

A landmark moment for Britain and Ontario

On July 13, 1990, all the executive members of the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) of England and Wales journeyed from their homes across the country to share in a special celebration with 26 FWIO Board Directors and members from our province at Ontario Government House, London, England.

The occasion was the 75th anniversary of the founding of the WI in Britain by a Canadian woman, and to celebrate its origins in Ontario. It was a historic, important and very moving event.

As your president, it was my great honour to represent you, our members here in Ontario, and to present Jean Varnam, President of NFWI, a framed collage of photographs of the founders, Adelaide Hoodless and Erland Lee, the Lee and Hoodless Homes and the Constitution Table which is in the Lee (Museum) Home dining room. In addition, my personal gift of a silver maple leaf further symbolized the link between our two organizations.

During what the Agent General described as a "very moving exchange of gifts and good wishes," Mrs. Varnam presented to the WI members of Ontario a Wedgwood plate which will be mounted and hung at the Lee Home.

Agent General, the Honourable Tom Wells, and George Hutchison, Director of Public Affairs for the Ontario Government in England, hosted a luncheon, complete with Niagara wine, also a symbolic link with the agricultural community of Saltfleet Township, where the WI had its beginning.

Not only were there tributes to Adelaide Hoodless and Erland and Janet Lee, but also to Madge Watt, the young widow who grew up in Collingwood and whose spirit instigated the founding of not only the WI in Britain, but also the formation of the Associated Country Women of the World. How proud we were to recognize and share in this 75th anniversary greeting across the Atlantic. And how proud that Women's Institute

is the gift Ontario women gave to the world, after such a small beginning on that cold February day in Squire's Hall, Stoney Creek in 1897.

But the Government House reception was only the beginning of the celebration. After consultation with Mr. Hutchison, Graham Jones, Principal of Denman College, issued an invitation to the FWIO Board to take part in the courses offered at this historic learning centre within a stone's throw of Oxford. Our members, therefore, spent a most interesting week at Denman College, sharing courses in Literary Landscapes, Making More of Your Camera, Appreciating Music, Word Processing and Summer Flower Arranging.

As students there, our members were able to take part in exchanges of information and ideas with their 55 British counterparts, learning and studying together "with the great

human heart common to us all."

The 75th Anniversary cake, a traditional fruit cake baked and iced for us at Denman, followed by the presentation of books for the college library, seemed small thanks for such a unique experience.

The NFWI has 320,000 members in county federations from Holyhead to Goonhilly, and from Yorkshire to Devon. Each federation owns a headquarters building; financially supports, decorates and maintains a bedroom at Denman College; initiates its own programs while still taking part in those of the national organization; runs a series of country markets; sponsors competitions; and stocks and sells the many books published by the Women's Institute Publishing Company.

The Surrey Headquarters, a lovely Victorian house in Guildford, houses a board room, working kitchen, book and mementos office, a modern and fully



FWIO President Peggy Knapp (right) receives a Wedgwood plate from NFWI President Jean Varnam. The plate will be mounted and on display at the Erland Lee (Museum) Home.