

COUNTY

50th anniversary may be the last for women's group

GENESEE - About 65 people celebrated 50 remarkable years of existence for the Genesee Women's Institute Wednesday.

Unfortunately, the birthday luncheon at the Genesee Community Centre may be one of the last events ever organized by the small but active group.

The uncertain future is due to several factors, explains Mary Pickerl, a longtime member and the granddaughter of a woman who helped found the group in 1933.

"In the last two years the membership has gone down with Edmonton Power coming in and buying out the farms," says Pickerl.

The other factors working against all women's institutes are the changing role of women and differences in the rural lifestyle.

Back in the '30s, the Genesee institute offered farm wives a chance to get out of the house for a day. "Now they don't need an out."

"For instance, our health and home economist departments are supplying the needs that used to be voluntary through the women's institute," she says.

"I think that we're finding the role of the women's institute is changing. It seems to be less and less attractive to younger women."

Membership today is only seven; raising funds is difficult and unless everyone can attend an event, the small number hardly warrants getting together.

Warns Pickerl, "unless we get some more members, we just can't continue on."

"The younger people are just not interested, and that's all there is to it."

Although the future of the Genesee Women's Institute beyond its 50th year is uncertain, the carefully maintained budgets and records from the past trace a colorful and important role in the community.

A movement to organize institutes was first initiated by a woman whose baby died from drinking unpasteurized milk, says Evelyn Scheideman, a Genesee member for 24 years.

"In the early days, it was a way for the country women to get out of the house to do something, to pool their resources and ideas in a serviceable way,



The meal served up by the Genesee institute Wednesday may be one of the last, unfortunately.

which they did in a variety of ways," says Pickerl. Their motto is For Home and Country.

Membership that first year rose from six at the organizational meeting to a total of 19 at year end.

The founding members set out to meet the social and recreation needs of the community, and educate themselves in the process.

The Genesee institute has donated to charities and organizations since day one. Maintaining the local cemetery and helping keep the local hall in shape soon became routine duties.

Scholarships at Warburg High School and the local 4-H movement are awarded regularly. The institute maintained close ties with the Genesee school until it closed about 11 years ago.

Supplies for new mothers in the area, or supplies for local men fighting overseas in the Second World War were generated by the institute.

One entry in a yellowed record book shows a post-war donation to the Hungarian Relief Fund of \$10, a small amount by today's standards, but a substantial contribution at the time.

Among the first projects was a sick kit; a package of medical items such as bed sheets, pillow cases, rubber sheets, a water bag and thermometer.

In a 1956 history of the institute, a writer recalled the purpose of the kits: "This kit was at the disposal of anyone in the district requiring it during illness in the home."

The institute has sponsored children in the third world since 1966.

In one humorous case, members decided to make a wool afghan for their foster child. Recalls Pickerl, with a laugh, "we just went through without thinking of where we were sending it."

The group had second thoughts about the gift after mailing it to its destination, Jamaica.

Word was soon received the warm blanket had been converted to a mattress.

The foster parent program is one ongoing project that would vanish if the institute folded, says Pickerl.

Upkeep of the new hall will prove a major task, especially without the aid of the institute.

Pickerl sees good reason to keep the 50-year-old group alive and active.

"I still think there is room for women to be learning more," she says.

The group has studied subjects like home economics and law. "It's these types of things that people should get involved with."

"A housewife's job has always been in several fields, it's not just three meals a day."

Among people attending the 50th anniversary luncheon Wednesday were: the second vice-president of the Alberta Women's Institute; the District 3 director; Reynold and Yvette Jesse, a former Genesee institute member and her husband now residing in Saskatchewan; and representatives from each of the four institute branches in the Leduc district, Leduc, Breton, Warburg and Conjuring Creek.