

On October 3rd., 1950, a meeting was called to see if a Women's Institute could be organized in the Oldcastle community at 1.30 p.m. and 17 area ladies accepted the challenge. Mrs. Wm. Sales, then president of Essex North District W.I., chaired the meeting. (Also taking part was) Mrs. A. E. Dodson of Tilbury, the Federated Representative and Board Member, and Mrs. Lillian McCarthy of Roseland, the new Southwestern Area Secretary. This new area of Southwestern Ontario had been just recently divided from the London Area, and our new branch would be a part.

After the ladies were told of the "Aims and Objects" of a Women's Institute, and the functioning thereof, it was decided to organize. Nominations were called from the floor for new officers and when the final vote was tallied the new slate stood as follows: Honorary President: Mrs. Wm. Sales, President: Mrs. Wilfred Libby; 1st Vice-President, Mrs. Charles Plant; 2nd Vice-President, Mrs. W. A. Crowder; Secretary-Treasurer: Mrs. Roy Jewell. Conveners of Standing Committees were left until the Annual Meeting which was always held in April of each year. The meeting was held in the old Sandwich South Township Hall on No. 3 Hwy., at Oldcastle, and the new group voted to hold their meetings on the first Monday afternoon of each month at 2 p.m. and voted the name of the new branch to be the "OLDCASTLE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE", and to be held in the Township Hall.

Following organization we started right in by having money making projects, card parties and a lawn social and dance the next June, and an afternoon tea during the first year. But first of all a cleaning bee was held to thoroughly give the old hall a good scrubbing and curtains were put up on the windows. There wasn't any water there or chairs to sit on or a stove to heat water on, Long benches were used and every time you had a project these had to be taken outside. The township fathers didn't have a janitor as yet, so the W.I. ladies set to work to make the hall a little more presentable. A small room at the back was used to house a large safe which council had removed and it then was made into a kitchen, with linoleum put on the floor and was completed with cupboards and a gas stove. We took our water from home for a few years for meetings and projects. Those old benches had to go and council agreed they were not comfortable anyway so they sold them to anyone who wanted one. The W. I. obtained 50 heavy metal chairs from the old Windsor Ferry Depot, the ferries having been discontinued running between Windsor and Detroit. They were obtained for \$2.00 each and Council helped by paying for half the cost. It wasn't long until our kitchen had dishes, cutlery and utensils to work with.

Many contributions were forthcoming to projects within the township down through the years, but our first contribution outside was to answer an appeal from the Provincial Board for funds to aid war-torn Greece. In 1952, all branches in Ontario raised \$7,397.67, out of which a tractor, a disc-harrow and a plow were sent to a small village where all the men of military age were killed off during the war, and only women, the very young and elderly were left to till the soil without equipment to do it with. Skilled men were also sent there to set up the machinery and to teach the people how to use them. Also \$200 was turned over for food and clothing.

In 1954, Dr. Neil Morrison asked all branches in Essex County to send a representative to a meeting to be held in Essex, so that a chairman from each branch could be named to assist him in obtaining county history for the book he was to author entitled "Garden Gateway to Canada". Mrs. W. A. Crowder, our historian and curator of our Tweedsmuir History Book, was named for the township of Sandwich South. Later when the book had been published, branches were given the privilege of selling them on consignment and were at first allowed to keep \$3.00 each, this was later changed to \$5.00. Our branch was responsible for having a copy of the book placed in all the separate and public schools in the township.

Free senior courses are provided by the Home Economics Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to all W. I. branches and Oldcastle branch has presented many of these to community ladies. The W. I. has been youth oriented right from the start and has sponsored many 4-H Homemaking Clubs for girls from age 12 to 26 yrs. Many of these girls won County honours, Provincial honours and Advanced honours down through the years, were awarded by the Home Economics Branch through their county Home Economist and also awarded from our branch. Three of our Homemaking Club girls made us very proud of them by winning the \$100 Bursary presented by the District. These were Beth Parr, Kelly Kavanagh and Leonora Costa. We have always been able to obtain very capable leaders for this worthy effort with these teenage girls and we are grateful to them. One year we had two clubs for a total of 65 girls and 56 of them went to Achievement Day.

Public Speaking awards and Music Festival awards have been presented to winning students from both the public and separate schools in the township and in the beginning junior sports were a primary factor and interest; in 1957, \$100 was voted to the struggling Pee Wee Baseball League, plus another \$25 for sweaters and an additional \$38.30 for operational expenses when they were trying to get organized; \$81 to the Green Hornets, a Jr. Hockey League in 1961; quite an effort was extended to the newly formed Sandwich South Association for Retarded Children, who began with four of our own children in the old No. 5 Public School on Malden Road, Maidstone. This had been a continuing fund giving project until it was taken over by the general school system. A card party produced \$72.10 for their benefit with many other contributions along the way. For the 3-year Fund raising Drive, 1960-61-62 our W. I. took the responsibility for it with Mrs. W. A. Crowder as chairman, who organized several canvassers and the proceeds each year exceeded over \$1600. We contributed \$50 to the Essex Arena Memorial Building Fund, also purchasing 40 blocks for same, as our township youth would be using it; one of the largest contributions given was the purchasing of a large commercial crib to the Pediatrics ward of IODE Hospital, following the tragic truck-bus accident when 8 of our school aged children were lost. This was in memory of them and \$170 was used to obtain it and have a plaque attached, 1966 was the year.

Our busiest activities were with the 4-H Homemaking Club girls, being sponsors and donors and providing leaders, and both brought glory to our township as several girls won trips to Calgary, Ohio, London, Guelph and Toronto agricultural fairs, forums, and seminars, etc.

(2) OLDCASTLE W.I. DISBANDS ----)

Oldcastle W. I. members had not neglected the senior citizens in the township either, sending get-well cards, sympathy cards, Cheer and Christmas baskets and having birthday parties for those over 80 years of age and 50th Anniversary parties with cakes and gifts being provided. We had concern for all phases of health and welfare. We packed used clothing, shoes, etc. which was sent to the strife torn country of Korea in the 1954-60 period, along with home knitted sweaters, layettes and girl's uniforms made by the members. In Aug., 1961 a monetary contribution to assist in sponsoring a 19 year old student from Essex County, a graduate of the W.O.S.T., Ridgetown, who was being sent to the village of Khirpal, District of West Bengal, India for the Peace Corps.

Families who lost their homes in fires were also helped. The W. I. rallied to this cause with sponsoring showers, made many quilts as well as providing blankets and foodstuffs. We contributed to the County Flood Relief in 1973 and the Hurricane Hazel Relief Fund in 1955. A Scholarship Fund was set up to the University of Windsor to aid Kinetic's students in memory of Mary O'Brien, a graduate and honours student, following her untimely death. She was the daughter of the Leslie O'Briens of Oldcastle with her mother being one of our devoted W.I. members. Mary excelled in different sports and brought honours to our community. The very first winner of this award was one of our own Oldcastle girls, a student at the University who received \$250.00 in the year 1973-74. The interest on the Fund is used for each year's scholarship and the University now presents two awards each year, of varying amounts.

Of note in the early 1970's our W. I. had three generations of one family attending, Mrs. Rosie Price with her daughter, Mrs. Doris Parr as members and Doris's daughter Beth in the 4-H Homemaking Clubs. This family presented an over 100-year old framed wool flower picture to the Erland Lee Home at Stoney Creek, Ont. where the Women's Institutes were founded in 1897. The home belongs to F.W.I.O. now. Erland Lee was a co-founder along with Adelaide Hoodless, and the Home was purchased, in his memory and opened on Aug. 9th, 1973, when the picture was donated.

The W.I. had a party and presented the proceeds of \$80 to the Windsor Fireman's (Burn Unit) and we also had several showers of foodstuffs and gave several donations to Leone Home for Girls.

We staffed the T-B X-Ray Survey three different times when it was held in our township hall and we've always been on call to assist the Township Fathers by catering to "Open Houses" when needed. For years we also catered to the Annual Meetings of the Oldcastle Co-Operative.

As a closing reflection of the 32 years of service, one cannot help but feel that the community has been a better place for its having been organized and it is our hope that a younger generation will take up the challenge and perhaps organize a new Women's Institute to work for our township, sometime soon. Mrs. Crowder, our curator will continue on with the township history and will be available anytime for resource material and family tree history, etc. Eventually all the material will be photocopied (now in the process of being done) and the books will be housed in the Essex County Public Library for everyone to use. There were 16 charter members and 32 charter year members, and only two active ones are left, Mrs. Wilfred Libby and Mrs. W. A. Crowder, both Life Members. The branch presented 10 Life Memberships during the 32 years of its existance.

THIS RESUME OF THE HISTORY OF OLDCASTLE W.I. WAS  
compiled and taken out of the Tweedsmuir History Book  
by Mrs. W. A. Crowder, Curator.