

The Women's Institute



For Home and Country

### Convention '97 Video

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the formation of the first Women's Institute in Stoney Creek, Ontario, in 1897, the Convention '97 Committee is producing a professionally prepared video which will combine the centennial celebrations in Hamilton with historical background about the WI and its roots. For those who would like a commemorative item from the centennial celebrations, but are unable to attend Convention '97 in June in Hamilton, this video is ideal.

The cost of the video is \$50 (taxes, shipping and handling included). To reserve your copy, please send a cheque for \$50 payable to Convention '97 to:

Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario  
7382 Wellington Rd. 30  
RR 5  
Guelph ON N1H 6J2

Mark Convention Video clearly on the cheque, and indicate if it needs to be a system other than what is used in Canada. For example, in Europe the PAL system is required. The videos will be shipped in October, 1997.

### Convention '97 Commemorative Booklet

A Commemorative Booklet of "A WI Centennial Celebration & FWIC Convention '97" will also be produced. This is an ideal memento for those who are unable to attend this once in a life-time event. Order your copy today. Send a \$10 cheque payable to Convention '97 to:

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7382 Wellington Rd. 30  
RR 5  
Guelph ON N1H 6J2

Mark Commemorative Booklet clearly on the cheque. The Commemorative Booklets will also be shipped in October.

## PRO LINE

### *For Home and Country: A Guide for Group Discussions*

I have just read the introduction to a report entitled *Henceforth We Shall Rank Among the Nations*, prepared at the time of Canada's centennial in 1967. If the words "Women's Institute" are substituted for the word Canada, a great deal of the message applies to this organization. The sentiments expressed are similar to what is happening in Women's Institute today and echo many of the ideas and themes expressed by Dr. Linda Ambrose in *For Home and Country: The Centennial History of the Women's Institutes in Ontario*.

The 1967 report starts: "Every age has its special problems and every generation faces its own unique difficulties and opportunities. Canada, about to celebrate ... the Centennial of its Confederation, remembers the turmoil of those past years and the solutions that were evolved. While it contemplates the particular challenges of our own day, it also takes a look at the future."

The article talks about the social vision and political acumen of Canada's leaders, the driving forces of change, the good common sense of its people. These "all combine to make Canada a very favoured land." It mentions the qualities of dedication, devotion and the spirit of compromise with which Canadians have overcome and will continue to overcome 'the complexities of our times.'

S. Bronfman concludes his article: "We have reached these many goals but there are still goals beyond them. We have done much, and dreamed much, and we have come to wider horizons. Now we must go on, in a new century, to conceive a greater vision and to realize it."

*For Home and Country* paints a fascinating portrait of one hundred years of a group "that has helped to shape the experiences of rural women and to frame Ontario community life over the past century." As you read the book, you realize that Women's Institute activities are as important to society now as they were at the beginning of the century. You also quickly realize that there are many lessons to be learned from our past.

Dr. Ambrose challenges members and leaders alike with the words of FWIO President Purcell in 1953, "What is our place in this changing world as a group? Are we still thinking back in the days of Adelaide Hoodless or have we grown up with the times? Has our WI degenerated into a social get-together or developed into a social service group? If women as a group are to keep the

position they have gained, they must keep alert to changes in the community, they must use the vote intelligently, they must study. It is time we made a new assessment of our groups to see if we are growing up."

In a review of the Ambrose book in the *Hamilton Spectator* (February 15, 1997), Kate Barlow states "... Ambrose makes no bones about how difficult it is to pigeonhole the Women's Institute. It's not a service club, although they do substantial fundraising for good causes. Neither is it a feminist movement, in the modern meaning of the word, although Ambrose points out its traditional empowerment of women."

Barlow continues: "Ambrose doesn't offer any definitive answer but suggests readers learn from the old story about several blind men exploring an elephant's outline. Each one arrives at his own conclusion."

*For Home and Country* is a book that is meant to be discussed, especially by Women's Institute members and friends. Questions such as "What was the purpose of the first WI?" or "How were WI activities in the '20s and '30s forerunners of our present focus on Safe and Healthy Communities?" come to mind. Others include, "What did WI stand for in 1897?," "What does it stand for today?," and "Why did a man run a women's organization for so many of its early years?"

In order to facilitate discussion of the content of the Ambrose history book, *A Guide for Group Discussions* has been prepared to complement *For Home and Country: The Centennial History of the Women's Institutes in Ontario*. This guide is intended to bring out some important aspects of the book and to stimulate discussion by Branches or by small groups. The questions are neither exhaustive nor exhausting. They will encourage members to see where WI has been and where it will go in the future, in keeping with the centennial theme "Indebted to the Past - Committed to the Future."

Copies of *For Home and Country: The Centennial History of the Women's Institutes in Ontario* are available from the FWIO Provincial Office for \$35. *A Guide for Group Discussions* is also available from the Provincial Office for \$3. Both prices include shipping and handling.

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