

LET'S TALK

A letter received voices the opinion of some Women's Institute members. "I personally worry about the future of the W I, and so do others that I have talked to from time to time. I don't think it can survive long as an organization that teaches handicrafts, yet that is how many outsiders see it. I'm not sure that it is fulfilling the vision of Adelaide Hoodless, whom I perceive as a true feminist—free, loving and responsible; but we need to talk about that. So far, in Home and Country, I see all kinds of anniversaries being celebrated, but I also want to see the NOW celebrated. Adelaide Hoodless lived NOW, and her NOW was 1897; ours is 1979. In Home and Country please." Mary E. James, Union Hall W I, LANARK NORTH DISTRICT.

February 19, 1979—The W I's 82nd Birthday!

It is only through birthday celebrations that one can determine where we have been and even offer some thoughts about where we ought to be going. Birthdays are a beginning!

At birth, are goals determined? Could Mrs. Hoodless have foreseen where the W I would be 82 years later, or was her objective to tell the women of her day her dilemma and help them through word of mouth to take advantage of her experience? She urged educators to demand courses in household science, the VON for better health care, the Council of Women for improved life-styles. She spun out ideas for the women of her day to capitalize on and work toward goals which would create a sense of purpose for women and families. Could Mrs. Hoodless's ideas ever have been accomplished without Erland Lee and those 101 women who were encouraged to organize the first Women's Institute?

Would her objective not have been to help those women in 1897? Was her dream for a lasting organization, or was she thinking of her present day situation?

When we look at those anniversary pictures, we know plenty of hard work, human kindness and achievements at community level have been accomplished. During this anniversary month, the W I will look back and reflect. The Institute are builders, making a contribution to the communities, creating a better world, grasping opportunities for leadership, pointing the way for better citizenship. The Women's Institute is there in the hamlet and village helping burned out families, the blind girl with a piano, comforting the upset and bereaved; doing the things in small and intimate ways, caring and sharing.

The W I has practiced volunteerism right through its existence. The world needs this type of organization

to-day just as much as it did at the turn of the century. Doubtless the projects we are carrying on to-day will be recorded in history as appropriate for our time.

Our objective never was to be a professional group. Our total being was and is to develop, assist and guide women from all walks of life to create a wholesome community atmosphere. To provide the social contact and stimulus to the housewife, encouraging her to speak, serve on committees and chair meetings.

Our questioner asks, what about the NOW and where are we going?

At this point in time what are our goals? Along with our basic objectives we have joined the rest of the world to do our small share for the International Year of the Child. The FWIO have committed themselves to assist in a child immunization program throughout the province. Our Tweedsmuir Histories are without question one of the finest recordings of community history in the province. The books are used by students, school boards and historical societies. Many branches have taken the information and compiled it into book form for sale. Add to this the preservation of the Erland Lee Home and its artifacts. In a society having more and more leisure time, we have come to realize the importance of crafts. Just drop in at the Lee during W I week and see the interest in pioneer crafts and one suddenly realizes how important our heritage is and how lost some of the old crafts are to our generation.

The wide ranging interests of members are reflected in the resolutions. Research affords the opportunity to increase awareness of current problems. The W I provides a vehicle whereby members throughout rural Ontario have a mouthpiece in government and industry, and the satisfaction of knowing ideas will be heard and often set in motion.

Our horizons are wide. As well as being federated with the national body we work with the 8½ million member international organization, the ACWW. We lend our weight toward pennies for friendship, international scholarships and provide assistance to bring a third world member to council meetings.

One thing is certain, the role of the Women's Institute, with its vast diversification, its people oriented goals, its strength in the rural communities cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Its worth has a multiplier effect. There will always be a need, regardless of the decade, to encourage women to have confidence in themselves and stand on their own feet.

The W I's feet are firmly rooted in the province, working constantly as guardians of established values.

Margaret Zaeller