

In Early Days of District W.I. Branch



The above photograph was taken in the early years of Birr Women's Institute, which today is 35 years old. Shown in the picture are: Front row, left to right, Mrs. Harold Hodgins, formerly Miss Avice Scott, now the only charter member of the institute; Miss Ethel Robson, one of the early presidents; Miss Becca Hobbs, first secretary; Mrs. Joseph Mulligan, the late Mrs. Angus Ferguson, Mrs.

Victor Jauncey, formerly Miss Caroline Coleman, first treasurer; the late Miss Margaret O'Neil, Mrs. Earl Grose, formerly Miss Irene Guest, by whose effort the Birr W.I. was organized; the late Mrs. F. J. Scott, first president. In the back row, centre, are Mrs. Sherman Needham, formerly Miss Gertie Stevens, and Mrs. Jacob Brumwell.

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Birr Women's Institute Is 35 Years of Age Today

By Jennie Raycroft Lewis

Thirty-five years ago today (April 16, 1911) about a dozen women of North London Township, dressed in their fashionably long dresses and coats with their picturesque hats, drove with horses and buggies to the home of Miss Irene Guest on the Proof Line road. Miss Guest (now Mrs. Earl Grose, of Toronto) had worked with great enthusiasm for some months previously, spreading the gospel of the Women's Institutes, telling everyone the benefit they could be to a community and to Canada as a whole. So at this historic meeting a branch of the Women's Institute which was in the future to be known as the Birr Women's Institute, was organized.

Miss Irene Guest was appointed as temporary president, but at the next meeting the late Mrs. T. J. Scott accepted the office for the remainder of the year. Miss Becca Hobbs was elected secretary and Miss Caroline Coleman (now Mrs. Victor Pauncey) was elected treasurer.

Since that time this organization has had its up's and down's, its times of exultation and depression, its periods of joy and sorrow, but through all the years there has been a trend towards expansion both in membership and scope of activity. Birr W.I. began with a membership of 12, but in 1922-23 the membership was over 60.

In the early years before the First Great War, the work of Birr W.I. was chiefly charitable and local community improvement projects. During the war many knitted articles were supplied to the Red Cross. Boxes were sent overseas to local boys and considerable sums of money were raised to aid Red Cross work.

After the war, the spirit of helping others continued. Money was donated to the Byron Sanatorium. In the War Memorial Children's Hospital there is a cot endowed by Birr W.I. Each year gifts of money, toys, and home canned fruit is given to the patients in that hospital.

Among the outstanding projects undertaken by these energetic and ambitious women are, the improvement of local cemeteries, the supplying of first aid kits to the schools of the district, providing grants for school fairs, public speaking contests, Federation of Agriculture, making substantial donations to the National Institute of the Blind and giving financial aid to local needy families.

When war broke out again in 1939 these patriotic women responded to the call for knitting, sewing, and the making of quilts. In 1942 the institute raised \$105 as its share of the Middlesex mobile canteen which was pressed into service for the troops passing through Eastern coastal towns. Also as a war-time project Birr W.I. did its "bit" in sending jam to Britain to be used in hospitals, army camps, or Red Cross canteens.

For many years Birr W.I. has appointed a sunshine committee. It is the duty of this committee to provide flowers or fruit or cards to the shut-ins and to the mother of a new baby a bouquet of roses is sent. The thrifty custom of presenting a bank book to each new baby has been followed down through the years.

Much of the credit for the success of these ventures is due to the efficiency of its officers together with the co-operation of the members of the institute and the splendid support of the people of the community.

Today we stand on the threshold of a new era. We take courage from the successes of the past and press forward in future service "For Home and Country."

Through The Years With Birr W.I.