

Name of Branch: Cayley Women's Institute

Location: Cayley is located 73 km south of Calgary, just west of Hwy 2

Organized: June 18, 1945 as "Mountain View WI"; name was changed to "Cayley WI" in February 1946, in order to avoid confusion with another branch, Mountain View WI at Didsbury.

Charter Members: Mrs. Leona Houlden, Mrs. Mary Brockway, Mrs. Flora Kocher, Mrs. Marion Alexander, Mrs. Edna Beaton, Mrs. C. Murdoch, Mrs. I. Keller, Mrs. E. Walker, Mrs. Winona Craig, Mrs. Sybil Reagh, Mrs. Eva Cummins, Mrs. Foose

First Executive: Mrs. Carl Alexander, president; Mrs. C. Craig, vice-pres; Mrs. Keller, sec-treas; directors: Mrs. E.E. Reagh, Mrs. R. Brockway, Mrs. Lynwood Walker

Disbanded: Dec. 1980

Activities: From a letter to Elizabeth Lefsrud about the founding of this WI branch: "Mrs. Carl Alexander, who had been appointed chairman for the evening, was elected president of the new branch. This was a happy appointment as Mrs. Alexander had been raised in an 'Institute' home and was familiar with all WI work.... Other charter members were Mrs. Miles Houlden, who headed War Work and Mrs. Len Beaton, Jr. who was the first handicraft convenor.

The first regular meeting, held the following month at Mrs. Alexander's home, named the new branch 'Mountain View.' However, the following February the name was changed to Cayley WI in order to avoid confusion with another Mountain View branch."

"Interest was high, everybody worked, and the membership increased each month. Ditty bags were filled, clothing drives for the war-areas of Europe supported, and plans for war-veterans studied. The Branch distributed food rationing coupon books to the community.

The usual fund-raising functions were held and \$100.00 was donated to the fledgling Cayley Community Club.

The following year Mrs. Aaring of Royalties, then Constituency Convenor, spoke to our branch on Post-War work and expressed the opinion that the most valuable contribution women could make was to keep themselves well-informed on world matters and on our own national events. (How true!)

[We assisted] in the purchase of a movie projector for the Cayley School and [made] heavy dark drapes for the school windows [in 1948]. Sewing classes were sponsored.



In 1948 Central Mortgage and Housing sponsored a nation-wide 'Better Homes Competition.' Cayley WI ladies happily pooled their ideas for those dreamed-of homes and for their effort were awarded fourth place, tying with Burdett branch.

In 1950 Cayley hosted the Constituency Conference which was held in the Highwood Memorial Centre in High River. Ross Wilkinson, MLA, was the guest speaker" (from a letter to Elizabeth Lefsrud).

"In 1950 we helped entertain and billet, twenty-three WI members from such faraway places as Norway, New Zealand and Japan, some of us still keep in touch with the ones we had as house guests. They travelled Alberta by chartered bus and while going through the Longview district they were held up by masked riders, led by Jim Wyatt, I believe. They were asked to get out and were delighted to find that the bandits were just friendly ranchers. All said it was one of the highlights of their tour" (*Under the Chinook Arch*, p. 184).

"The Pioneer Tea in 1954 was a wonderful afternoon spent with guests from the surrounding towns as well as Calgary and Lethbridge. One guest told of how she had dug a cellar under her mother's house in the early days. She was 'Sweet Sixteen' and the community was well supplied with bachelors. When she saw one riding over the hill she would grab the pick and shovel and start working. The gentleman would take the shovel from her and it wasn't long until they had a cellar to store the vegetables in. She also told of life in a sod-roofed house and of their annual trip to Calgary for supplies" (*Under the Chinook Arch*, p. 185.)

"A typewriter was purchased for a young man of the Cayley district who had been injured in an accident.

Our Constituency was honored by a visit by Geerda Van Beekhoff of the Netherlands, President of ACWW, in 1963, who was entertained at a barbeque at the home of Mrs. Roy Henderson. All Constituency branches participated. Special guests were three Indian members of Homemakers Groups, beautifully dressed in their buckskins and beads.

Another memory of the 1960s was having Enid Abraham and Isa King of Guyana visit our branch.

A scholarship for Cayley students was sponsored in memory of Steve Baranek, Principal of the Cayley School who lost his life in an accident" (from a letter to Elizabeth Lefsrud).

Notable Members:

Book of Remembrance:

- [Marion Alexander](#) moved with her family to Alberta in 1917, where she went to school and eventually married. She and her husband moved to the Cayley district in 1945,

where she became the first president of the Cayley WI. Over time she served as Constituency Convenor of Calgary-Okotoks; District 4 Director; Provincial President; Director on the FWI Board, and Life Member of ACWW. Marion attended several Federated and World Conferences.

Her personality, enjoyment of people and Institute record were contributing factors in her being chosen to represent FWI at the "Real Women of the World" Conference, sponsored by the CBC in Toronto in 1962, receiving the "Frysinger Fellowship" to represent Canada on a tour of the US to promote goodwill among rural women. Marion later received an achievement award in 1976 in recognition of World Fellowship presented by Premier Lougheed. Her WI presented her with a "Years of Service" plaque.

Life Membership:

- [Marion Alexander](#) came from a WI family. Her mother, Mrs. Reynolds, a former school teacher, joined the Carmangay WI when the family emigrated to Alberta in 1917. Marion has been part of the WI movement all her life. When her parents moved to Iron Springs, Mrs. Reynolds joined the Battersea WI there in 1932. In the early 1930s, Marion joined the Lethbridge Northern Busy Bees Girls Club and held several offices there. After her own marriage in 1934, Marion joined her mother's WI. In fact, WI seems to have been a family commitment. Mr. Reynolds was such a staunch supporter of WI that he was considered a member, as well. When Marion and her husband moved to Cayley, she became the first president of that WI. Marion was presented with a Life Membership in 1964, the presentation being made by her mother.

Sources: Cayley Women's Institute. *Under the Chinook Arch: A History of Cayley and Surrounding Area*. Cayley, AB: Cayley Women's Institute, 1967; Cayley WI Minute Books, Museum of the Highwood; PAA 91.3041/10 AWI Branch Listing and Contact 1944-1961; PAA 2007.0380/55 Box 2. AWI Branches Vol.1; *Book of Remembrance II*; *Life Membership Book*; private correspondence [from unknown sender] to Elizabeth Lefsrud, 1975.