

Britain's Women's Institute Celebrating Golden Jubilee

LONDON (CP) — More than 500,000 women are celebrating the golden jubilee in Britain of the Women's Institute, a society for rural friendship and education that originated in Canada.

The National Federation of Women's Institutes here began its birthday party when the Duchess of Gloucester, the Queen's aunt, opened an exhibition in London on "the country-woman today."

Queen Mother Elizabeth, like the other female members of the Royal Family a WI member, will attend the first day of the British federation's annual meeting at Royal Albert Hall today.

Celebrations reach a climax next Monday when representatives of each of the 8,717 British institutes will attend a garden party given by the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

The first Women's Institute was founded in 1897 at Stoney Creek, Ont., by Adelaide Hoodless, who conceived the idea of a society of mutual help and instruction among isolated farm wives.

STARTED IN 1915

The WI came to Britain in 1915 when a group was organized in the Welsh community that claims the longest name in the world at 58 letters—Llanfair PG for short.

Six more institutes were formed in Britain in the follow-

ing six months and three years later there were 800 clubs on the island. Membership grew by 10,000 last year.

The chairman of the British WI Federation is Gabrielle Pike, a magistrate who lives in the Berkshire hamlet of Cothill, where her husband George is headmaster of a boys' school.

Mrs. Pike, a great-great-granddaughter of the Quaker prison reformer, Elizabeth Fry, is intent on some reforms herself, particularly in co-ordinating and streamlining some WI work, such as working with mentally-ill patients and providing meals for spastic children.

APPOINT OFFICER

One reform just adopted was the appointment of a fulltime publicity officer, one of whose tasks will be a campaign to get WI correspondents to sharpen up reports that appear regularly in scores of rural British weeklies.

One such report, published during the Second World War, is still remembered. It began by naming who presided and who read the minutes, ran on with who gave the "interesting talk" and who poured tea. It concluded with the paragraph:

"Unfortunately the meeting had to end early because a German fighter sprayed bullets through the roof of the village hall, killing the president."

Mary Stewart, author of the Collect, was born in 1876 in the State of Ohio. With her parents she moved to Georgetown, Colorado and, as she herself has written, her childhood was spent "High up in the Rocky Mountains climbing over stony hillsides, hunting wildflowers, playing along tumbling streams". Later she tells us, all through college days, her eyes still lifted to the hills while her mind explored the classics.

It was while Miss Stewart was principal of the high school at Longmont, Colorado, where she was member of the Fortnightly Club, that she composed the Collect. She tells us: "It was written as a prayer for the day. I called it A Collect for Club Women, because I felt that women working together with wide interests for large ends was a new thing under the sun, and perhaps they had need for special petition and meditation of their own."

This must have been true for the Collect has found its way about the world, wherever women get together. Indeed it has been reprinted in many lands.

Miss Stewart helped to organize the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. From teaching, she went into the National Employment Service as assistant director general; later was made assistant director of education in the bureau of Indian Affairs and continued in this work until a year before her death in 1943.

A. B. C.