

Institutes in the Far North West

Editor's Note: When Mrs. Jas. Haggerty, President F.W.I.C. and Miss Florence Eadie, formerly of Home Economics Extension Service, went to visit the Institutes in the North West Territories, we knew that whatever else they might do they would be sure to get close to the people — and they did. It is impossible, here, to begin to tell the many human interest stories they brought back, but we have been given access to their official reports and from these we pass on some information about what the Institutes are doing in this territory with a few notes about the women themselves and the problems and promise of the country.

Mrs. Haggerty Reports

INTRODUCING HER REPORT, Mrs. Haggerty said: "The Women's Institutes in this new country cannot possibly operate along the lines followed in other parts of Canada. Formality and Parliamentary Procedure have to be set aside at the beginning of their organizations in many cases. Those who would like to conform to a pattern of programme have to think out ways and means that will interest the native women and try to integrate them into the life of the community.

"There are many other problems that have to be solved; for instance, the natives take their entire families and go into the bush to hunt and trap for two or three months at a time, which means that perhaps four or five women must carry on until they return and, of course, the programme suffers.

"In many places the Treaty Indians (or supposedly full-blood Indians) and the Metis or half-breed Indians do not get along well and sometimes they refuse to work together, with the result that at one meeting the Treaty Indians are present and at the next the Metis attend.

"In one or two settlements the Indians and Eskimos will not agree and resent one another. We found there was little trouble with integration of the whites and natives, but the trouble arose between different factions of the natives.

"The Indians and Eskimos have not yet reached the place where they can be left entirely on their own; they need the leadership and guidance of a tactful and understanding white person and this has to be given very subtly and kindly."

Mrs. Haggerty brought back these reports from her visits to the Institutes of "the Territories": These have all been organized within the last few years.

"Fort Smith is called the "Ottawa of the North West Territories," and has an active group named Capnoweta, which means Capital of North West Territories. They stress Handicraft in their Institute and do a great deal to help the native women with these arts which are very beautiful and should be preserved. They buy the materials at cost price from the Indian Affairs Branch, distribute it to those who are doing the work and then have regular sales when the work is sold at good prices. They deduct the cost of the materials and a small sum for the Institute, and the native women have this means of earning some money for themselves while they are enjoying meetings and social times with the white women. They all get along well together, have interesting programmes and sponsor many community projects. They are interested in 4-H Clubs.

"Fort Providence, too, does a great deal of Handicraft and the Institute helps to sell and this makes a common bond between the women. There is a Nursing Station there operated by the Catholic Nursing Sisters with which the Women's Institute works closely. The Sisters carry on classes where they teach basic English to the pre-school children and the Institute provides the materials such as crayons, coloured cards and all sorts of helps to encourage them to come regularly. The Institute members take turns in providing cookies or cup cakes and powdered milk so that the Sisters may have refreshments for the children. It is so necessary, everywhere, to encourage regular attendance at classes and meetings.

"At Fort McPherson I found that the first Institute had lasted only a few months due to lack of leadership. The Secretary, who was keen, was transferred elsewhere and the Indians were left on their own. They just couldn't handle the situation so they handed the books and the sum of \$70.00 to the Principal of the school, the money to be used for books for the library in the school. The Principal has not yet spent the money and produced their books, asking for my advice about using the money. Since it had been raised primarily for this purpose I could not see how it could be used otherwise and told him so.

"I called on several people and invited them to come to an evening meeting in the school and sixteen natives and four white women turned out. They like the Institute meetings and could continue if only they could provide leadership. Two women expect new babies;