

Women's Institute Project

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Tweedsmuir Histories on View

By MRS. P. CAMERON

DAYTON—To actually see and examine the Tweedsmuir History Book which won second prize in the Dominion competition in 1951 and first prize in the Provincial in 1953, was the good fortune of about 20 representatives of the various branches of East Algoma Women's Institutes.

Sowerby Community Hall was the setting for a "Tweedsmuir History Workshop" capably conducted by Mrs. Robert C. Walker, R.R. No. 1, St. George, who is Provincial Curator of these history books.

The meeting got underway at 10 a.m. Wednesday, May 13, and lasted until 3.30 p.m. with a break for a "pot luck" lunch at the noon hour.

Mrs. Walker, who is exceedingly interested in her subject, is not long in creating enthusiasm among her listeners. The result was that before the day was over every person present, with newly awakened interest, was determined to help make their own Village History something special.

On the first page of every history is a picture of Lord and Lady Tweedsmuir and a "Foreword" written by Lady Tweedsmuir in which she stated she was proud to have the Women's Institute of Ontario name their village histories "The Tweedsmuir Village Histories." These histories were started in 1945 and since that time competitions at different levels, have been held.

The data, secured by the Women's Institutes in compiling their histories, is being recognized by the various schools, libraries and other groups interested in their community history. The aim is to have each Institute compile an authentic history in a distinctive way, going a little beyond the boundaries of the community until a history of the whole province is written. Of course each Institute will

write up only its own community in detail.

This is an almost overwhelming task but with each Historical Research Convener having at least two on her committee, and with the co-operation of the whole community, each branch is endeavoring to compile a book, well-illustrated with pictures of all types (even to tin-type) of pioneer life, buildings of the past and present, township maps, both ancient and up to date, and many interesting things about the past and present.

Mrs. Walker used the Prize Winning History Book (which incidentally was compiled by her own branch and which had data on events of their community dating back to 1828) to illustrate how a history may be compiled. This particular book had a beautiful cover of hand-tooled leather. The speaker stressed originality in covers and told us about some unusual and clever ones she had seen in her travels over Ontario.

The New Canadians with great artistic talent should be encouraged to help in this endeavor, she stressed. Such materials as metals, wood and felt may be used as covers. Valuable information on how to properly arrange the history into various sections and how to index same was given.

Histories must have accurate information and therefore different groups and organizations are asked to provide information so that churches, schools, libraries, township offices and various societies will all have their places in the community story.

Mrs. Walker said, that in her opinion, young people of today should be gaining all the information they can about the past from the older people in their communities while they are still with us. These stories are vital and much more real than those which

are portrayed on television. (At this point we were wondering why more of the local pioneers are not featured on television and radio).

"So many changes are being made these days," the speaker continued, "that many things which were quite commonplace even 25 years ago, are becoming lost arts."

Other interesting topics contained in the Tweedsmuir histories (and here the pictures are especially important) are items about: those taking part in the Boer and the two Great Wars; Century Farms (or Pioneer Farms); Family Trees; Industries, old and new (including blacksmith shops, now fast disappearing).

Each branch was urged to get everyone in the community interested in hunting up old documents (of which photostatic copies can be made) samples of old "Funeral Cards" which can be shown with those of the modern day, "Before and After" pictures of every phase of community life, and of course old pictures of every description—especially old "group pictures" of school days. In this way the Tweedsmuir History becomes important to everyone who lives in or comes back to visit in the community. Everyone who contributes items or pictures is credited for doing so (in the book).

Books of the various Institutes represented were reviewed by the speaker who commended the women on their efforts thus far and told them where improvements could be made. She expressed the wish that each branch would benefit from the "Workshop" and that all would find pleasure in compiling their books. Mrs. Hartwick of Walford on behalf of those present, thanked Mrs. Walker for her help and inspiration in bringing such a wealth of ideas and information.