

WIs 'ahead of their time' in liberating women

By KATHRYN JOHNSON
of The Free Press

TORONTO — The women's liberation movement hasn't had much impact on the Women's Institute because, according to its officers, that's what the institute's been about for years.

"Women's Institutes have been ahead of their time," Mrs. Olive Farquharson, president of the international organization, the Associated Country Women of the World, said Saturday in Toronto. "We're interested in equal opportunities for women."

Mrs. Farquharson, in Toronto to help celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the WI in Stoney Creek, was interviewed with other WI officers before the anniversary luncheon at the Royal York Hotel.

While not burners of bras, WIs started many years ago to liberate women, Mrs. J. Philip Matheson of Oyster Bed, P.E.I., area vice-president, ACWW of Canada said.

The question of allowing male members to join has been raised, Mrs. Farquharson said, and already one of the branches has honorary male members.

"In Europe, councils are organized for men and this is happening in Asia, too," she said.

Pollution and the environment, she said, have also been concerns of the organization. "Why, 30 years ago in England we suggested there should be a minister of environment."

On a world-wide basis she said the WI membership did decline, but since the jubilee in 1965 many new members, including young women, have joined. Membership totals seven million in 285 affiliated organizations in 66 countries.

She estimates 50 per cent of the members are working women and to accommodate them, many evening meetings are held.

In the last five years WI membership in Canada has dropped from 60,000 to 58,000. Mrs. E. V. Fulton of Birtle, Manitoba, president of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada, attributes the fall to lower rural area population.

"We hope to make inroads into cities," she said. "We have four branches now in Winnipeg."

Training in home economics, sewing and grooming was credited by Mrs. Harvey L. Noblitt of Ontario, with the increase of membership in 4-H clubs, sponsored by the WI.

In her luncheon address to the 1,612 WI members, who came from all parts of Ontario, Mrs. Farquharson noted the work being done overseas.

"Not only do we pass on our practical knowledge, our expertise, to women in developing countries, but they feel greatly encouraged to take their rightful place in their own communities by the heartening sense of friendship and understanding that membership brings them.

"In councils of the world, the United Nations meetings, the World Food Conference and so on, your ACWW representatives speak out on behalf of women's needs, the needs of the family and the determination of the mothers to see that their children are well-educated, well-nourished and able to shoulder responsibilities of life."

Scholarships provided by the Ontario federation, she said, are enabling two girls in a small village in Turkey to train as midwives.

She disagreed with those who might think WI work is no longer needed in well-established countries. "The bus-

iness we become, the more organized and commercialized life becomes, the easier it is to forget we can do things ourselves. The easier it is to forget that, by intelligent use of our hands, we learn so many skills and by the use of our minds in various branches of the arts we can overcome the growing problem of society today—how to use increasing leisure wisely and thus avoid boredom."

Most of Mrs. Farquharson's three-week stay in Canada will be spent in Ontario. At Stoney Creek she will be attending a dinner Feb. 19, the anniversary of the first Women's Institute meeting. She has recently returned from a trip to western Africa, her first major one since becoming ACWW president in August.

A widow with no children, she lives in a small Essex village in England. She joined the institute in 1938 and has been a contributing member of the ACWW, formed more than 40 years ago, since 1940.

For her work as representative of the National Federation of Women's Institutes of England on the UK National Savings Committee, she was, in 1969, awarded the OBE (Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire).

Mrs. Austin Zoeller of New Hamburg, past president of the FWIO, convened the anniversary celebration at which Mrs. Noblitt presided.

Revolving on a pedestal in front of the head table was the anniversary cake, a replica of the Lee Homestead in Stoney Creek. Erland Lee was a co-founder with Adelaide Hoodless of the first WI. The FWIO has purchased the homestead and plans to refurbish it as archives for the WI.

Members responded enthusiastically to entertainment provided by Langford WI, Brant County. Mrs. Kenneth Chapin sang a medley of

songs telling the history of the WI, with piano accompaniment by Mrs. Chester Jackson.

William Stewart, Ontario minister of agriculture and food, accompanied by his wife, represented the govern-

ment at the anniversary luncheon. Congratulatory messages were received from the Queen, Prime Minister Tru-

deau, Premier William Davis, farm organizations and WI branches from various parts of the world.



Women's Institute members in the London area left for Toronto on two chartered buses Saturday morning to attend the 75th anniversary celebration of the founding of the WI. From left: Mrs. Frances Fallon of Arva, secretary-treasurer, Middlesex East WI; Mrs. Ken Hogg of Thorndale, president, Middlesex

East WI; Mrs. Vern Towers of Glencoe, president, Middlesex West WI; Betty Conway of London, Middlesex County home economist; Mrs. James Pilkington of Mt. Brydges, WI provincial director and Carroll Yakelasher of St. Thomas, Elgin County home economist.