

## Profile:

# Erland Lee Home Curator/Hostess

Mary Kneebone graduated from the University of Guelph with a degree in Canadian Studies (history and politics). Mary took several courses that focused on women in Canadian history and their role in shaping our country. In her undergraduate thesis, Mary examined how changes in household mechanization affected rural women at the turn of the century.

Mary is the new Curator/Hostess of the Erland Lee (Museum) Home. But her job entails much, much more she said. "I have to be an interpreter, researcher and historian, as well as help manage the museum's affairs and act as a liaison between the Erland Lee Committee and the public."

Previously, Mary worked at Dundurn Castle in Hamilton as an Historical Interpreter. She admitted this experience opened the door for her to a whole new field - museums. "Dressing in period costume allowed me to step back in time and live ... [as] a female servant in the 1850s, rather than just talk about it." And she added, "Visitors

to the Castle were so enthusiastic. They really responded to me as an Interpreter, and I fed off of their interest."

Mary sees her position as Curator/Hostess as an opportunity to develop what she learned at Dundurn, but in a different setting. She said she likes the greater responsibility and creative freedom allowed her at the Erland Lee Home. For example, she talked about her work researching and putting exhibits together. For June WIDays, an exhibit entitled "Rock-a-Bye Baby" - featuring the changes in the feeding, clothing and furniture patterns of babies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries - was on display in the Carriage House.

When asked what she hoped to accomplish, Mary gave the following explanation: "I would like [the Museum] to be the kind of place that people want to bring others back to for a visit. I would like to increase its recognition as an historic site of significant importance to the community of Stoney Creek. In part, Mary hopes this can be done through her involvement in related organizations within the city and the region. Mary is an active member of the Stoney Creek Historical Society and the Hamilton-



Wentworth Historical Association.

She concluded: "I want to increase the pride Women's Institute members have in the Museum, and increase the exposure for the WI as well."



By Hilde Morden

Did you ever work in a Women's Institute booth at a mall, fair or plowing match? What strikes terror in me when I'm staffing a booth is the following comment: "What will I say to a complete stranger (man, woman or child)?" If you are fortunate enough to have a co-worker in the booth with you, it is quite easy to carry on a conversation until the stranger eventually goes away.

How do you overcome the anxiety you feel when confronted by strangers? How do you explain what the Women's Institute is all about, much less ask if they are interested in joining or organizing a new Branch?

In part, the secret is in the display. In

September I helped staff a booth at a county plowing match. The demonstrator of Battenburg Lace had an excellent presentation. She showed how to make the lace, told of its history and application, and promoted the upcoming Personal Growth and Renewal courses - Tatting and Art. An application for the "Personal Enrichment Seminar" listing a Fashion Show and six workshops to be held in February 1993 also gave an opportunity to promote WI activities.

The main table had a display with provincial flags and posters of Canada's 125th birthday celebrations. This provided an interesting opportunity to speak with children, asking if they could identify the flags?

The local Tweedsmuir History Books and knowledgeable Curator created a great interest for the men who questioned: "where was John Brown's farm in 1902?; when did the beef ring exist?; and, what was the date of Smith's Mill burning?" The Fall issue of *Home & Country* made a conversation starter with both women and men by displaying articles - "The Chatham Ethanol Consortium," "Make Your Leaves

Work for You," and "Tomatoes: The Fruit of His Labour."

The three E's - effort, energy and enthusiasm - are essential for a successful booth presentation.

**Effort** - look interested, smile, and give your name.

**Energy** - wear a name tag (this is more important than wearing your badge) on your right hand side. And when you extend your right hand for a handshake the line of sight is to the other person's right side.

**Enthusiasm** - think of conversation starters to interest people and draw them into your display area. Provide information on what you will talk about. The open booth with a table off to the side is best; a table in front of you makes a barrier. Move out to greet people with a firm handshake and an upbeat self-introduction.

The unusual and original will be your best lure to interest people to your booth.

**Remember - the Women's Institute promotes friendship, information and action!**

*Hilde Morden is the New Branch Co-ordinator for the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.*