

Name of Branch: Rush Centre Women's Institute

Location: Esther is 185 km north of Medicine Hat, close to the Saskatchewan border.

Organized: 1916

Charter Members: Mrs. John Christie, Mrs. Jim Travis, Miss Ida Muhlbach, Miss Lela Little, Mrs. Joe Long, Mrs. Dan Campbell, and Mrs. H. Muhlbach Sr.

First Executive: Mrs. John Christie, president; Mrs. Jim Travis, vice-president; Miss Muhlbach, sec-treas.

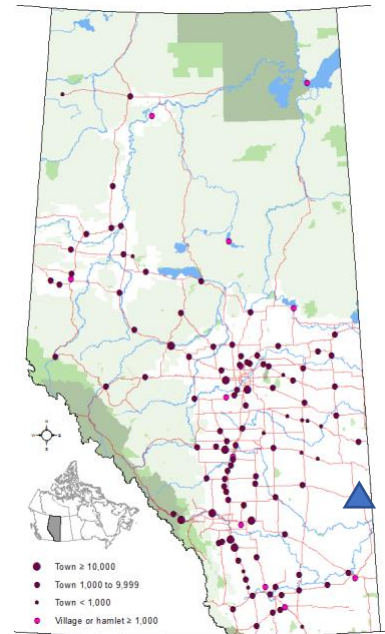
Disbanded: active in 1997

Activities: "The Rush Centre WI branch was organized March 16, 1916 with seven ladies, Mrs. John Christie, Mrs. Jim Travis, Miss Ida Muhlbach, Miss Lela Little, Mrs. Joe Long, Mrs. Dan Campbell, and Mrs. H. Muhlbach Sr., as the Charter members. One might wonder why there were only seven members, but one must remember this area was newly homesteaded and very few families lived here. Most of the homesteaders were bachelors, but they soon married and in a few short years the WI membership climbed to twenty and over. Several of these brides were present at the 50th Anniversary held in the Esther Hall August 19, 1966. While modes of travel were not as they are today and roads were just prairie trails everyone attended the meetings and many pleasant hours were spent together." [Parks to Lefsrud]

"The first winter they began a circulating library amongst the members, pooling books and magazines, and passing them along as reading material was scarce. This would be greatly appreciated when one had to sit up late to stoke the fires on a cold night.

The first delegate sent out to a convention was Mrs. Robb. The first 'doings' put on was a concert in the school, held in March 1917, and proved very successful, netting \$25.00 for the Red Cross. The first picnic was July 12, 1917 at the school. In 1918, it was decided to hold the meeting in the members' homes. Meetings were livened with singing, and in some home a gramophone selection added to the enjoyment. Talks and papers were given on such topics as gardening, preserving, meat curing, soap making, war-time economy, setting hens, control of house flies, bread making, and numerous others.

The first order for materials included yarn, gingham, muslin, etc., to be made up into small articles and to be auctioned at a concert and dance held in the school. In 1918, a United Picnic, together with Golden Centre WI and Love Vale UFA was held. They had their first chicken supper in the school in the fall of 1918. October and November meetings of that year were cancelled because of the epidemic.



The WI 'doings' of all the years would fill pages – but to list a few – a social evening to welcome a new minister, the Hallowe'en Parties, Leap Year Party, Minstrel Show, various kinds of suppers and teas, barn dances, old-fashioned dances, plays, amateur hours, Christmas trees, Picnics, bazaars, farewells, masquerade, and many others.

The constituency rallies have always been big events for the members, helping a small, isolated group keep in contact with other groups. Attending these rallies also had its problems in transportation, lunches, etc., especially in the early days when few cars were available and when women drivers were supposedly as much a menace as today. Some early rallies were in Benton in Ball's Hall in Sibbald, in Lanfine and in various places." [Esther Community History, p. 42].

"The WI motto "For Home and Country" was truly lived up to. During the two World Wars the WI was never slack in doing their bit for the Red Cross and for the home boy soldiers who fought so bravely for their country. During the "Hungry Thirties" the work of the WI carried on, and for example at one time instead of sending a member to a convention the money was given to a member who had to go to a Sanitarium, and in another instance was when a member was blessed with twins. With three small children besides the twins and due to financial circumstances, they were unable to hire help, so the WI employed a girl for her for two weeks. Also, during these years Santa Claus worked under great difficulties, so the WI gave a helping hand providing small gifts for every child in the district.

As the elder members began to leave to retire, the younger members continued to keep the Rush Centre WI active, and many projects have been completed. Our first big accomplishment was the compiling of a Cook Book in 1955. Members donated their recipes and their time to type and run off the copies on the duplicating machine at the Acadia School Division office. In 1970 the members prepared a new revised Cook Book and nearly 250 copies have been sold. In 1960 the Esther Orchids Girls Club was organized with a membership of fifteen to twenty girls enrolled every year. Being the mother club, we assist them whenever and however they need help. Perhaps the most difficult and the longest project we undertook to do was the preparing and publishing of the Esther Community History book. Nearly 250 copies of that have been sold.

The club continues to prepare Program books for the ensuing year and perhaps the biggest and most fun event is the Annual Garden Tour. In the month of August, the members tour each member's garden and home surroundings, and small prizes are given for different competitions, and this is followed by a barbecue supper for members, their husbands, and families. Also, the members always look forward to the Constituency Conference held in Cereal every year. The members enjoy the handicraft and baking competitions. In recent years we try to help members if illness prevails. In one instance we housecleaned a member's house for her and in another instance, we did a member's Christmas baking for her. We also help in many ways with the upkeep of our community Hall.

Although our membership is small and our finances not all that big, we still continue to work for Home and Country. Our 60th Anniversary will be in March 1976 and we will soon be making plans for that and trust it will be as successful as our 50th Anniversary was. This winter's project is the updating of the Rush Centre WI Scrapbook. We also are hoping for more new members to keep the club as active as has for the past 59 years." [Parks to Lefsrud.]

Notable Members:

Book of Remembrance:

- [Mildred Affleck](#), a former teacher, who married a farmer in the Esther area. Mildred was noted for her handwork, for which she received many awards and, for her green thumb, and for her creative writing;
- [Beatrice Pratt](#) trained as a stenographer, meeting her husband when she came west on a harvest excursion. A lifetime member, Beatrice is remembered for her home-made bread, doilies, and afghans, as well as for her green thumb, especially with African violets.

Life Membership:

- [Mrs. Padberg](#) (née Ida Muhlbach) moved to the Esther area when still in her teens; she served as assistant to her father, the Postmaster, until her marriage to a local farmer.

Sources: 1924, 1928, 1930, 1931 Convention Report on this website; *Book of Remembrance* Vol. I, II; *Life Membership Book* on this website; PAA 91.3041/ 10 AWI Branch Listing and Contact 1944-1961 for Districts 1,2,3,4,5; Cole, Catherine and Judy Larmour. Many and Remarkable: The Story of the Alberta Women's Institutes. Edmonton: Alberta Women's Institutes, 1997. 125-131; *Esther Community History*. Esther, AB: Rush Centre Women's Institute. [1967]; private correspondence from Mrs. Don Parks to Elizabeth Lefsrud, 1975; PAA PR0089.003 Boxes 6,7 contains most of the Minute books from 1916-1991]