

Support Needed to Preserve Our Heritage

By Joyce Pettigrew



Thanks to Tweedsmuir History Curators, Women's Institutes have preserved local history for half a century in Ontario. In some communities they remain the only individuals mindful of this need.

Unlike communities in a number of European countries where archives have existed for centuries, the preservation of local history in Canada has attracted little public interest.

The general public is not particularly aware of their local community archives, if one exists, or of their use. It is not until they require information or documents to help celebrate a community anniversary, fight a legal battle, discover the history of their house, or find their long lost relatives, that the worth of the historical records held in a local archives becomes apparent.

There is a good network of national and provincial archives in this country, and interesting developments are taking place in the area of university, corporate and religious archives, but the area of municipal and local archives remains relatively undeveloped.

The Ontario Municipal Act requires municipalities to safeguard certain kinds of records, such as minutes, bylaws and financial documents. These records, alone, do not provide a very descriptive interpretation of how a municipality has grown and developed.

Some municipalities have seen the value of records management and archives, and have broadened the scope of their records set aside for permanent retention. Because they appreciate the historic value of their records, they can provide a more accurate portrayal of the social and economic history of their municipality.

Most municipalities, however, have not yet realized the value of establishing a records management and archival system. In the past, some municipal clerks kept all of the municipal records, only to have the next clerk throw them out. Other municipalities simply gave their records away. And of the municipal records that have been kept, many are stored

as unorganized boxes of files in attics, basements or damp vaults.

Fortunate is the Ontario community whose municipal records have survived clerks, fires or floods. Even more fortunate are those municipalities whose records are preserved by the Archives of Ontario. But the Archives of Ontario does not have the resources or the space to continue this service to all Ontario municipalities; it encourages the establishment of local archives.

If such records are to be available to us and to our descendants, they must be collected, organized, preserved and made accessible. Records worthy of keeping need to be preserved in a clean, dry, safe place, and professionally organized for ease of access. And they should be preserved within or near the community which created them.

The provincial government must be encouraged to assist in the development of a municipal/community archival system. In

areas where there are no established archives, this might mean funding new archives or using county/regional archives to preserve municipal records that might otherwise be lost.

Neither the provincial or municipal governments will act on a municipal/local archives system unless they know that people wish it to happen. Please write to your MPP and your municipal officials and tell them that you wish to see the development of a local archival system in Ontario. Let them know that municipal and local records should be preserved as part of a community's collective memory for the benefit of future generations.

Your letter will help - send it today!

Joyce Pettigrew is the Vice-President of the Ontario Association of Archivists, a retired Archivist from the Norwich & District Archives and a member of the Springford Women's Institute.

Area Presidents Are "Called to Order"

By Margaret Atkins

The fourth in the series of "Train the Trainer" Workshops was held in Guelph in January, with 27 Area Presidents attending. This year's theme was "Call to Order."

Lively discussion on "how to" apply themselves prevailed throughout the workshop. The group learned all aspects of their position. By conducting interviews, they experienced first-hand the importance of knowing the facts when faced with a TV interview.

The group participated in plenary sessions on "How to Work a Room" and the "FWIO Structure," and also acquired knowledge of "Parliamentary Procedures" and "Time Management."

With modules designed to inform, instruct and prepare the individual for leadership roles within the Women's Institute, the workshop stressed the importance of the role of President and

her direct responsibility to the members and the organization.

Up-to-date information on current opportunities - "Pass-It-On" courses, Heritage Days at the Lee, and Personal Growth and Renewal programs - brought forth many questions, some concerns and a host of innovative ideas.

Enthusiasm filled the two-day workshop and all left in a great frame of mind, carrying home Peggy Knapp's special thought: "Like a ship, our organization is one entity made up of all its parts. As a Federation each level is 'mistress in her own house,' but working together as a larger voice to make a difference for its members, their communities, our country and other women around the world."

Margaret Atkins is the Public Relations Officer for the FWIO.