

Beamsville WI: 100 years for home and country

BY JOANNE MCDONALD
This Week

BEAMSVILLE - In 1945 the Beamsville Women's Institute pledged its support through a foundation membership with the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital Foundation in Grimsby.

It was not only a sign of things to come, but a testament of how a community that works together can do great things. Members of the Beamsville WI have been the movers and shakers in the community over the past century, instrumental not only in advocating for local health but in educational, agricultural and social issues.

They met last week for the 100th anniversary celebration of the local branch at the home of Margaret (Tufford) Romagnoli.

It was the same house and location as was used for the first meeting of the Beamsville WI in 1905 with charter president Margaret (Beatty) Tufford.

Their numbers have thinned and their years turned golden but it was a dedicated and close-knit group that met this week to share the day's motto and theme, "Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it".

"The WI is my personal success story," said immediate past president Barb Stones. "In 27 years involvement I grew as an individual."

Barbara Temple was elected as the new Beamsville WI president for 2005. The group meets the third Tuesday each month at the First Baptist Church.

Much has changed over the years, said Romagnoli but the local WI has a rich history carefully preserved through the Tweedsmuir histories, a collection of local history books compiled and maintained by members throughout the years.

Romagnoli has been the in-house historian for the past 10 years and she has done a thorough and insightful job of capturing the lives of the people and the community of Lincoln and area that will be a valuable resource in years to come.

"We want to make sure nothing valuable is lost or forgotten," Romagnoli said.

The books that recorded minutes over the first 10 years have been lost, but the remaining 90 years have been recorded intact since 1916, a year that noted 65 members were active in the group. Membership has now decreased to about 21 women. "We're all dear friends," Romagnoli said, adding that over the years, "members were so dedicated to their work".

The Tweedsmuir books tell a story of active involvement over the past century. During WWI, March 1918, the Romagnoli farm and the same house that was host to the 100th anniversary meeting was used as a recreation centre for soldiers. That year, the Beamsville WI held two banquets and presented engraved lockets, "for 110 returned boys of the vil-

lage". The home over the years has been locally known as both Locust Villa because of the profusion of locust trees on the property and the Red Acres farm due to the proximity of a former factory that made red clay bricks.

The home's current owner, is the third Margaret (Tufford) Romagnoli. The first, although not related, was Margaret (Beatty) Tufford and the second, her daughter, Margaret (Tufford) McVittie.

On February 19, 1897, the first Women's Institute (WI) was formed in Stoney Creek, Ontario, through the efforts of Adelaide Hoodless and Erland and Janet Lee. The organization's first constitution was adopted Feb. 25, 1897, and the membership fee - 25 cents.

By 1900, there were 33 Women's Institute Branches and a total of 1,602 members. The first Women's Institute Convention was held in 1902 at the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) in Guelph. In 1902, the WI received legal stature in the province when The Agricultural and Arts Amendment Act of the Ontario government received royal assent.

For more than 100 years, WI members have actively worked together for the betterment of members' families, homes and communities. Their original focus - domestic science education - quickly expanded to include personal growth opportunities, government lobbying and health and wellness initiatives.

The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) was organized in 1919 giving Branch members a stronger voice as a united group. Since, FWIO's educational programs and social events have created new opportunities for rural and urban women, locally and provincially.

Today, FWIO focuses on high-quality education and support programs and services to assist and encourage women to become more knowledgeable and active citizens, to promote and develop integral family life skills, to discover, stimulate and develop leadership and to identify and resolve diverse needs in communities.

By 1904 the Women's Institute grew to 149 Branches with a total of 5,433 members. By 1907, in just one decade, the Women's Institute organization had increased to 400 Branches in 84 ridings.

During the Great War, it was no surprise that war work became the focus of the WI; they contributed to many activities, such as outfitting a hospital ship, financing field kitchens, supporting a motor ambulance and donating tons of canned goods, jams and knitted items. For the year ending May 1918, the WI had donated approximately \$850,000 in goods and cash to the Canadian Red Cross Society.

Women's Institute members were also involved in their local schools and School Board. They organized and provided meals, music instruction and health clinics for medical and dental check ups for children.



ABOVE - The 100th anniversary of the Beamsville Women's Institute was celebrated last week at the home of Margaret (Tufford) Romagnoli in Beamsville, the same home where former members held their first meeting in 1905. Above, centre, Dorothy Burtch is surrounded by her friends, (L-R) Swadesh Sachdeva, Eileen Turnbull, Barbara Temple, Margaret Strong, Agnes Hilberg, Anne Clark, Muriel Sherk, Pauline Gardner, Margaret Romagnoli, Barbara Stones and Angela Valli. RIGHT - Margaret (Beatty) Tufford, the first president of the Beamsville Women's Institute in 1905. BELOW - The historic home of Margaret (Tufford) Romagnoli in Beamsville as it appeared when W.I. members held their first meeting there in 1905.

