1897 We Treasure the Past - We Face the Future 1947

Fifty years of honourable history, fifty years of great achievement, lie behind the Women's Institutes of Ontario. When Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless saw the light in 1896, and was instrumental in the organization of the first Women's Institute at that historic meeting at Stoney Creek on February 19, 1897, she little realized that in the next fifty years that light would be carried throughout Ontario, across Canada, and to all parts of the world. Truly she lit a torch which has been handed on to those who came after, and is burning today with a truer, clearer flame than ever before.

How closely the Women's Institutes have adhered to the original ideas of the founder is shown by a study of the aims and objects set out in the first Constitution, and the objects as they are listed today. The original constitution gives the objects as follows, with the sections that have been added since then shown in brackets;

"The object of this Institute shall be to promote that knowledge of Household Science which shall lead to the improvement in household architecture, with special understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods and fuels; and to a more scientific care (and training) of children with a view to raising the general standard of health (and morals) of our people; (and 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)."

These original objects have been the basis of the many achievements which stand to the credit of the Women's Institutes. They have been carried out through the years under six divisions or branches which were set up in the original constitution, and which today find their counterpart in the standing committees of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, as follows:—(1) Domestic Economy; (2) Architecture, with special reference to Sanitation, Light, Heat, etc.; (3) Physiology, Hygiene, Medicine, Calisthenics, etc.; (4) Floriculture and Horticulture; (5) Music and Art; (6) Literature and Sociology, Education and Legislation.

Everywhere they have been established, Women's Institutes have sought to attain the goals established at their inception. Through the special courses, arranged and provided by the Women's Institute Branch of the Department of Agriculture, standards of homemaking have been improved to an immeasurable degree, and the basic principles of sound nutrition, efficient homemaking, care of children, have been made available to rural women.

What is perhaps more important has been the impact of Women's Institutes on their own communities in creating new ideals of community living. Women have learned to work together in harmony for the betterment of their own communities, and have, by their co-operative efforts, exercised a great influence on many phases of legislation affecting rural living. The Institutes have been leaders in constructive effort for the improvement of rural schools and rural education, and have succeeded in bringing to the rural children a large measure of equality in educational opportunities with those enjoyed by urban children. Their greatest contribution in the field of education, however, was the effort, led by Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless, which brought about the establishment of Macdonald Institute as an integral part of the Ontario Agricultural College, opening to young women great fields of opportunity for specialized training in household science.

In the field of improvement of public health services for rural communities, the Women's Institute were strong pioneers and inspired much of the legislation which has provided medical and public health nursing services in the rural areas.

Through two world wars, the Women's Institutes rendered yeoman service in providing for the needs of those in the armed forces, and giving assistance to the peoples of countries which suffered from the ravages of war. Every good cause was given unstinted support and aid, and in the Second World War, in particular, the Women's Institutes contributed magnificently to meeting the needs of the sorely pressed people of Britain. That work of caring for war victims is still going on, and the Canadian Red Cross Society has no stronger supporters than the women of the Institutes.

But above all, the Women's Institutes have given to our rural women a progressive outlook, a sense of their responsibility for building a better community, a better province, and a better world, and a realization that on them, the homemakers of the nation, depends the type of citizenship we are going to have in Canada in the years that lie ahead. The Women's Institutes have been a great spiritual force for making, not only better homes, but a brighter and happier world.

These 50 years have been years of great achievement and sound progress. Now the Women's Institutes face the future. Facing them is a challenge that they go forward, inspired by the knowledge of what has been accomplished in the past and realizing that still greater tasks lie ahead to be undertaken and carried on to a successful conclusion. United by their determination to play their part in building better homes, happier communities and a sounder national life, Women's Institutes accept the challenge to face the future, and with the new inspiration derived from this 50th Anniversary Celebration, stand ready to carry on in the spirit of those who first saw the light, and to hand down to those who come after them a torch tha' will make the world a brighter place for woma hood the world over.

Acknowledgment

The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario hereby express their sincere thanks to The T. Eaton Co. Limited, Toronto, for its splendid contribution to the success of our 50th Anniversary Celebration. We appreciate its generosity in providing these Souvenir Programmes and also the Music for the Pageant.

MILDRED SUMMERS,
President,
Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.