

Name of Branch: Acadia Valley Women's Institute

Location: About 14.5 km west of the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, between Oyen and Medicine Hat on Hwy 41, on the Buffalo Trail

Founded: 1927

Charter Members: n/a

First Executive: n/a

Disbanded: 1939

Activities:

"The first women's organization was formed in March 1916 and was called "The Helping Hand." They met once a month at the various homes. Fees were small – nothing to get in but ten cents to get out.



One Box Social held in those early days raised \$335.00.

A Ladies Aid was organized to look after the parsonage and church interests, but in 1923 the Ladies Aid and the Helping Hand merged and formed the Acadia Women's Club.

At that time there was a Women's Institute in Vandyne and the women in Acadia Valley felt their outlook on life might be broadened if they were affiliated with a large body of women.

Mr. Houston, a student minister, held church services in Vandyne and quite frequently Mrs. Dave Graham went along with him to his appointment. In this way she met a Mrs. Regan, who was Constituency Convenor for the WI. She told Mrs. Graham about their work and program. Mrs. Graham relayed this information to the Club members. They decided it would be to their interests to join the WI which they did in 1927.



Mock Wedding, late 1930's. Kneeling L.-R.: Evelyn Abrahams, Betty Carran. Back: Amy Darch, Gert Marshall, Pat Wheaton, Mabel Carry, Ida Haahr, Mrs. Innes.

The Acadia Valley WI was one of, if not the strongest, organization in the Constituency. Programs for the year were drawn up by various local WIs, each usually lining up a program for one or two months.

Each year a WI conference of all locals was held at one centre. The WI entertaining the locals always provided a bounteous banquet and lunch. Any WI member could attend these affairs and everyone looked forward to the annual get-togethers.

[In 1939,] after much discussion, pro and con, the women decided to disband as a WI, as they felt all the money we could raise should be used in our community and for our boys in the forces (the Second World War).

On Dec. 9, 1939 the Community Club was formed as well as a Red Cross Organization.”

Like some Alberta communities, Acadia Valley WI continued its commitment to social welfare in the community, whether it was under the banner of the Women’s Institutes or the Community Club. A favourite way to raise money for community needs was to hold a Box Social, where women would prepare a lunch and wrap it up artistically. The men would then bid on the



boxes, not knowing whose box they were bidding on. They then got to eat lunch with whoever had made the box; this gave rise to a great deal of slippery behaviour, as young men tried to bid on what they thought was their girlfriend’s box and other people tried to trick them into bidding on some other girl’s box. One year, someone had the bright idea to have the men make up the boxes and the women doing the bidding. The food in the married men’s boxes was good because their wives had made it for them, but the boxes made by bachelors might reveal “four hard baking powder biscuits, two flap jacks, and two slices of sow-belly.”

Over the years the Community Club sent parcels and cigarettes to local boys overseas. When one of these soldiers suggested that he and others would appreciate receiving news from home, the Club established a newsletter called *Acadia Valley Tid-Bits* in July 1942. The paper was published every two months until Sept 1945. Not only did this take a great deal of commitment on the part of the writers and editor, Janet Peers, it took patience and a certain amount of courage. Janet describes the process in this way,

“The first six editions were hectographed. (A hectograph was a concoction of gelatine and glycerine, which after being boiled for hours, was poured on a shallow pan and allowed to harden. After making a master sheet, using hectograph ink, copies could be taken off the jelly-like sheet. To take off the pages of *Tid-Bits* required the use of several hectographs.”

Source: Acadia Valley Community Club. *Times to Remember*. Acadia Valley, AB: Acadia Valley Community Club, 1981. (text and photos, pp. 43-45).