

Women's Institute and

S. Lynn
Campbell



In recognition of the centennial of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the following history of OMAF and FWIO was prepared. In this issue, learn about activities around the turn of the 20th century. The article will be continued in the next issue of Home & Country.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Women's Institute movement have enjoyed a close, working relationship over the past 91 years. From the very beginning of the WI movement, these two organizations have co-operated to achieve their common goal, as described in the **Ontario Women's Institute Story**, "the consideration of any problem or the carrying on of any line of work which has as its object the uplift of the home or the betterment of conditions surrounding community life".

The first meeting of the Women's Institute was held on Feb. 19, 1897. One of the motions carried at that meeting was that a "Women's Department of Domestic Economy in affiliation with the Farmers' Institutes" be organized. To this end, Erland Lee wrote to J. I. Hodson, Superintendent of the Farmers' Institute Branch of the Ontario Department of Agriculture and to John Dryden, the Ontario Minister of Agriculture, for government cooperation and support.

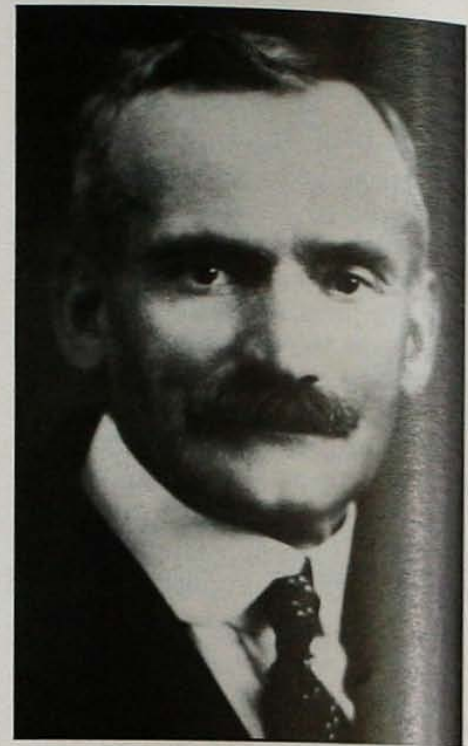
At a second meeting on Feb. 25, 1897, a letter was read from John Dryden in which he agreed to provide support for this new organization in the form of grants and affiliation with the Department of Agriculture through the Farmers' Institute Branch.

The Department of Agriculture's support of this new organization was only natural given the fact that it was aimed at rural women and its express purpose was the betterment of rural home life. This was clearly laid out at the second meeting of the organization when it adopted as its objective the following:

to promote the knowledge of Household Science which shall lead to improvements in household architecture with special attention to home sanitation, to a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods and fuels, and to a more scientific care of children with a view of raising the general standards of the health of our people.

Given this objective, the department's commitment to all of rural Ontario, plus the precedent established with the department's support of the Farmers' Institute, it was logical that the department help this new organization in any way it could.

For their part, the WI founders realized the department could offer them many advantages. These varied from



Erland Lee

such concrete items as funding and organizational leadership to more intangible things such as the support of this large, important branch of the government and its many rural contacts.

The department was quick to help this new and expanding organization. In 1899, several women were hired as speakers and organizers to promote this new movement. One of these women was Laura Rose, formerly a dairy instructor at the Ontario Agricultural College. Miss Rose helped organize the second WI Branch at Whitby in June 1899 and numerous other institutes over the next several years.

The other women hired at this time included Miss Blanche Maddock, Mrs. A. Kinney, Miss J. L. Smith, and Miss A. Hollingsworth. These women were directly responsible for organizing 16 of the first 50 Women's Institutes.