

P. 6

HISTORY OF BURGESSVILLE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

The first Women's Institute was organized in Saltfleet Township, South Wentworth, on the 19th of February, 1897, just 50 years ago. The Branch is known as the "Stoney Creek" Institute. Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless was the person responsible for the organization of this first Institute of the world, and to her all Institutes pay homage in this year of Golden Jubilee.

The Women's Institute aims to be an effective channel through which various forms of activity in the best interests of the whole people can be carried on in rural districts.

Health Education and service, child welfare, school improvement, Libraries, community centres and many other undertakings, are made effective through the co-operation of the various Departments of Government and the local Institutes.

With these objectives in mind, we will review briefly some of the interesting notes in the history of our own Institute Branch, and see to what extent we have carried on the good work.

The Burgessville Branch of the Women's Institute was organized in 1903, in connection with the Farmer's Institute, and under the leadership of Mrs. Justus Cohoe. According to the diary of the late Charles E. Walker, the exact date was February 12th, forty-four years ago, so we are six years younger than the first Institute. At the time of organization a Mr. Mason was president of the Farmer's Institute and John McKie the secretary. Mrs. Cohoe was zealous in institute work and helped organize other Institutes in the District. She was the first president of this Branch and Miss May Emigh (Mrs. Wesley West), secretary, Mrs. Cohoe was also first president of the Beaconsfield Branch, which she helped organize.

There are four charter members living (maybe more) - Mrs. A.E. Dennis, Mrs. John Hughes, Mrs. West and Mrs. C.E. Walker. Mrs. Charles Burgess was a charter member, and as a Branch we owe much to her continued interest throughout her life, and her influence as manifested by her daughters, Mrs. Griffin, Mrs. Mollins, and Miss Kessie Burgess. The latter two having been presidents for some years. The Branch has always had their wholehearted support and co-operation in every way.

Among the presidents serving during the 44 years, we have record of the names of Mrs. Elias Snyder, Mrs. William Pollard, Mrs. Milton Reid, Mrs. Ernest Knaggs, Mrs. A. Celquhoun, Mrs. Flewes (Mrs. Wesley Lancaster), Mrs. Dr. Johnston, Misses Irene Wallace and Ressie Burgess, Mrs. V. Mollins, Mrs. Harry Mergan, Mrs. John Jaques, Mrs. J. R. McLees, Mrs. Charles Kelly, Mrs. Vern Dennis, Mrs. H. Rockett and Mrs. J. A. Dickinson. Miss Irene Wallace gave very efficient service as secretary-treasurer for 15 years.

In 1935, the South Oxford Institutes were organized as a District, with Mrs. Cohoe as first president. Mrs. Snyder and Mrs. Mergan were also District presidents, and at the present time Mrs. R. W. Burten is first vice-president of the District.

A glimpse of the meetings of early days reveal that they were held at the same time as the men's, and included a demonstration on cooking, not so much the why - as how to prepare a certain dish. Mrs. West in telling of organization work in company with Mrs. Cohoe, pays tribute to her calm efficient manner in organizing and arranging programs etc, and says "Weather, snow, sleighs, horses, small hotels like Mt. Elgin and Beachville Hall, homes, etc, were ever present worries, the ladies in the afternoon and a joint meeting with the men in the evening. Then finding places to stay. Before very long the men's organization stepped their meetings with lectures regarding farm work, and we were on our own finding horses, etc. However the girls sent out by the Department from Guelph were good and gave as much as anyone could in a few hours - and the women present were interested and helpful - of course we did not think so much of correct diet, feed values, etc, as how to make flaky pie-crust or a cake with icing---- and to-day knowing if the farm women can't do things, no one can. The time we went to Vandecar by train, we did not forget, found no one to meet us, started to walk, got lost, a rain storm and sitting until after the night meeting quite damp, and a cold of course."

So much for the good old days with their trials and tribulations - as time goes by, the institute grows and broadens with the years. During these years our Branch has been very active "For Home and Country" as our motto reads, we have assisted in the formation of the Burgessville Library, and continue to give financial assistance there. We were instrumental in having music taught in the Public School, also supplied hot lunches for a couple of years, and in 1931 began to contribute cash prizes for students with high grades in both Public and Continuation Schools. At the time of planning the building of the Continuation School the institute succeeded in securing the interest of Trustees and people of the community in having a Community Hall included in the building.

In 1933, our institute won first prize for a quilt exhibited at London Fair, and won first on quilts there for six consecutive years. The first quilt was later sold for \$25.00 and went to the White House in Washington, D.C. Miss Edith Moore supervised the work on quilts and many lovely ones were made and sold, making it possible to complete the stage of the Community Hall, as it is now.

To list all worthy causes aided by our Society, would make lengthy reading, suffice to say that each year donations are sent out to such organizations as the War Memorial Hospital for children at London, Dr. Barnard Home, Institute for the Blind, Sick Children's Hospital, Rotary Club, etc. Showers of toys and money for a number of years have gone to the Fireman's Christmas Fund in Woodstock, and all local causes worthy of help