

# Women's institute and its legacy

The legacy any organization leaves for the future generations in the community is just as important as what the individual members receive.

This is very true of the Women's Institutes. Throughout the rural communities in Ontario there are tangible records that the Women's Institute cares about the community that they are in.

In Granton it is the Women's Institute that erected the War Memorial while the Yarmouth-Glen branch take care of the local cemetery. In the tourist village of Sparta, the local Women's Institute branch have restored and maintain the local museum, The Forge and Anvil.

It was through the efforts

of the Women's Institute that the Southwold Earth works, recording a campsite of the Neutral Indians, has been restored. For a long time Parks Canada and the Women's Institute maintained the site. Now Parks Canada looks after the site.

St Thomas is the home of the Elgin County Museum. The local Women's Institute branches under the direction of Mrs Fletcher helped to raise money to establish the museum which records the work and joy of the pioneers of Elgin County. Thirty years after its establishment the local branches are still supporting the museum, financially.

If you travel to Stoney Creek you will visit the Erland Lee (Museum) Home, a site that is visited by hun-

dreds of overseas as well as Canadian visitors, as the home of the co-founder of Women's Institute Erland and Janet Lee.

Visitors particularly like to see the original table on which Janet Lee recorded the minutes of the first Women's Institute meeting in 1897. Little did she realize that this organization would spread throughout Canada and to the four corners of the world.

Federated Women's Institutes of Canada maintain the Hoodless Homestead in St George. This is the home of the other co-founder of Women's Institutes, Adelaide Hoodless. Both these houses are of interest not only to Women's Institute members but to anyone interested in seeing

homes restored to their original style.

When you visit the Agricultural Museum at Milton you will have the chance to see the Women's Institute Hall. This now depicts a 1928 Sewing Class, similar to the many sewing classes held in the rural halls throughout Ontario.

Many Women's Institute branches purchased the local schools, when consolidation came about, and turned these schools into local community centres. Some are maintained entirely by the local branches and others have been turned over to a local community committee. Facilities such as these help to hold the community together.

When you travel out of Ontario there is still one more place that the Ontario

Women's Institutes helps to maintain. This is the International Peace Gardens between Manitoba and South Dakota. The Federated Women's Institutes of Canada was one of the first organizations to offer assistance when the Peace Gardens were established. Today the upkeep of the Women's Institute acre is financed by an annual donation from each province. Maybe you sat on the Ontario branch or had a picnic on the Ontario table.

As you travel through rural Ontario you will find many more examples of the legacy that the rural communities have received from the largest rural women's organization in Ontario — the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.