



The NB Women's Institute Began in Andover, NB in 1911

(Written in May, 2011, by Robert LaFrance)

Last week marked the 100th anniversary of the Women's Institute in New Brunswick and, because the first branch of the WI was organized in Andover, now part of Perth-Andover, the provincial WI chose to hold the centennial observances in the village where it all began in 1911.

The St. James United Church and its attached hall were the scenes of the anniversary events that began Tuesday, May 10, with opening ceremonies and regular business followed by a banquet, and ended early Thursday afternoon with the election of NBWI officers for the 2011-12 year. In between there were the renewing of acquaintances, fundraising sales, a tree planting ceremony, a welcome by local politicians, songs, committee reports, the perusal of exhibits including banners from many New Brunswick WI chapters, and a tour of Bon Accord Seed farm or a walking tour.

The May 10 banquet featured not only good food, but a skit written by Cari Grierson of Kincardine and performed by the Scotch Colony Players who included Cari Grierson, Darlene Morton, Carolyn Smith, Carmella Murch, and guest actress Rev. Sue Fleming. The skit featured people from 1911 including Mrs. Alma Porter of Andover, (wife of MLA James E. Porter), Mrs. Wetmore Pickett, Mrs. Manzer,

Mrs. Howlett, and Miss Elliott who were seen getting together to form Andover's WI, the first in the province.

"One Hundred years Proud" was the motto of this women's community organization which owed its origins to a group in Stoney Creek, Ontario, just east of Hamilton. Women there began a group to look after the safety of cow's milk after the son of one of the prospective members died after drinking impure milk. His mother was Adelaide Hunter Hoodless, who organized the Stoney Creek branch in 1897. Fourteen years later, in the spring of 1911, Mrs. Alma Porter organized a meeting of Andover and Perth area women and that resulted in the first WI branch being chartered in New Brunswick.

The objectives of the Women's Institutes were: "to raise the standards of homemaking, to develop happier and better informed citizens who had a more abundant life, to develop leadership, and to promote national and international understanding, tolerance, and good will".

Holly Hersey of Upper Gagetown, president-elect of the NBWI who will take over from Glenna Geer this year, said that the institute had been working on and organizing last week's anniversary activities for about three years. The 97th Provincial Convention (some years missed because of war) involved much planning and organizing. More than 120 women were on hand to do that day's business and to partake of the May 10 banquet in the church hall which was packed with tables for the occasion. "The majority of the work has been in the last three months, putting it together." Mrs. Hersey said. "We had a hundred and twenty registered, but extra people came today. I would say about 130 are here today."

St. James United Church on West Riverside Drive in Perth-Andover was awash in colour during the convention because of dozens

of banners from individual branches (including the nearby Dover Hill-River de Chute WI's banner), posters, and memorabilia from the WI's century of existence. "These are life member books, and these are minute books from many years ago," she pointed to books filled with handwriting. "We have life member books right from the very start. For a person to get a life membership, the branch will send a picture and a write-up to the provincial WI who will approve it."

There were lots of photographs in the church as well as old copies of the WI provincial magazine 'Home and Country'. Most of the branches attending the conference made a banner depicting what their institute is about. There were copies of WI cookbooks, other publications including the Provincial WI's history book entitled 'The First Fifty Years', (1911-1961), and the second one that covers from 1961 to 1986 and called '***Holding Fast That Which is Good***'.