

EDITORIAL

NEW TRENDS AND OLD TRADITIONS: A review of last year's reports from the secretaries of Women's Institutes over the province show some progressive new trends growing out of past traditions.

It has become almost a cliché that the Institute is "an educational organization", "the country woman's university". A survey of program topics shows that many branches are trying desperately to keep it so. We don't hear much about program planning any more but evidently some women know that a good program is still the backbone of an Institute.

Discussion was featured this year as never before. Earlier Institutes were proud of the way the members learned to "speak in public". Now we go farther. We know that at any community meeting — church, school or representation to some public body, we must be ready to speak our minds and debate a question if necessary. It's a great help to have had some practice in the Institute.

Some years ago the Institute filled an important purpose in "brightening the social life of the isolated country woman." There aren't many isolated country women in Ontario today but there are many who need friends and happy, relaxing social interests — perhaps even the overworked mother who tries to carry on a job by day and homemaking by night. So we find Institutes organizing bus trips to the Shakespearean plays at Stratford; to Upper Canada Village; to Ottawa to visit the Parliament Buildings and the National Gallery; or a trip to the Iccapades for members and their husbands.

The more we get into the big projects of a large organization, the more members of vision see the need of getting more lightness into the Institute program. One branch recommends more singing at meetings — it has compiled its own songbook. One raises most of its funds for the year at a gala Calico Ball. Another reported a variety concert repeated on request in three communities and given gratis in an Ontario hospital. The proceeds were used to finance a folk dancing school for the twelve-to-twenty-year-olds of the community. Many Institutes have joined a film council and have movies in the school house on Friday nights. And of course there are the family nights with supper and games and singing. In these days of commercialized entertainment Women's Institutes find it highly worth while to go back to one of their original purposes — "to develop local talent and a more abundant community life."

There was a time when Institutes made things hard for themselves by doing work and raising money for projects that should have been the responsibility of the whole community. For instance, they bought equipment for schools that should have been provided by the school board and paid for out of everyone's taxes. Now the Institute asks the board to do what needs to be done; and perhaps the board likes it better this way too.

Institutes are also learning to cooperate with authorities and others in getting things done. This year's reports told of things accomplished by sending petitions to county councils and the Highways Department to have roads repaired and danger spots removed; asking municipal councils to take care of cemeteries and in one township, to provide fire protection. An Institute felt that their community needed supervised recreation so the women invited the whole community to a social evening to discuss it. A Community Recreation Association was set up and things are moving along happily.

At their beginning the great concern of Women's Institutes was the health and welfare of children. At first they got what advice they could from travelling lecturers — doctors or nurses. Now they work with their local health units, having doctors and nurses speak at their meetings and reciprocating by sponsoring baby clinics and immunization centres for children. They seem to keep in close touch with schools, often conferring with teachers on study courses and vocational guidance. And as horizons broadened from the home and the community to the community of the world, it was not surprising that when the opportunity came, many branches were ready to sponsor a child in Europe or Asia or Africa in the Save the Children plan. It is all in keeping with the original pattern and the present trend to accept wider areas of social responsibility.

And the good neighboring, characteristic of Women's Institutes, is as active today as it ever was. This year's reports include such things as giving a transistor radio to a boy suffering from muscular dystrophy, sending gifts regularly to a woman in a mental hospital, providing home cooking for a family whose mother was away, ill. We can never outgrow that, either.

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