

In Memory of

Laura Rose Stephen

LAURA ROSE STEPHEN who, as Laura Rose, was the first Women's Institute organizer and lecturer, died on July 29th of this year in her ninety-eighth year. Those who knew Laura Rose in her active years of Institute work will remember her as one of the most gifted extension workers of this country or (we believe) of any other.

From the Laura Rose Women's Institute of South Waterloo we received the accompanying photo, and the following biographical sketch prepared for the Institute some years ago by a member, Mrs. Peggy Knapp:

"This is the story of a woman — a woman who had an ideal, and the overwhelming energy, ability and ambition to reach it. It is the story of Laura Rose Stephen, for whom the Laura Rose Women's Institute was named.

"Mrs. Stephen lives in retirement in Ottawa today, but for 40 years her name was a household word among Women's Institute members not only in this province but across the Dominion, for she organized branches in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Quebec.

"Laura Rose was born in Georgetown, Ontario, but while still a girl in her teens she moved to North Dakota to keep house for an older brother on his homestead farm.

"Those were the days when the East was still relatively young, and her tasks would stagger a teenager of today. She not only kept the household running smoothly, but cooked for hired men, made butter, cared for the chickens, carried wood, pumped water and raised a large garden, as well as serving as teacher at the local school. Since the school was some miles from her home, she rode there on horseback in summer and in a 'jumper' pulled by two bronchos in winter — sometimes in temperatures forty degrees below zero.

"When Laura Rose returned to Ontario she entered Alma Ladies College and later the Ontario Agricultural College where she took the course in Dairy work. She graduated with high honors and was instructor at the College's Dairy School for thirteen years.

"It was during this time that the Women's Institute was founded at Stoney Creek and along with her other duties, Miss Rose was engaged by the government as an organizer and lecturer. She loves to boast that for thirty-two years she addressed the Institutes' summer series of meetings. And it was Laura Rose who contributed to the Institutes of Canada their motto, "For Home and Country."



The late Laura Rose Stephen, first Women's Institute organizer and lecturer.

"Laura Rose was greatly in demand as a speaker, for here she excelled. With her warm personality, broad outlook and wide experience coupled with a delightful sense of humor, she was a welcome guest.

"As if there was no limit to her energy and talent she served as judge at rural fairs, sampling butter, bread, jams, fruit and inspecting fancywork and sewing.

"For years she edited two monthly columns in farm journals and wrote many articles for publications in the United States. One of her works, a three-hundred page book 'Farm Dairying' was used as a text book in many agricultural schools and colleges.

"In 1911 Laura Rose was married to W. F. Stephen, Secretary of the Canadian Ayrshire Breeders and the Montreal Milk Producers. They lived in Huntingdon, Quebec, for some time and then moved with their adopted son and daughter to Ottawa.

"So it is that the Laura Rose Women's Institute is so proud to bear the name of this indefatigable woman. They feel that they must seek to live up to her standards of perfection, her ambitions for her home and her country, her great thirst for knowledge, her broad concept of life and living.

"The words of the Mary Stewart Collect, 'May we strive to touch and know the great heart common to us all' are so graciously typified for us by this woman who gave so much to rural Canada."