

THE TOBERMORY WOMEN *and the* WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Women's groups have been active in Tobermory since the early 1900's, serving their community, the war effort, and various charities.

Women all over Canada were discussing the possibility of getting "the vote" in the 1890's and the Tobermory women were no exception. On February 22, 1894, the "Wiarion Echo" printed an article submitted by one of its Tobermory readers. The article stated that there was a "heated controversy" over whether women should be allowed to vote, but that the majority of the people were in favour of granting the franchise to women. Some supporters of the women's cause said that if women were in the political arena; whiskey traffic would cease, the Sabbath would be better observed, there would be less profane language, laws would be well-administered, and the honour of women would be held "more sacred".

In April of 1905, a by-law was passed stating "that the Reeve, Clerk and Treasurer be authorized to sign the petition to entitle women to vote at Municipal Elections who held property in their own name". This was still a far cry from what we have today, but it was a step in the right direction.

The Women's Institute (W.I.) was formed in 1914 just after the outbreak of war and the women set to work knitting socks for the soldiers. During the first year in operation the ladies put together a small library and Miss. E. Hopkins became librarian. By 1916, the local women donated 147 pairs of socks and many other hospital supplies to the Red Cross to be shipped overseas. A pair of socks was sent to each of the nine Tobermory volunteers training in Wiarion.

In 1916, the W.I. held the annual picnic on the 12th of July and served refreshments at a stand for the purpose of obtaining money for the Red Cross. A game called "French Toy" was played and everyone enjoyed themselves. The proceeds from the refreshments stand amounted to \$40.

By 1917, the group had over 30 members and Mrs. Walsh became president. A friendship quilt was made and completed in 1918. This special quilt contained squares on which each soldier's name and regimental number was embroidered. Donated to the St. Edmunds museum, this quilt can be seen there today.

The "Skylark Girls" were a younger version of the Women's Institute, organized in 1931 by Mrs. Russell Belrose. Although this club did not last a long time, many activities were undertaken during its existence. In September, Miss Dora Pettigrew gave an interesting paper on Florence Nightingale to the club and the next month, the club's first social evening was held.

Both the Skylarks and the Women's Institute were involved in Hallowe'en fund raising events in 1931 which were aptly described in *The Wiarion Echo*.

"A bazaar need never be bizarre. We have had many so-called events of this kind, but never one before that caught up such originality of scheme and such novelty of interest as did that of the "Skylark Girls," which was held last Wednesday evening. This had not been a hurried event, but the climax to a number of happy evenings in which dreams became plans and Hallowe'en captured as suitable background providing hobgoblins and pumpkins, black cats and witches as a decorative scheme for walls and lights. A program of sideshows gave two mystery tents and an excellent fish pond as added attractions to the hand-embroidered goods and choice souvenirs that were tastily displayed, together with a counter of pies, cookies, candy and cakes that looked very tempting indeed. The local library building had generously been loaned to these young people, and looked entrancing in its orange and black semi-weird atmosphere. Laughter was to be heard everywhere, interspersed with pleasant remarks about the display of dainty gifts. The whole was something different and thus deserved special mention. This successful undertaking, under the capable leadership of Mrs. Russell Belrose, calls for congratulations from all interested in our young folk. The proceeds were divided into an equal third for each of the societies. The church, Women's Institutes and the Skylarks. The best that can be said is keep on with the good work and golden deeds.

The W.I. Planned and executed a successful event in an Hallowe'en euchre and dance, to which were added sales of dainty gifts and embroidery, with many useful articles for the housewife and the bride-to-be. Always an item of interest is the draw for the quilt. One went to Mrs. O. C. Vail and Fred Smith. Lunch was served at the close. An interesting fish pond was provided for both the children and the adults. Friday night will be remembered as a very enjoyable evening, and one that ably augmented the doctor's fund."

In 1932, the ladies of the church got together and formed the Womens Association, later becoming known as United Church Women (U.C.W.). This, however, did not put an end to the Women's Institute as they continued to hold euchre parties, bazaars, and fund raising events.

There must have been some people in the village walking around in less clothes than was seen fit at the time, for the following letter was written to the council by the W.I. In 1934:

THIS INFORMATION WAS RECORDED IN HISTORY OF ST. EDMUNDS TOWNSHIP