

Name of Branch: Bearberry Women's Institute

Location: 18 km west of Highway 22 and 107 km northwest of Calgary

Founded: April 2, 1947. Organized in the home of Mrs. Eric Kjos; "In spite of very bad roads Mrs. A.E. Knott and Mrs. Bramley of Sundre and Mrs. Brown of Hainstock came here to help us organize. After a very interesting and enthusiastic talk by Mrs. Knott the motion was made by Mrs. Wayant seconded by Mrs. Woledge that we form a WI." [PAA 91.304/152 Box 6 Minutes April 2, 1947-Dec. 1954. Minutes 1947]

Charter Members: Mrs. J. Vinson, Mrs. A. Sandford, Mrs. Eric Kjos, Mrs. I. Kjos, Mrs. Cheney, Mrs. Woledge and Mrs. I. Kjos; Mr. Roy Wayant, Mrs. J. Crouch, Mrs. A. Vinson, Mrs. J. Rogers

First Executive: Mrs. J. Vinson, Pres.; Mrs. A. Sandford, Vice-Pres.; Mrs. Eric Kjos, second Vice-pres.; Mrs. I. Kjos, Sec-Treas.; Mrs. H. Cheney, Mrs. Woledge and Mrs. I. Kjos, Directors

Disbanded: Dec. 1955

Activities:

At the first meeting, April 26, 1947, the Bearberry WI decided to hold their meetings on a Saturday and that each month's hostess could choose her own home, the Hall, or "any other convenient place." Then, people volunteered to prepare reports for the standing committees; plan a year's program, plan for a delegate to attend the May convention. Finally, they raffled off a dish for \$1.55.

And so began the short, but very organized, history of a Women's Institutes branch. The members enthusiastically adopted a motto: "To Think, Act, and Live our Creed." On the inside cover of the first Minute book, the Bearberry WI Secretary lists all the places that paperwork had to be filed -- clearly in the hopes that she would get the bureaucratic side of membership right. The AWI was and is a highly structured institution with many reporting levels, all of which have to be supported with fees. For their first year, descriptions of their annual activities were to be sent to these four recipients:

- Pink (1) Mrs. Helen Morton, Vegreville, President, AWI*
- Yellow (2) Mrs. A.E. Knott, Sundre, Constituency Convenor of Alberta*
- White (3) Mrs. F.G. Grevett, Calgary, Publicity Convenor*
- (4) Olds Gazette, for the newspaper*

In addition to the 25 cent Branch dues, the Bearberry WI was to send money to the following:



- (1) *Mrs. A.B. McGordon, Penhold "The sum of \$1.00 per member, after the December meeting. All songsheets, creeds, pins, and stationery."*
- (2) *Mrs. M. Dibble, Constituency Convenor, Mound, Alberta - \$5.00 Constituency Dues (after the December meeting)*
- (3) *Mrs. Howes, District Convenor - \$1.00 District fee*

For WI report forms, [the branch was to] write to Mrs. C.G. Strong, Vegreville

Reports of Standing Committee, were to be sent to:

Citizenship – Mrs. W. Overguard, Sundre, Alberta
Social Welfare – Mrs. J. Armstrong, Westward Ho, Alberta
Ag and Cdn Industry – Mrs. M. Dibble, Mound, Alberta
Social Services, Mrs. H. Bredin, Eagle Hill, Alberta
Handicraft – Mrs. N. Rogers, Mound, Alberta
Household Economics, Mrs. O. Knecht, Olds, Alberta
Home Economics, Mrs. Howard Bredin, Westward Ho, Alberta

At best, Bearberry had a membership of about 16 women, but it frequently found itself with only four or five active members. In the July 1947 Minutes, eight members attended; some said that they could not contribute financially, so would like to emphasize the social aspect of the club. Other women wanted a sale of work, but the Institute decided to leave this idea for a bit. They did form a new committee for visiting the sick and for welcoming newcomers. And they raffled a photo of Edinburgh Castle for \$1.25. By August, they had agreed to make some items from flour sacks for a sale and they raffled a butter dish for 75 cents.

It took a while for the Institute to develop a pattern for its community service work. By the end of 1947, they had held dances and a Christmas party and had garnered a profit of \$59.06, which was about what most WIs would have had in the bank during this era. By December of 1947, the Institute listed 12 members, with a new member; they had made enough money that they could pay \$5 for the use of the Hall for that month's meeting. And they had begun to work on some infrastructure projects. First they explored whether or not to establish a library committee. Isabelle Kjos was on this committee and, judging by the history of this Institute, it may have been her idea. Linked to this proposal was the thought that they might rent a teacherage for their meetings. In January 1948, they changed this idea to considering whether or not they could rent the teacherage for a library room. This plan must not have worked because, in May, Mrs. Cheney offered space in her store for a library cupboard.

At the beginning of each calendar year, each Institute was meant to establish a plan of activity for the coming year. In most WI Minute books, this "plan" is alluded to, rather than actually spelled out and many Institutes seemed to make their plan up on the fly. However, Bearberry WI had a specific list developed for 1948. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Isabelle Kjos was the Secretary:

1. *That a Handbook be supplied to each member.*
2. *That each monthly meeting start at 2 pm sharp and that the business of meetings be attended to with the least possible delay.*
3. *That a gift of appreciation be given to the president and secretary going out of office at the end of the year. Moved by Vera Kjos seconded by Mrs. Hooszoski that the gift be a WI spoon. Carried.*
4. *That a sick committee be elected and that a fund be set aside for purchase of fruit or flowers.*
5. *A birthday box for pennies from each member as their birthday comes around. A penny for each year of age. This money to buy the fruit and flowers.*
6. *That a gift be given to each new baby of the community. Each member to make a gift article and give to the sewing committee.*
7. *That an article should be read out of the Report Book at each meeting by members in turn.*
8. *That second-hand clothing be collected to send to Europe.*
9. *That the hostess be responsible for suggesting the next roll call.*
10. *That a silver tea be held for the whole community. Ladies over 70 guests of honor.*
11. *Exchange of gifts at December meeting (gifts not over 50 cents).*
12. *Sewing project to be a quilt for Europe. Either to be raffled or sold.*
13. *A donation to the Children of Europe \$5.00.*
14. *That Secretary get Handbooks and Creed Cards for each member.*

Early in 1948, the Bearberry WI began what would become a concerted campaign to get some woman-friendly infrastructure built in their community. The person leading this campaign was Isabelle Kjos. In February, the members voted to meet with the Hall committee in order to suggest a few improvements: that the women have the use of the north-west room as a ladies' cloakroom and that a lavatory be built outside with a door to it from the cloak room: "Our long objective the betterment of our community."

In April, the WI women met with the Hall again and "no satisfaction could be obtained re downstairs cloakroom"; so they moved to drop the issue about the lavatory. However, the women were obviously miffed about the cloakroom. Mrs. Kjos kept the issue warm by presenting "an interesting report on the Rest Room in Olds," with a suggestion that "we put on something special to raise funds for the rest room." They decided to hold a bazaar and dance in aid of the WI Rest Room in **Olds**. And, in November, they were able to send \$25 to support that facility. But, by October of the next year (1949), Mrs. Kjos proposed that a lavatory and dressing room be built on the hall as soon as possible, with local men as the contractors. Clearly, the WI had raised some money and changed some minds in the intervening year.

In December of 1954, Bearberry WI decided that all WI women would now serve on the Hall committee; the Minutes indicate that they were now focussing on the issue of the Hall's upkeep. So, although the Bearberry WI had not built this particular community hall, they had, to all intents and purposes, taken over the running of it. Not being able to continue with two

organizations, the members voted to disband the WI, since they had only five members attending, with two resigning and two more not able to attend for the next four or five months.

Sources: [PAA 91.304/152 Box 6 Minutes April 2, 1947-Dec. 1954; Dec. 1954-Dec. 1955; PAA 2007.0380/55 Box 2 AWI Branches. Vol 1; "Bearberry Community Hall Celebrating 75 Years." *MountainView Today*. Aug. 5, 2014. <https://www.mountainviewtoday.ca/local-news/bearberry-community-hall-celebrating-75-years-1810727>]