

## BEFORE ACWW

The women of Finland were the first in the world to organize. Back as far as 1813, the Finnish Economic Association invited its first woman to become a member.

It seems ironic that in the 1980's rural women are still striving to form groups in order to become more knowledgeable about the business of farming, when in the mid and late 1700's the Finnish Turku Academy had begun advisory work with the distribution of hemp and flax seed to farmers and organized spinning schools for women, and after years of hard frosts, taught the women to make lichen bread and the use of the potato. It is evident that rural families were working together then, and the pendulum is swinging back to a united rural family farm unit. Just as the women's role to-day, is becoming recognized as an important part in the country's economy, in Finland in the 1870's, the rural women's work was gaining acceptance and recognition as their contribution to national family unity.

In the USA, "The Grange" was to become a pillar in the mid 1800's, as a farm fraternity. From an early report, we read, "from the very start, and as part of its organization principles, women have enjoyed equal rights to vote and hold office in the Grange. There are several offices that must be filled by women, but there is no office to which a woman is not eligible."

Around the time of the formation of the first Women's Institute in the world at Stoney Creek, Canada, the Norwegian women were working along similar lines. Because of a specific need — in Ontario — to tell women about the dangers of drinking impure milk. In Norway — the scourge of tuberculosis, (caused by the greater mobility of people, because of increased railroad lines, new roads and the opening up of ocean ports to other countries), the welfare of the home from the social, economic, aesthetic and hygienic points of view, the need became urgent to promote a better understanding toward eradicating this dreaded disease.

With the organization of the Women's Institute, Stoney

Creek in 1897, the Norwegian Housewives Association in 1898 and the Finnish Martha Organization in 1899, it wasn't long until Germany, Denmark, Sweden and many other countries found a real reason to assist women to raise their voices.

It can be readily understood, women working in many countries, unaware of the progress being made by other women in other lands, that there was a tremendous potential for a world-wide organization working in unity toward better life-styles, whether it was economic or social.

When reading the history it appears that the original step and each succeeding step became stronger because of tragedies, wars, increased communications, and a need for facilities to know that women in other countries were striving hard for the same goals.

It took many years, many confrontations and many different personalities to launch an International Organization. Many strong personalities were eventually to band together to form a world-wide group.

**Mrs. Alfred Watt**, Canadian, organized the first WI in Llanfair, Wales in 1915, and saw Women's Institutes thrive during the first World War with 1200 Branches being organized in Britain during those four years. It has been said, "Mrs. Watt had an ability to infect other people with her own enthusiasm which really did amount to genius."

**Lady Aberdeen**, a town woman, after presiding at three International Council of Women Conferences, became well known and because of her broad concerns for women in general, it was only natural that rural women began to seek her advice.

**Lady Denman**, a prime mover in the adoption of the Constitution of the National Federation of Women's Institutes in Britain, also showed tremendous concern for the formation of an organization of international status.

A personal friend from the time Mrs. Watt organized Llanfair, **Mrs. Godfrey Drage**, a lovely and kind lady



*Lady Aberdeen*



*Miss Elsie Zimmern*