

## Beamsville Women's Institute

### Baptist Church integral to early life in Beamsville

**A**s Beamsville Women's Institute prepares to celebrate the Centennial of the formation of the first WI branch in Ontario, the organization looked into the past and made plans for the future at its January meeting.

In her address to the Institute, Marion Dawdy discussed the founding of First Baptist Church and its contribution to early life in Beamsville.

Mrs. Dawdy told the Institute that Jacob Beam Sr. and Staats Overholt appear to have been instrumental in beginning the work of the church in the 1780s. They were greatly aided by the New York Missionary Society who sent itinerant pastors to the area for nearly 20 years.

This group became an integral

part of the community, said Mrs. Dawdy. Early resident pastors taught school to augment their income. Jacob Beam Sr. granted two acres of his Crown land for the building of a church and to establish a burial ground.

One quarter of this land was allotted for a grammar school in 1847, a red brick structure now known as the Walt Howard house. Another section was deeded in 1851 and a township hall was erected where the Fleming Branch of the Library is located.

First Baptist Church in Beamsville is the oldest established continuing church in the Ontario-Quebec Convocation of Baptist Churches. The present church was built in 1858, and is the oldest church building in Beamsville.

The church continued to play

a part in the town's growth and history. In 1894, a fire department was established and the church bell was used to signal the volunteer firemen. The church billeted soldiers during World War I. The military used the tower for signalling and as a lookout post across the lake.

Detailed information on the two hundred year history of the church can be found in Mrs. Dawdy's publication, "Baptists of Beamsville".

A special Centennial meeting to commemorate the founding of the first Women's Institute in Stoney Creek in 1897 will be held on Wednesday, February 19 at the Baptist Church at 1:30 p.m. A reenactment of this historic meeting will take place. Interested members of the community are welcome to attend. For more information, call Barbara Stones at 563-7274.

## Women's Institute 100th Anniversary

### From Horse and Buggy to Space Shuttle

**O**ver 15,000 women are expected to gather in homes and community halls across Ontario on Wednesday, February 19 to celebrate the Centennial of the Women's Institute.

One hundred years ago, Erland and Janet Lee travelled by horse and buggy through this area, inviting women who had no public voice, to a meeting where Adelaide Hoodless suggested an organization where they could meet and learn from each other, thus developing their minds and their practical skills.

The meeting at Squires Hall in Stoney Creek on February 19, 1897 was attended by 101 women and resulted in the organization of the first Branch of the Women's Institute in the world.

The Women's Institute grew steadily across Canada, and today offers women the vehicle to make decisions which will im-

prove the quality of life for themselves, their families, their communities and the world.

Throughout the past 100 years, not only has the Institute developed the personal growth of its members, but it has also been instrumental in initiating government legislation to protect the environment and the citizens of Canada.

Centennial celebrations for the Women's Institute culminate in June, when 4,000 delegates representing The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario will welcome keynote speaker Dr. Roberta Bondar to its convention in Hamilton.

The theme of the convention is *Indebted to the Past; Committed to the Future*. Convention Chair Peggy Knapp noted that "the symbolism of the change from horse and buggy days at the turn of the century to the present space age is profound."

Bondar, Canada's first woman in space aboard the space shuttle Discovery in 1992, is a national role model who is a proponent of higher education. She believes it is critical that Canadians, young and old, embrace science just to live in this world.

Dr. Bondar is at present conducting research into the effects of weightlessness on the blood flow to the brain at the University of Western Ontario in London.

Another scheduled convention keynote speaker of interest is Dr. Linda Ambrose, author of *For Home and Country: The Centennial History of the Women's Institutes in Ontario*.

Dr. Ambrose, who will address the delegates on Members Day, June 18, has chronicled in her book not only the history of the WI movement in Ontario, but a history of rural women and rural Ontario.