [began] talking to the Women's Institutes we thought we'd finally found the best tenant we could ever find."*

Les Foote, Reeve, Guelph Township



Marjorie Durnford, former resident of the house and West End WI member, researched and wrote the brief history of the house relayed on the plaque installed on the front. The one-and-a-half storey house is believed to have been erected in 1885 on the site of its log predecessor. It was built during the ownership of the Gillies family who arrived in 1839, who were among the Scottish pioneers known as La Guayran immigrants who settled this section of Guelph Township in 1827.