

(U-2)
10-8

(U 2) 10-8

A group that has made a difference

It's quiz time! Do you have any idea who promoted the idea of mandatory stopping for school buses with flashing lights? Do you know who came up with the notion that signs should be posted at all railway crossings? Here is a hint. The same organization was also responsible for the implementation of three-point rear seat-belts in automobiles.



HISTORY

BY PAUL
WHITE

For The Sun Times

If you answered that it was a government, you are only partially right. These ideas were generated by an organization who then convinced political officials of the importance of these changes. The group behind these actions and many more legislative resolutions was the Women's Institute.

The first branch of the Women's Institute was formed in Stoney Creek, near Hamilton, in February 1897. The second branch was created in Whitby, Ontario.

On Sept. 15, 1900, the long history of the Women's Institute in Grey County marked its beginning when that organization marked the beginning of its third branch in Kemble.

One of the driving forces behind the creation of this Grey County branch of the Women's Institute was Mrs. James Gardiner. Shortly after the creation of the Whitby branch, Mrs. Gardiner spoke to a group of men and women at a meeting of the Farmers' Institute in Kemble. The topic of her speech was "Man Works from Sun to Sun, but Woman's Work is Never Done".

Beginning in August, 1900, Mrs. Gardiner travelled from door to door in the Kemble area inviting women to attend a meeting at the library. The purpose of the meeting, she told her listeners, was to form a branch of the Women's Institute.

At that historic meeting Mrs. J. L. Smith was named honorary president, Mrs. Gardiner was elected president, Mrs. Daniel Davidson held the office of vice-president, Mrs. Franklin Wilcox became the treasurer and Mrs. George Beckett was selected for the position of secretary.

In 1919, the various branches of the Women's Institutes across Ontario formed the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.

Once again, Grey County women can claim an important role on this historic occasion. The first president of this organization was Mrs. William Todd of Orillia. But she had a strong Grey County connection. Prior to her marriage to William Todd, she had been Harriett Hanna, born and raised in the Grey County community of Flesherton.

In 1953 a Grey County woman, Mrs. Gordon MacPhatter, was elected to the presidency of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario. She held this office until 1956.

Mrs. MacPhatter, the first resident of Grey County to hold this office had also been a member of the Kemble branch which was the first Grey County branch of the Women's Institute.

When the Women's Institute was originally formed, its founders viewed its purpose to be that of domestic health and welfare. In fact, the constitution and bylaws listed in the formation of the original branch at Stoney Creek lists as its object: "to promote that knowledge of household science which shall lead to improvement in household architecture with special attention to home sanitation, to a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods and fuels, and to a more scientific care of children with view of raising the general standard of health of our people".

The outstanding contribution by the Women's Institute in leading the fight to improve the standards of all aspects of society is something we should all be thankful for.

The Women's Institute of Grey County has also played a large role in the preservation and promotion of the heritage of this region.

They have been at the forefront of the drive to create and maintain both the Grey County Museum and the Grey County Archives. Their Tweedsmuir History books, which they maintain with great pride and detail, provide an important insight into the life of rural women in this region.

The information used in this article came from documents in the Grey County Archives which boasts one of the largest collections of Women's Institute records in the province of Ontario.