

Name of Branch: Jackson Women's Institute

Location: near Carstairs

Organized: The organizational meeting was held Dec. 30, 1953, in the home of Mrs. Ethel Robertson; the chair was Mrs. A.L. Hogg, Constituency Convenor.

Charter Members: Elma Bird, Evelyn Bohannon, Elizabeth Davies, Nellie Davies, Marion Eckstrand, Molly Faas, Martha Felder, Holly Hallett, Martha Hildebrandt, Mary Klink, Nell Low, Marjorie Owens, Arrena Owens, Anna Olson, Mae Ray, Zelda Ray, Ethel Robertson, Hazel Somerville, and Marion Vogel. N

Note that about half of the women forming this new WI had been members of Westcott WI, but had left to form Jackson when Westcott got too large. Jackson WI had 19 members in 1955 and gradually grew those numbers to 24 in 1960.



First Executive: Ethel Robertson, pres; Marion Eckstrand, sec-treasurer

Disbanded: current in 2007

Activities: Ethel Robertson, the first president, got the Institute off on the right footing by establishing certain principles: that the club should follow Robert's Rules of Order, that the President and Secretary stand when addressing the meeting and that all meetings start on time and move along in a timely fashion. Jackson WI continued with these principles throughout its history.

In *Beyond our Prairie Trail*, Noreen Olson gives us a look at the evolution of the WI over time: "In the early days, the WI gathered food donations and money to help the Habbermehl Home for the Elderly in Didsbury. They helped them buy a freezer in 1958, they helped with the spring cleaning. These days, we contribute to the food banks in Cremona and Carstairs. We used to do bake sales, potluck suppers and card parties. Now we do garage sales and auctions. We used to have garden tours; now we go to Stage West. We used to learn health tips on canning green beans safely and the new wonder drug, Sulpha. Now we study AIDS and organ transplants. Some things remain the same – we still have baking contests and wonder what will become of the family farm" (p. 331).

Noreen Olson uses the publication of a local history (1995) to underline the most important foundation of the WI movement: education. She writes, "The speakers, workshops and educational sessions at these meetings vary widely, but are uniformly informative and interesting. We routinely deal with topics from handicrafts to law enforcement. Our members learn everything from farm safety to human rights. Our provincial organization sends

resolutions to every level of government and on practically every subject. To be a member of the WI is to be involved in the world” (331).

Mrs. Olson reminds her readers that the WI helps the needy locally, provincially, nationally, and around the world, with “clothing and baby blankets, sewing machines, pumps and wells, garden tools and seeds, health facilities and gift coupons to thousands of women in developing countries” (332).

Notable Members:

Book of Remembrance:

- Shortly after [Marion Eckstrand](#) was born in Illinois, in 1909, her family moved to Langdon where, in 1925, her father won the Master Farm Award. Marion trained as a teacher and taught in the Langdon district at several schools. She was a member of Westcott WI and a charter member of Jackson WI, filling several leadership roles. Her love of education led her to take on Convenor for Education, United Nations and Agriculture. Marion was much admired as a courageous and accomplished woman.
- [Phyllis Hunt](#) was born in 1910 in Calgary, where she received her education and later worked as a secretary. Phyllis married a farmer in the Priddis district, where she subsequently joined Westoe WI. After moving to the Carstairs district, Phyllis joined Jackson WI. A well-loved and kind woman, Phyllis served in several leadership roles in her branches. She is remembered as a choir member and an accomplished painter in oils.
- [Ethel Robertson](#) was born in Missouri in 1904, coming to the Didsbury area when she was two years old. After completing Normal School in Calgary, Ethel went to teach at Westcott, where she later married “the boy next door.” Ethel was a charter member of Westcott WI in 1928 and later of Jackson WI. She is remembered as an energetic and capable leader, having held most positions at both branches, and serving as Constituency Convenor and District Director as well. She and her husband received a Master Farm Award in 1959. Ethel was a driving force behind the publication of *Prairie Trails: A History of Carstairs and Didsbury*. She is remembered as an efficient worker, who had a good sense of humour, kind judgment, and for whom each day was a privilege to enjoy.
- [Pearl Stone](#) was born in 1904 in Carstairs. After qualifying as a teacher, Pearl married a local farmer and settled in the Dog Pound area; she joined Jackson WI in 1966, eventually serving the Institutes as a Director. A scholarship in her name was given to students in the Cremona Grade 6 class. Pearl was a writer, publishing two books and serving as a newspaper correspondent for several years.

Life Membership Book:

- [Holly Hallett](#) was born in Saskatchewan, but moved to Alberta at a young age, eventually marrying and coming to live in the Carstairs area, where she was a charter member of Jackson WI in 1953. A capable leader, Holly rose to become provincial President of the AWI.

During her terms on Council for the AWI, Holly chaired the Pornography Awareness Program in Alberta, assisted in strategic planning for the Alberta Department of Home Economics "A Direction for the 90's - Home Economics Program Statement," and was responsible for implementing the government-funded Rural Child Care Pilot Project, which was organized by a committee of representatives from five rural women's organizations.

Over the years, Holly's greatest interest was the environment. She was a member of the Rural Sub-Committee of the Environment Council of Alberta, and a member of the Transition Working Group which worked on the restructuring of the Council in 1992. She worked on many briefs, including Maintaining and Expanding the Agriculture Land Base in Alberta.

Holly was also a representative at Canada-Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture meetings, Farming for the Future Conferences and Winning Women Conferences.

Holly was active in her local community in many different areas - the Cremona School Parent Advisory Committee, Public Speaking and Project Books, Judge for 4-H, giving Provincial Leadership Training Courses, and volunteering where needed.

- Born in Missouri, [Ethel Robertson](#) came to the Westcott area as a child. After graduating from Normal School, she taught at Didsbury and eventually married and settled in the district. She was originally a member of Westcott WI, but was a charter member of Jackson WI, which was formed in her living room, and of which she was the first president. Ethel served in several positions in the AWI, including District Director. She was very involved in Centennial projects and was awarded a Life Membership in 1967.

Sources: Carstairs History Book Committee. *Beyond our Prairie Trail*. Vol. 1. Carstairs, AB: Carstairs History Book Committee, 1995; PAA 91.3041/ 10 AWI Branch Listing and Contact 1944-1961; *Book of Remembrance* Vol. I, II; *Life Membership Book*; [*Home and Country* (Fall 2007): 10; Carstairs Centennial History Committee. *Prairie Trails: Pioneer History of Carstairs and District*. Didsbury: Didsbury Booster, 1967.

