

GRACE PATTERSON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE, THAMESFORD

1945 - 1989

In 1919 a group of girls met in Adams School House where they had been attending Sunday School, and they formed a Club which they named The Grace Country Club in honour of Miss Grace Patterson, a local girl who was a missionary in India. The girls corresponded with Miss Patterson and among other projects, they adopted two orphans in her school.

The Club continued to meet and work together until 1945 when the majority of members felt that a change in organization should be made. Interest in Miss Patterson and her work was as alive as before, but there was a desire to become affiliated with a country-wide organization. After much thought and discussion a meeting was held at the Home of Mrs. Earl Valentine, a niece of Miss Patterson, and Mrs. J.D. Hossack of Embro, Secretary of Oxford North District, conducted the organization and installation of officers. Officers elected at that meeting on October 9, 1945 were - President Mrs. Jack Shewan, Vice Presidents Mrs. D.S. MacKay and Mrs. Jas. Calder, Secretary-Treasurer Mrs. George Sutherland.

Forty members joined at this first meeting, the number increased to a high of seventy, but has decreased to the present membership of twenty-nine. The name "Grace Patterson Women's Institute" was chosen, and as the Grace Country Club had done, the new organization voted to send sufficient money to Miss Patterson to support and educate an Indian child of her choosing. We continued to donate money to a student until shortly after Miss Patterson's death in 1984.

We assisted in the support of two foster children sponsored by Oxford North District until the early eighties when we began supporting Community Projects with Save the Children. At present these are in Jamaica and Kenya. For many years we filled up to ten handi-bags each year for Save the Children. For several years now we have participated in the District project of Sleeping Children Around the World. We donate money for two sleeping kits, and what a joy to see the happy faces of children photographed with their blankets, pyjamas and other useful articles. One year we sent pencils to Jamaica.

Besides creating a wonderful community spirit our branch assisted each month for many years with the pre-school Clinic sponsored by the Oxford Health Unit. Mrs. Walter Hutchison was very devoted to this project and to the well-being of the community children. Mrs. Hutchison was also responsible for convening the assembling of layettes for Unitarian Services each year. In 1978 Mrs. Hutchison was remembered with a gift in appreciation of her years of dedication to these worthwhile projects, and to the little ones. In 1977 the branch received a certificate from Unitarian Services for ten years of contributions.

Phyllis Hossack Jansen was the first of many babies of Women's Institute members to receive a baby spoon from the Branch. In the early years each bride also received a small gift.

Some interesting highlights from the early meetings - The first Roll Call was "How to prevent household accidents", and two others shortly after were "1 dozen cookies with the recipe" and "Guess the weight of the one sitting on your right".

The first Motto was "Look before you leap." The first collection amounted to \$4.10. In 1955 a trip to Detroit cost \$4.40. Also in 1955 it was suggested that we have more variety in our lunches. In that same year was a debate "Grandmothers were better homemakers than the women of to-day". Vanilla was sold to buy a coffee urn. 1958 was the beginning of current events at every meeting. The programs included much musical entertainment in which the young people participated. Readings and recitations were popular, and simple demonstrations. In 1946 entertainment was a Grandmothers' Chorus. There seemed to be a great need for Lightning Cleaner which was sold at various times.

In 1946 members made articles from one yard of cloth. These were later displayed and auctioned off by Mrs. Arthur Young. In 1947 teen-aged girls were invited to a meeting to hear Miss Ashplant speak about "relationships between mother and teen-age daughter". At the annual meeting in 1950 the secretary wrote in the minutes, "Many ladies rushed to pay their fees as they did not want to be left out from a single meeting."

We are grateful to our members and to many community women who have given freely