

Seven Famous Words

We have always done it this way.

How often have you sat at a meeting and these words were uttered? At a programme planning meeting especially we've all been guilty of falling into this rut.

In 1897 Adelaide Hoodless didn't hesitate to try to change the role of women. She talked to all sorts of groups attempting to elevate the status for women. She recognized the fact, that women should be playing a more important role and she did something about it. She did not concede, "we have always done it this way" but instead, "let's get together and do the things that need doing".

Since the formation of that first Women's Institute at Stoney Creek right up to the present, it can be said, we have been concerned with women, their families and the standard of living. It also has been proven that during the seventy-eight years of our existence the programmes and projects implemented, belong to the members. The strength of the programmes still depends on our goals — this alone should dictate change.

Women's Institute members have always been for women's rights, however, the recent feminist movement has prompted us to rethink our position in today's society. In many cases we are shifting our emphasis from general community service to specific problems of women. We now are being asked to consider and express our thoughts on the issues of today. Members are being asked to speak out on property laws, immigration, day care, violence and obscenity on TV, as well as their opinions on the position of the family and their role in the changing society. We are being told to write letters to our local members of parliament, community leaders and industry, to speak out about the current issues.

One stabilizing factor that has not changed, is our WI policy "in the conduct of its affairs and in every phase of its work the Women's Institute shall be non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-racial and all Women's Institutes shall be operated for the equal good of all citizens." This sound thinking has given us the strength and ballast in this changing world.

Some things are changing — new projects reflect new goals. Is there anything more important than our health? The Home Economics Branch didn't think so. The Women's Institute members didn't think so either, so together we've completed the Nutrition Workshops. Now we're being asked to fill out a questionnaire. Through your participation the Food Specialists will be able to tell you some important facts and theories about you, your eating habits and what it all means.

Part of the changing scene has come about because so many members work. Now branches are holding evening meetings, breakfast meetings, or ten o'clock coffee meetings rather than the regular afternoon meetings. It's up to the branches to try to devise programmes so these working women will participate and continue to work WI into their busy schedule.

Another of the changing scenes seems to be the pendulum swing back to the important part Women's Institutes play in encouraging community projects. There was a time when we felt we should do it all ourselves; now we know it is important "to get things going", by asking governments, local authorities and local boards to do those things that are needed most in our community. WI's can then take a back seat and turn the projects over to those most suited for the task.

We no longer can work in isolation, the changing scene makes it desirable to work with other organizations toward a cooperative effort. More and more it is apparent, "No man is an island" — it is time we realized the significance of the Women's Institute, and prove the seven famous words do have a genuine meaning.

Margaret Zoeller

