

# 75th anniversary recalls role of WI in community life

Women's Institute members from throughout the area gathered in Cobden on September 24 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Cobden Women's Institute Branch.

The celebration took the form of a luncheon, with head table guests contributing in various ways to the festivities. Members and guests were welcomed by Cobden Branch president Margaret Johnson, and a special anniversary cake was cut by three life members; Margaret Burwell, Laura Hamilton and Florence Wilson. Two other life members, Florence Ross and Elma Brown, were unable to be present.

Mrs. Burwell gave a history of the Cobden group for the 60 women gathered. She told the group that the idea for the Women's Institute came from an organization called the Farmer's Institute. Men and women attended these meetings, and women decided that they would like to have a group of their own.

In January of 1911, a branch of the Women's Institute was organized by Mrs. Sam Rankin as president and Mrs. Richard Purcell as secretary. The group was known as the Shield's W.I., after the locality just west of Cobden known as Shield's Crossing. The C.P.R. main line crossed the highway on the Shields farm, and the Shields home was used as a distribution point for mail in the neighbourhood.

Later the name was changed to "Lakeview W.I.," but it was changed again when it came to light that there was already an Institute by that name in the province.

A highlight of the early years of the organization was a picnic held in June of 1912 on the school grounds. Some came by steamboat on Muskrat Lake to this event, and it drew into the group new members from

other areas and from the village. The guest speaker at this gathering was Mrs. Laura Rose Stephen. Her topic was "The Dairy Cow from its Horns to the Heels."

Meetings were held in homes, and members used them as an opportunity to share their skills with each other. Topics of meetings included bun making, dressing and cooking a turkey, icing and cutting a layer cake, turning the heel of a sock, ironing a dress shirt, and making soap.

During both world wars, a great amount of work was done for the war effort. Hundreds of pairs of socks were knit, as well as sweaters, scarves and mitts. Food parcels were sent to those serving overseas and bales of bedding were sent through the Red Cross.

Homes were opened for entertaining at going-away parties for soldiers leaving for overseas, and for welcome home parties for those fortunate enough to return.

The Cobden Women's Institute was involved in the building of the original Cobden Memorial Hall to honour those who gave their lives in the First World War. It was the first memorial hall built in Canada.

The hall was destroyed by fire in 1958, however, a new hall was built at the same location. The branch's 50th anniversary celebration was held in the new hall in 1961.

Over the years, the branch was involved with many aspects of community life. The Institute sponsored a clinic in the basement of the Memorial Hall for the medical examination of school children. Dr. A. Mahood of Ottawa, assisted Dr. John R. Stewart of Cobden, removed the tonsils and adenoids of more than twenty young patients at that location.

Other community activi-



Three life members of the Cobden Branch of the Women's Institute were on hand to cut the special cake at a luncheon celebrating the branch's 75th anniversary. Left to right are Laura Hamilton,

Margaret Burwell, and Florence Wilson. Two other life members, Florence Ross and Elma Brown, were unable to be present.

ties have included contributions to the Cobden Cemetery, the Astrolabe arena, the library, the Memorial Hall, and the Lakeview Nursing Home. A bursary is being provided to Opeongo High School students.

The branch continues to contribute to Institute projects both at home and world-wide.

"The Cobden Women's Institute feel we have accomplished something worthwhile," concluded Mrs. Burwell. "... something which we hope will continue to grow in binding us together in good fellowship for Home and Country (the W.I. motto). So we pay high tribute to the memory of the splendid women who have carried on faithfully for the past 75 years of its existence. We treasure the past, we face

the future."

Greetings from provincial board members were brought by Evelyn Bothwell of the Perth area, and from North Renfrew by Elma Waite of Forester's Falls, district representative. All institute branches in the district were represented at the celebration. Among the guests also were past members of the branch who have now moved to other areas.

Membership has been declining, with the growth of other area church and community women's groups. At the time of the branch's 50th anniversary in 1961, membership stood at 33. The present membership is 15. The current executive is made up of president Margaret Johnson, secretary Leila Cole, and treasurer Margaret Burwell.